A call for social work resistance to the rollback of socially progressive policies

Following the defeat of the sixth Labour Government of New Zealand at the October 2023 general election, it took six long weeks of negotiation between three political parties—ACT, the National Party and New Zealand First—before the current coalition government emerged. Made possible by the mixed-member proportional electoral system, this three-party alliance brought to power two smaller, more extremist parties on the coattails of the larger, centre-right National Party. Despite their combined vote share of 15%, the smaller parties were given immense power as 'kingmakers' in the process. The subsequent political bargaining process led to many sacrifices being made on the altar of consensus generation. The result was an ambitious '100-day plan', as well as longer-term political projects, that expressed the concerns and bugbears of the two extremist parties with very little headroom for National Party's policies at all. The outcome is a curious amalgam of policies with several underlying themes and idiosyncrasies.

Underpinned by a return to essentially conservative social values and neo-libertarian ideals, the coalition's mishmash of policies include deregulation across policy domains (particularly climate-related), reducing workers' rights, removing any recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi, rolling back almost all of the previous government's socially progressive policies and adopting more punitive approaches to crime. Examples include the repeal of legislation ensuring fairer pay and stable work conditions, the closure of plans for the nationalisation of water infrastructure (colloquially known as 'three waters'), requiring specific time in schools to teach reading, writing and maths and banning cell phones, reducing health system wait times, disestablishing the Māori health authority Te Aka Whai Ora (set up to develop a more responsive health system and the reduction of health disparities) (see Baker, 2024), repealing the smokefree legislation that was enacted to reduce smoking across the population and challenging the provision of food in schools programmes.

This government also, aligned with its populist leanings towards conservative attitudes toward matters of reproductive rights, genders and sexualities, implicitly threatens reversal of progressive changes in their term ahead. We signalled these threats in our previous editorial (Beddoe et al., 2023). As early as November 2023, they announced plans to remove some aspects of gender and sexuality in school-based sex and relationship education (*Stuff*, 2023; *1News*, 2023), calling on the trope of 'parental responsibility', which, like their attack on school lunches, responsiblises parents, ignoring the advice of experts. Within the same ideological frame, they challenged the progressive move to provide period products in schools (Ministry of Education, 2023), a policy based on research that girls skip school when they cannot afford period products. Parents must provide, they opine, or they are failing. But schools provide toilet paper and water to wash without question, as do all public facilities—so why not provide the necessities for menstruation—another bodily function? (Murray, 2024).

All these matters—school lunches, sex education and period products—become the topic of scornful dismissal by populist MPs (largely rich, white, older men), and they do this by braying to their disaffected base, calling on tropes of parental responsibility that are only a skip away from 'a man's home is his castle'. What next? Perhaps the government should de-fund family violence services because they think women

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND SOCIAL WORK *36(1)*, 1–8.

should act responsibly and leave dangerous relationships using their own resources?

These changes all reflect conservative notions of equity and freedom from within a neo-libertarian paradigm, promoting an extreme version of individualism, downplaying the need for social solidarity and diminishing the government's role, scope and size. All overlain with constant plays to a settler colonial notion that universalist approaches to policy equate to equity and fairness. This latter aspect of policy includes a concerted rejection of te reo Māori (Māori language) in public ministry and government operations as well as a rejection of Māori rights to sovereignty or governance under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (te Tiriti o Waitangi). This is consistently reconstructed within government rhetoric as a threat to equality rather than an expression of it. In line with this, a further win for ACT was that there would be a referendum on the principles of te Tiriti O Waitangi, the state's founding document that sets out the rights and responsibilities of iwi Māori and the Crown. This move has been soundly criticised and will be the subject of protest in the years to come (see for example, Fitzmaurice-Brown, 2024). ACT was unhappy that te Tiriti was finally beginning to influence legislation and policy, and their referendum is a scarcely concealed effort to replace te Tiriti obligations with a universalist doctrine, rather than one that guarantees rangatiratanga to Māori, and redress for breaches of it. Without this, it is wholly distorted. As John Campbell (2024, n.p.) wrote, the Treaty Principles Bill is "not so much a re-evaluation of the role of the Treaty as an abandonment of it" as part of a 'new colonialism'.

