

# **A NEW POLITICS FOR NEW ZEALAND: MAX HARRIS**

## **Michael King Memorial Lecture**

### **Auckland Writers Festival 2017**

E nga mana, e nga reo, e nga rau rangatira ma o Tamaki Makaurau, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa.

It's a great honour for me to give this year's Michael King Memorial Lecture. I still remember, 12 years ago, in my final year of school in Wellington, getting a copy of Michael King's *Penguin History of New Zealand*. That book helped to bring New Zealand history alive for me; it made me feel like part of a journey that had started centuries ago and that will continue for centuries after me. I never met Michael King. But two other things about his work stand out. He tried to grapple with the question of what it means to be Pākehā in this country, to own the best and worst of our history. His answers are not the only answers that could be given to that question. But asking that question opened up a space for further conversations. And Michael King aspired to tell complex and nuanced stories to a general audience. In what I have seen and read, he never patronized or demeaned his audience. He spoke up to them: he assumed and respected their intelligence. In doing so, he lifted all of us.

I hope I can swim in his slipstream today. I want to speak up to you, in the knowledge that I am only 28 – and that there are life experiences and insights in this audience that far exceed mine. And I want to speak up to you in the knowledge that we are a smart country – a country bursting at the seams with cultural, social, emotional, analytical, and practical intelligence – and a country that does even better when we think through and do things together.

## **I A Stumbling Block**

I want to speak to you, first, about a set of experiences that changed my life two or three years ago. Those experiences led me to write a book called *The New Zealand Project*. I've told this story before in the book, and elsewhere, but I want to tell it in a slightly different – and perhaps deeper – way today. New Zealand writer Ashleigh Young (who's also speaking at this Festival) says in her brilliant collection of essays, *Can You Tolerate This?*, “how wonderful it is that a simple stumbling block ... can change the entire story of our lives and deaths”. That line rings true to me – though my stumbling block didn't seem wonderful at the time.

I was studying at Oxford three years ago on a new Master of Public Policy course, the brainchild of a New Zealander at Oxford, Ngaire Woods. At the end of the course, we had to do a ‘summer project’ – a practical placement – and we were asked to dream big, to think of our ideal job, and to try to pursue that. For a while, I thought I'd be happy anywhere; but at some point, it occurred to me that I'd love to try to work with Helen Clark at the United Nations Development Programme. An interview, some written materials, and several phone conversations later, I found myself in Helen Clark's Executive Office, doing a mixture of strategy research and speechwriting support. That experience – in particular, watching and learning from Helen Clark's discipline, dedication, and diplomatic nous – was transformative.

But it was another experience in New York that would have an even bigger effect on me – a stumbling block that came largely out of the blue. On one Sunday evening, in an emergency room at Mt Sinai Hospital crowded with beds, I was told that I had a dilated (or expanded) aorta, the blood vessel that carries oxygen from your heart to the rest of your body. Another term the doctors used to describe what I had was an aortic aneurysm. The reason a dilated aorta is concerning is that if the aorta tears or dissects, your body's supply of oxygen is cut off, with fatal

consequences. I was told that, in light of other physical features, it was likely I would need open heart surgery to address this.

I say that this came “largely out of the blue” because an Auckland junior doctor friend of mine had told me months earlier at a wedding about some heart conditions I might be predisposed to, due to some specific features of my anatomy he’d noticed. I mentioned this when I turned up to Mt Sinai Hospital, having had fleeting chest pains in the weeks before and having fainted in my apartment one weekend morning. Had I not mentioned what this Auckland friend had told me, the doctors would not have run the tests they did. I might not be here today.

The six months that followed that news in Mt Sinai Hospital were some of the most testing and terrifying times of my life. At Mt Sinai, surgeons wanted to operate immediately; my Mum, a nurse, persuaded me not to let that happen – I found out later that the surgeons wanted to perform the wrong kind of surgery. On a darkening Friday evening a week after I was discharged, I was on a Megabus going to Baltimore to see the world expert in something called Loeys-Dietz Syndrome; the person I was seeing, Dr. Hal Dietz, had been the first to discover or describe the Syndrome in 2005. In Baltimore, after meeting with Dr. Dietz, I got the news that I’d been dreading in the days before: it was highly likely that I had Loeys-Dietz Syndrome, a connective tissue disorder that makes it more likely that people will experience torn tissues in their body, and in particular torn blood vessels around the heart. The Syndrome tends to appear in people who are skinny, relatively flat-chested, and have thin wrists and several other specific features.

I remember straining to remain positive around this time. I’d read that the life expectancy of those with the Syndrome was 26.1 years; at the time, I’d just turned 26. But Dr. Dietz told me these numbers were out of date, and that he expected me to lead a relatively long and normal life. Dr. Dietz also told me that I definitely

did not have some “truly horrendous” other Syndromes (though I concluded later that one of the tricks of the best empathetic doctors is that they can always point to something worse that you don’t have, even when what you have might be pretty bad).

Nevertheless I would still need to undergo major surgery in Oxford: an aortic root replacement. Thinking about that surgery, and waiting for it, were further challenges. There was a 2-3% chance I would die in the surgery. Then there was the worry that something would go wrong beforehand. I lived for about 3 months with an aorta that I was told could dissect at any moment. Almost every twinge in my body – that cold numbness in my foot, that strain in my shoulder – I saw as a possible precursor to my aorta tearing.

