



# Making it real: Beyond reformation to transformation Aotearoa 2017

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SUE BRADFORD

SEA OF FAITH 7 NOVEMBER 2017

# Content of presentation

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- Introduction – & a life of ‘fuse lighting’
- Some key experiences & what I learned from them
- Where we are & what lies ahead - if we’d like to see transformation, beyond reform
- Some questions for consideration



# Early life

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Family background

Political awakening

A committed radical left activist from 15

Commitment from:

- Experience

- Education

- Belief – theory



# Early organisations & experiences

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Anti –Vietnam War & peace movement

Progressive Youth Movement – Resistance Bookshop

Womens Liberation – Gay Liberation – on Auckland Uni campus

Anti-apartheid – active in HART 1969 onwards

Experience of studying in China 1980 - 1981

Springbok Tour 1981

...Also 3 yrs+ on DPB; mother of five



# Unemployed workers' struggle

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Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre 1983 - 1999

'Jobs & a living wage for all'



Individual advocacy for unemployed people & beneficiaries

AND

Collective advocacy – direct action on the streets, lobbying, research, media

# New Vision group (AUWRC)

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Brought radical left Christians & non-Christians together

Tremendous synergy in:

- Bringing cultural & creative skills to our work
- Deepening our thinking
- Taking action together
- Setting up new organisations



# Creating organisations: Peoples Centres

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Auckland Peoples Centres (1989 –early 2000s) - \$10 per month per family

Medical, dental, Green Dollars, beneficiary advocacy, Christian chaplaincy, small business & self employment support, our own education programmes, hairdressing.

AUWRC - political and educational wing – intensification of political action 1991 onwards when National came to power, Shipley's benefit cuts & ECA

- Political/services mix
- Autonomy critical – from govt, churches, unions
- Services wings strengthened by skills of activist leadership
- Slow decline after AUWRC closed mid-1999; services alone not enough





# Creating organisation: Building our own Future 1993-1994

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CCANZ project (Conference of Churches of Aotearoa NZ) – AUWRC key organising group

Series of Peoples Assemblies around NZ – culmination of national Peoples Assembly

Sectoral meetings around country – community economic development, students & young people, radical church people, housing, unemployed, unions, cultural workers ...

Collective formulation of a national Peoples Charter:

Manifesto of belief, vision - & action

References: *The Peoples Charter*; *Building our own Future: Peoples Assembly project (1994)*; Peoples Network; Auckland





# Creating organisation: Kotare Research & Education for Social Change Trust

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Arose from 1994 National Building our Own Future Peoples Assembly

Formation period 1994 – 1999

Developing own educational centre – Hoteo North, near Wellsford

Role of Kingfisher Farm - Bradford family & Sisters of St Joseph (Whanganui)



# Kotare Trust (ctd)

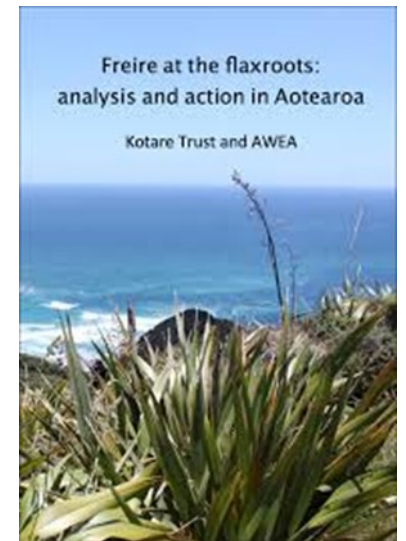
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A place which would outlive our generation of activists – nurture new generations of leadership – pass on skills & experience – deepen work

Sectors: ecological – unemployed & beneficiary – unions – youth – women – community sector – Tiriti work from Pakeha perspective – use of cultural work – role of church people

Still going strong, run regular workshops & summer schools.