Taken together, these changes have led to policy fractures, breaks, continuities, circularities and, inevitably, resistance. Each new government creates an overlay of what already exists, rather than a clean break from the past, leading to complex, multi-faceted refractions of political ideology, interests, alliances and outcomes. Policy path dependency operates beneath new (old) rhetoric and initiatives. This mix of old and new shapes public and social policy and the conditions for social and community work practice. Grassroots mobilisation, resistance and protest are also invigorated, the strongest tools for saying no.

In one of the most insensitive of its policy announcements, felt especially in the Muslim community as we passed the fifth anniversary of the massacre of 51 worshippers at two Christchurch mosques, the coalition government has agreed to re-write the Arms Act, with the possibility of allowing competitive sports shooters access to semi-automatic weapons (*1News*, 2024). Semi-automatic weapons were banned by Jacinda Ardern's government, with near-unanimous parliamentary support, following the mass shootings in March 2019. However, the cause of "Firearms, freedom and family" is now championed by ACT MP and Associate Justice Minister Nicole McKee (Walters, 2020). Perhaps the most bizarre outcome of this coalition government is the prospect of a gun-owning former spokesperson for the Council of Licenced Firearms Owners now leading firearms reform. The Imam of the Al Noor Mosque in Christchurch has described the prospect of changes to the law on firearms as "alarming" (Williams, 2024).

At our planning meeting in late January, the Editorial Collective decided to seek contributions to a special issue: *Resistance and rangatiratanga in a time of political change*. Here we call for articles that focus on these recent political changes in Aotearoa New Zealand including:

- Critical analysis of the underpinning ideology and likely impacts of specific policy changes (including but not limited to health, justice, welfare, child protection, education, Māori sovereignty).
- Linking of current changes with their historical context including aspects of continuity, fracture and recurrence.

- Projects of resistance in any area of policy change and the methods and effectiveness of this resistance.
- Consideration of how social and community workers can respond to the inevitable challenges of policy demands and effects that may be at odds with notions of social justice, human rights, empowerment or collective wellbeing. Is this another nail in the coffin of social work? (Maylea, 2020) or is there still a 'world to win' (Garrett, 2021).
- How legislative repeal will, or will not, influence change in the specific areas, that is, analyses of legislation in wider context.
- The re-framing of the Treaty articles and principles as they are applied in legislation and the significance of this for Māori and non-Māori, with applied examples (for example, in child protection, justice or health).
- An analysis of the implicit discourses surrounding te reo Māori and the effects on its use in various settings.
- Social problems-oriented or constructionist pieces examining the re-framing of key words, concepts and discourses in political or media texts that represent or critique these changes.
- The effects on practice contexts of any changes introduced as part of the new 2023 coalition government.
- Analyses of the effects on already-marginalised communities of these changes, and how social work might respond (for example, gender minorities, working class, welfare recipients, migrants).

We welcome contributions and details of the call and guidance for authors are available below[1].

In this issue

In "Whānau Pūkenga – Survive, normalise, flourish: Peer support for Indigenous academic social workers", Hannah Mooney (Ngāti Raukawa ki te tonga, Te Āti Awa, Ngā Rauru, Te Āti Haunui a Pāpārangi), Ange (Andrea) Makere Watson (Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Mutunga, Taranaki Tūturu), Deacon Fisher (Ngāpuhi), Paul'e Ruwhiu (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou) report on the development of group designed to support and develop Tangata Whenua academics and students to contribute to a robust social work programme. Whānau Pūkenga aims to address the challenges Māori academics face in the university setting. Mooney and her colleagues emphasise that the retention and support of Tangata Whenua academic staff must be a priority to honour the obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi to deliver social work education that meets community expectations and the requirements of the Social Workers Registration Board. Indigenous and minority group experiences of barriers in the academy are well documented, and Tangata Whenua academics can find working in predominantly Western tertiary institutions challenging. Decolonisation, growth and inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies, pedagogies and liberatory spaces need to be prioritised if social work aims are to be realised and Māori staff are, not just retained, but supported to flourish.