Interested? Website: <http://kotare.org.nz/> - We welcome your interest & support



# Trying to change the system from within

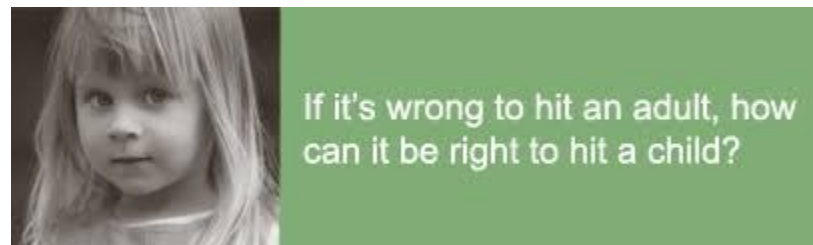
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Green MP 1999 -2009

Why leave the struggle on the streets & in community?

Some achievements, esp 3 members' bills, attempting to give 'voice to the voiceless' – portfolios welfare, employment, mental health, ACC, housing, children ...

Why I stood down from Parliament 2009



# Auckland Action Against Poverty (2010 – present)

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Filled a gap that had been left 1999 onwards following closure of AUWRC

Triggered by establishment of National's Welfare Working Group 2010

Political action & advocacy - & individual beneficiary casework

A new generation – but included some of us from the AUWRC generation too



# Taking time out to reflect & research

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- PhD – *A major leftwing think in Aotearoa – an impossible dream or a call to action?*
- Carried out research 2010 – 2013 (Marilyn Waring, AUT ); graduated 2014
- Interviewed 51 left academics & activists
- Methodology: Political activist ethnography
- Remained politically active – AAAP, Mana (2011 -2014), Kotare Trust – field journal

Thesis reference: <http://aut.researchgateway.ac.nz/handle/10292/7435>



# Key research findings: think tank

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Strongly supported across the wider left

Multiple possibilities: social democratic; green/ecological 'beyond left & right'; radical left, Māori forms ...

Pan left think tank neither desirable nor possible





# Key research findings: state of NZ left 2010 - 2013

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On radical left, lack of a party; desire for an ideological & activist 'home' & base for action

Need to become braver, & find or rediscover the will to power, make our own paths

Theory matters: developing new & relevant theory for Aotearoa, now

A thoughtful left is a potent left – more time, spaces, places to think





# What I'm doing at present

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Post- 2014 attempt to set up a left think tank failed from my perspective – recent defeat.

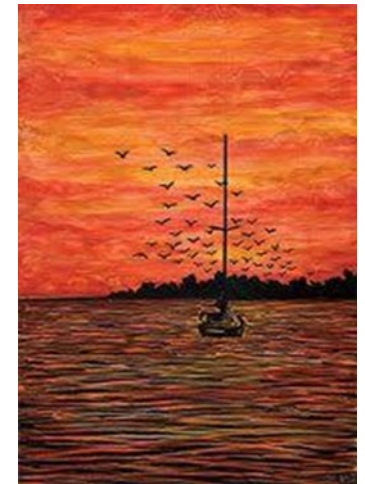
But still involved in 2 organisations our groups set up:

- Kotare Trust – current programme: incl: social investment, progressive Basic Income, Tiriti/anti-capitalist work, summer school around 'learning to listen to each other better'
- Auckland Action against Poverty

Some part time PhD supervision, research at AUT, Unemig project

Considering the future & what comes next

A few reflections ...



# Three key ways of creating change

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From outside the system

The long march inside the institutions

Building our own organisations inside a rotten system



# Commitment essential – form of vocation

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Commitment to transform society, not simply reform it, although reform also matters.

For me: 'radical left': a commitment to economic, social & ecological justice, grounded in te Tiriti o Waitangi. Anti capitalist & beyond capitalist. Internationalist.

Acting on this commitment, not just talking about it.



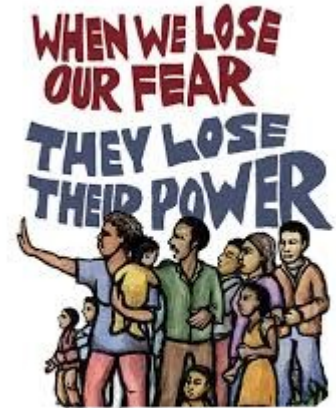
# Whose side are I/we/you on?

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Always considering 'At this point, in these circumstances, whose side am I on?'

How can we affect structural change, exposing real causes of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, ecological devastation ... & the rest ... without being tempted into a simpler, easier way forward?