Over the course of the publication of this issue of the journal, many parts of Aotearoa, and indeed other parts of the world, still grapple with the significant impacts of climate events like Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023, and other disasters. The anecdotal stories on the ground in Aotearoa during the summer of 2023 are of social workers responding to this disaster, volunteering to shovel silt, donning PE gear to retrieve belongings, providing networked support for the distribution of essentials and attending to the basic welfare and housing needs of those who have lost everything to floods, slips and cyclonic winds. Social workers will be more than usually interested, therefore, in the timely insights offered by Kathryn Hay and colleagues, who further report on their research project examining the role of social

workers in the management of disasters. In "Secondary stressors and counselling within social work practice following disaster", Kathryn Hay, Lynne Briggs and Sue Bagshaw examine in-depth case studies of social work disaster practice, including the 2004 Whanganui floods and the 2011 Christchurch earthquake. The participants in this research offer valuable insight into how social workers, personally and professionally, respond to such events and how this practice could be formalised and strengthened.

The article articulates the transferability of social work skills to disaster work, and highlights the need for adaptability and creativity in the face of unprecedented circumstances. Emphasis is made on the reality that social workers may be both victims of disaster and central to the community or national response. Social workers bring a holistic perspective to challenges faced, acknowledging complexity and the need to work at multi-levels of impact. A significant recommendation from the study is to strengthen existing networks and develop more effective communication processes between agencies and services. Developing formal partnerships with disaster management and civil defence structures is offered as a way of streamlining responses. It also recommends specific skills development for social workers at the tertiary level, ongoing training for all social workers, and the creation of a group of skilled, disaster-response social workers to be ready and called upon when necessary.

In "Grace Millane: 'She should have been safe here'", Katelyn Appleyard and Shirley Jülich explore the way news media framed a publicised murder of a young woman in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2018. Employing a singular case study research design, Appleyard and Jülich examined how news media framed the prosecution of the murder of Grace Millane and whether it was consistent with journalists' guidelines for reporting violence against women (VAW). Previous literature reports that victims and perpetrators of VAW were othered to obscure them from the context of the larger social issue that VAW presents and that victims were blamed for their assaults. This research found that rape myths were reproduced in the media reports of the prosecution and were intensified by a lack of adherence to reporting guidelines for journalists. Othering and perpetuation of rape myths result in Grace's story being viewed as apart from the significant social issue of violence against women in Aotearoa, New Zealand, ignoring an important social issue. Social workers are not immune to the powerful messages communicated in media framing of violence. Appleyard and Jülich conclude that it is vital for social workers to be vigilant in advocating for their clients and committed to promoting the principles of human rights despite the rape myths that are prevalent in wider society.

This journal holds many stories of social work history in Aotearoa New Zealand, a rare collection of social work journeys undertaken by practitioners, educators, and researchers, and of the profession itself—the progress of social work education, professionalisation, child protection and health social work (for some of many historical accounts see, for example: Fraser & Briggs, 2016; Hunt et al., 2020; Staniforth & Nash, 2016; Staniforth, 2022; Staniforth et al., 2022). Each story adds to this country's unique landscape and whakapapa of social work, adding insight into who we have become through times of social and political change. In this issue, Barbara Staniforth (who has made a significant contribution to recording our history) and Carole Adamson offer "Their stories, our history: Mike O'Brien", an article about Mike O'Brien and his 55-year career in social work.

Using interviews with Mike and his colleagues, Staniforth and Adamson take us through O'Brien's early life in social work when qualifications were in the early stages of development, and

few social workers were qualified. They describe his motivations behind becoming a social worker and his involvement in the development of community services and welfare reform. Mike was a well-respected social work educator and researcher known for his ability to bridge the gaps between social justice, policy and social work practice, for making theory practical, and for finding ways to address structural and grassroots tensions. His research and academic contributions were internationally recognised, and he was appreciated at home in Aotearoa for his support in challenging systems and policies which disadvantaged marginalised populations.

O'Brien's career moves through generations of political and social change, highlighting the intersecting dimensions of inequality and poverty and the potential of our profession to work across multiple levels to bring about change. Given the intense challenges social work in Aotearoa has faced historically, reflecting on a social work career with people like Mike O'Brien inspires and encourages inspiration for the difficult times inevitably ahead.

It is a reality that many social work clients live in poverty and access state-funded support in the form of welfare benefits. As practitioners, many of us know the struggle of engaging with the benefit system ourselves or in supporting clients. Alastair Russell and Charon Lessing's article: "How well does social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand prepare social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits and what could be done better?" acknowledges the critical role social workers can play as advocates. In recognition of this role the article explores the vital role social work education can play in resourcing students to be advocates and to support clients engaging with the benefit system.

The article reports on the findings of eight semi-structured interviews with recent social work graduates who discussed their experience of social work education alongside engaging with realistic welfare benefit advocacy scenarios. The research found that recent graduates seemed unprepared to support people who were accessing benefits. Russell and Lessing conclude that individual or collective advocacy is either not taught (or not taught in sufficient detail) in social work education, leaving many social workers unprepared to support those living in poverty or claiming a benefit. They recommend the use of a poverty-aware paradigm and realistic benefit advocacy scenarios as part of social work education. This new work complements Russell's earlier article on 'competent solidarity' (Russell, 2017). This is a timely article that, while focused on gaps in social work education, also challenges social workers to think about their role as advocates for clients within a neoliberal environment that blames the individual rather than supports those seeking state assistance.

In "Social work formulation: principles and strategies for mental health social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand", Jo Appleby, Kendra Cox (Te Ure o Uenukukōpako, Te Whakatōhea, Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Porou), Karyn Black and Natasha Marsh note that, while social workers are important members of multidisciplinary mental health teams and formulation is a core skill in mental health practice, there is little published guidance about what strong social work formulation looks like. This article was developed as the authors reflected on their experiences of learning and teaching social work formulation and awareness of the paucity of published guidelines for social work formulation. As mental health social workers, they had struggled with the dominance of deficit-based paradigms and aimed to promote a social model grounded in social work principles thereby strengthening the social work professional identity in mental health.

In another article with a focus on social work identity; "The string to my kite: How

supervision contributes to the development of a newly qualified social worker's professional identity", Lynn Bruning, Kathryn Hay and Kieran O'Donoghue report on a qualitative study of supervision in social work. The study reported in this article aimed to explore how newly qualified social workers perceived supervision. Bruning et al. employed semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences and views of eight newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) in relation to the continuing construction of their social work identity, the challenges they faced in their transition from student to practitioner, and their adjustment to their new professional status. A focus was on how supervision acted as "the string to their kites, anchoring them to their professional foundations". The authors conclude with a recommendation for a more intensive approach to supervision in the first year of practice.

In the first of several articles in this issue that consider the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on social work, Margaret Alston, Carole Adamson, Jenny Boddy and Kelly Irons present "Social work and telehealth", which describes social workers' experiences in adopting telehealth and their views on how it may continue to be used as a mode of service delivery. Alston et al. draw on a narrative review of the literature and a mixed method survey of 208 Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand social workers (71% of whom were from New Zealand). Social workers reported many challenges, including problems such sparse and sometimes unreliable information and communications technology (ICT) services, particularly in rural areas, and, for some, a necessary reliance on personal equipment. Client interactions could also be impacted by issues of access to ICT services and equipment. As has been reported elsewhere in the literature consulted for this study, social workers noted personal challenges during Covid-19, such as the need to home-school children during the pandemic and difficulty separating work and personal space and time. Despite the challenges reported, the authors noted agreement from many social workers that telehealth should be retained because of the benefits for clients who struggle to attend face-to-face meetings.

We continue to gather valuable insight from the extraordinary experiences of the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. In "'They are my tribe': How a self-organizing women's group built a sisterhood that improved well-being and increased social connectedness", Doris Testa offers the findings of research about a group of women in Australia who gathered regularly to swim at their local beach. Testa personally observed this gathering of women in her community and was curious about its development and the experience of the women involved. Through her research with them she explores how groups grow organically around an activity, the physical and social benefits, the nature of belonging and the link between emotional and environmental 'geographies'. She examines the notion of blue spaces, the benefits of swimming as an activity and the value of being in the natural environment—all of which link to well-established literature about criteria for good mental health.