... & without falling into the trap of 'magical thinking'?



# Why talk about 'transformation'?

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It's an inspiring concept ... and ...



# Politics can be pretty depressing

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- Power of neoliberal capitalism triumphant
- Climate change & resource depletion
- Ever widening gap between rich & poor
- Cycle of governments – National & Labour - who penalise the poor while serving needs of big business.
- Failure of tauiwi left to adequately begin to take on kaupapa of constitutional reform from a Tiriti/tino rangatiratanga perspective – Matike Mai leads the way

The people with whom I work live & act in hope that this might change ...



# Election result 2017: a time for hope?

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Yes – but are these parties committed to changes within neoliberal capitalism, or do they have any capacity for moving beyond it?

Both things need to happen.





# Transformation

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Can be personal ... spiritual ... &/or political

Doesn't necessarily follow that transformation is at any particular point on the political spectrum



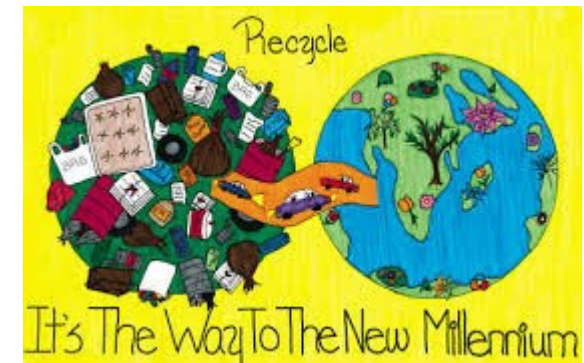
# Some dangers I've seen

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If we change ourselves by achieving higher consciousness do we change the world...?

If we recycle, garden, bike - ecological, social & economic injustice will somehow come to an end?

If we make our home, neighbourhood, town perfect - that's enough?



# Structural change essential

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Real transformation means structural change

‘Change the system, not the planet’ – Paris climate justice march 12 Dec

Need our own organisations & institutions that can begin to build our own counter-power



# Making it real - unless we:

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Identify the true nature of our economic, political, cultural, ecological situation

Analyse

Understand

Confront

Create our own new stories, songs, art of how a better future could be

Actively resist & move forward..... nothing will change in any  
fundamental way for people & planet



# A few key challenges for new govt & for us (there are many more)

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- Overturn National's welfare reforms
- Don't let 'child poverty' detract from need to deal with adult poverty
- Root out every tendril of Govt commitment to 'Social investment'
- Start to roll back capture of community sector
- Deal seriously with the housing & homelessness crisis
- How do we tauiwi pick up the challenge from Māori on constitutional reform?
- How do we maintain and build autonomous radical organisations at a time of a Labour-Green-NZF government?



# Transformation – beyond reformation

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- Transformation: going beyond what we know or can conceive of now
- Moving beyond individual ethical decisions & market solutions
- Politics in NZ doesn't have to stay like it is, and won't
- Leadership needed, inside & outside Parliament - enabling, not hierarchical or weak
- Transcending sectarian/faith boundaries between us – where we find common cause
- Up to each of us to act - not alone, but with likeminded others.
- We need to be brave, and full of hope.



# Some questions for possible consideration

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- What would a transformed Aotearoa look like?
- Can the practice & discussion of spirituality & religion be a disengaged substitute for political action?
- Is working to end inequality & its structural causes in Aotearoa/NZ a spiritual/religious issue that Sea of Faith members could engage in?
- Do you have any ideas about steps forward for engagement & action?



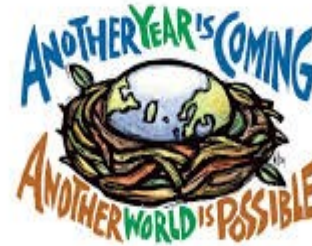


# Conclusion

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Thanks for inviting me to be part of your conference this week.

Without the kind of hope tempered by realism and imbued by faith that another, better world is possible - however we define & encompass that faith - our attempts at transformation ... & a future which embraces & nurtures life itself ... will fail..



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Recent biography: *Constant Radical* (2017) Jenny Chamberlain; Fraser Books