The research found barriers to belonging to such groups, however: swimming skills and confidence in the sea, and proximity to blue spaces, ethnicity, the cost and time involved, the fear of the "male, white gaze". The feminist notion of sisterhood, however, of community and belonging, of solidarity, empowerment and amplification of women's voices is offered as a framework to remove these barriers, and to advocate for, and encourage, participation.

In "Application of the critical intersections model to social work with young parents in Aotearoa New Zealand", Victoria Holden uses Beddoe and Maidment's critical intersections model (2009) to examine the challenges faced by social workers who work with young parents. Drawing on the intersectional approach espoused by

the model, Holden outlines the cultural imperatives to engage with Māori young parents, especially given their greater chance of becoming young parents. She deconstructs some of the discourses around being a young parent and, by utilising critical social theory, analyses the issues relating to stigma and discrimination for some within this group. The creative use of a composite case study derived from placement is put to good effect when applying these concepts to a realistic case scenario, bringing the theoretical discussion alive. Emphasising cultural humility and the skill of establishing rapport in the context of a therapeutic relationship, Holden deftly applies theory to practice in this special context of practice.

The journal welcomes practice notes that can encompass practice across the gamut of social work activity and the three included in this issue reflect the breadth of possibilities. In the first practice note, "Ongoing benefits of a knowledge-exchange project codesigned with students", Irene de Haan, Cherie Appleton and Jerry Lo also focus on an innovative programme that developed during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020. The immediate impact of the lockdown was anxiety and uncertainty about student placements, which was very stressful for students and staff alike due to the requirement of placements for degree completion and professional registration. The authors, a team of social work educators codesigned a collegial knowledge-exchange project (KEP) combining academic knowledge and practice wisdom gathered through students' consultation with academic and practice experts. The KEP main components were to provide a focussed analysis of practice research, interviews with social workers, production of a "practice briefing", application of the knowledge gained to a "real life" practice story and sharing accumulated knowledge. The authors provide a pedagogical perspective, highlighting their learning about promoting professional communication to underpin collaborative work, and the usefulness of an intensive orientation to practice context before students begin placement.

In the second practice note, Tony Stanley provides an overview of "The Oranga Tamariki Practice Framework—Setting out, explaining, and reinforcing our practice approach." In this, Stanley highlights how the practice framework described integrates and promotes the Aotearoa New Zealand *Code of Ethics* and the Social Workers Registration Board *Practice Competencies*, while enabling and driving sound and ethical professional practice within Oranga Tamariki. Stanely argues that this framework ensures that social work practice is then delivered, experienced, led and quality assured based on the discipline of social work rather than comprising risk-aversive reactions to practice tragedies or the volumes of bureaucratic policies and procedures that become outdated and less functional over time.

In the third practice note, "LOVE—A tool for making ethical decisions" Jermey le Comte explores how social workers regularly engage in complex ethical dilemmas. Understanding professional codes of ethics is just a necessary first step and often insufficient to help them to make ethical decisions. Le Comte shares a practical supervision tool, LOVE, that arose from their experience working in several different professional roles: supervisor, trainer, and professional body ethics panel member. The LOVE tool aims to help safeguard social workers while they navigate ethical dilemmas by assisting them to systematically consider the different lenses within the practice, such as legal and organisational requirements, professional values, and ethical codes, ultimately reducing the risk of them overlooking important elements.

This issue also contains four book reviews. Georgina Guild reviews *The Strengths Approach in Practice: How it Changes Lives*" by Avril Bellinger and Deidre Ford. Andrew Davidson reviews *Creative Writing for Social Research: A Practical Guide* by Richard Phillips and Helen Kara. Eileen Joy reviews *Governing Families: Problematising Technologies in Social Welfare and Criminal Justice* by

Rosalind Edwards and Pamela Ugwudike. Finally, Darren Renau reviews *The Politics of Children's Rights and Representation,* edited by Bengt Sandin, Jonathan Josefsson, Karl Hanson and Sarada Balagopalan.

Liz Beddoe, Emily Keddell and Neil Ballantyne, for the editorial collective

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Endnotes

1 Full articles or viewpoints will be due July 1, 2024? Please see the author guidelines for information about preparing and submitting your article. https://anzswjournal.nz/anzsw/information/authors