In the end, I made it through the surgery in November 2014, with the help of extraordinary nurses, doctors, and professionals in the British NHS, and my family and friends. After I woke up, I scrawled notes on pieces of paper, passing them to the nurses and my family who’d come to the UK. The notes said, “You’re all champs” and “I’m so happy to be alive.” The period around surgery had not been easy. Getting to sleep for any length of time was difficult: I would fall asleep, feel like I was willing myself to stay with my dreams, only to wake up – after what seemed like 10 hours – 45 minutes later. I kept myself entertained by watching highlights of the NZ cricket team playing in the 1990s. Just to keep us all laughing a bit, my sister knocked her head on a beam in the accommodation she was staying in and was admitted for concussion while I lay recovering from the operation.

A week before the surgery, though, I’d got some other news – this time positive. The decision to have surgery in Oxford after returning from New York had turned my plans upside down. I had flights booked to come back to NZ permanently, and these had to be pushed back. So I found myself with three months on my

hands at a time when I wanted to do anything except worry about the upcoming operation. I decided to sit an unusual examination, of the kind you might only find in a place like Oxford. In one of Oxford's 38 colleges, there's an annual test that goes over two days in September/October; any current or former Oxford student can sit it, generally around 100 people give it a go. It consists of six hours on a specialist topic that you select (in my case, law) and six hours answering general questions. The questions in my year – I looked back at them – included: “Do we need borders?”, “Did Eve [as in from Adam and Eve] make the right choice?”, and “Is rising life expectancy a good thing?” 5 or 6 candidates are shortlisted for an interview. The successful 1 or 2 or 3 students from the interview get 7 years of guaranteed funding to do any kind of research or writing. I decided to sign up. It was a long shot. But it would be fun, I thought, to say I'd tried the exam and had the experience. (I realise, by the way, that this is not how everyone would spend time in the run-up to surgery, and this is not everyone's idea of fun.)

To my great surprise, after a draining 12 hours in which, I'll admit, part of my mind drifted to whether I'd ruin the exam for everyone else by having a medical episode (I could just see the headlines, “New Zealander dies during 12 hour Oxford exam”), I was called back for an interview. I thought the interview went terribly. But a week later, I was called to say that I had passed the exam, and that I'd been elected to a Prize Fellowship immediately. That was one week before my heart surgery.

I'm going into all of this detail partly because these experiences inform who I am and how I see the world, partly because this series of events still appears odd to me (involving as it did an unusual, strange new medical condition and an unusual, even stranger, very old university exam). But I'm also explaining this background because it provided the context for the writing of my book, *The New Zealand Project*.

After the news about Loeys-Dietz Syndrome, my heart surgery, and getting the All Souls Prize Fellowship, the way I thought about the future had changed. It was not just that suddenly, overnight, I had an offer of funding for the next seven years. My ability to plan for the long-term was also stunted – as a result of the shock of surgery, and the fact that I had a Syndrome with unpredictable symptoms. A lot of people in this room, though perhaps not all of us, lead lives on the assumption that we'll live into our 70s at least. That expectation of a long life gives us a freedom and a security. I felt like that had been taken away from me. As my close friend Andrew Dean would say to me later, the future had always been part of my identity: I liked to plan for future years and to dream of different trajectories (all of which is a privilege). I felt like that part of my identity had been excised. But along with that foreshortened vision, that constricted horizon, I felt an urgent desire to do something meaningful. I felt, for the first few months after surgery, like I should do everything as if it was the last thing I'd get to do. So I began to sketch the plans for a book on New Zealand. If this was the last thing I could write, this is what I'd want to do. I felt a sense of social debt to New Zealand (having benefited from New Zealand education and society in so many ways), I believed that some things were deeply wrong with the country, and I thought that we had a unique opportunity to make things better.

It was New Zealand politics that I wanted to focus on: the process in New Zealand by which ideas, identities and individuals gain or lose power. Parliamentary politics is part of that process, but it also includes campaigns and activism. I'd studied politics here at Auckland as well as law (and much of law is politics that has become permanently embedded in the rules and principles of our society), I'd gone on to do further study in public policy and law at Oxford, and I'd engaged in politics in New Zealand, in particular as a campaigner with criminal justice group JustSpeak and environmental group Generation Zero. Politics remains a central vehicle for changing minds and changing culture – and I was

particularly interested in sketching some new ways of thinking about politics that would highlight to people who'd lost faith that politics matters. We give up on it at our peril.

I immersed myself in the eight areas of New Zealand politics that seemed most significant for our future – foreign policy, the economy, decolonisation, social policy, justice, work, the environment, and gender. I read history books and policy papers, interviewed people in New Zealand and overseas, and tried to think hard about common themes and connections. What I recognised later was that there was a symmetry between how I was thinking about my future and how I saw New Zealanders viewing our country's future. I had a foreshortened sense of what was ahead of me, and a narrow tunnel vision-like view of the present. The more I spoke and thought about the state of New Zealand politics, the more I realised there was also a cramped sense of what was possible for us collectively. There's a concept in political science known as 'the Overton window' – the idea that any one time in politics there is a window of what is seen as politically possible; ideas outside of that window are just dismissed – they don't fit in. New Zealand's Overton window was very narrow. Writing the book was, then, a way for me to reclaim the idea of the future in my own life – a way to grasp again that I could have a future. But it also became clear to me that we needed to reclaim the future collectively – to realise we could change politics for the better. We needed, in the words of a recent book, to realise we could invent the future.

I knew how I'd lost this sense of a future and how my horizons had been narrowed – through my surgery, and my experiences with the healthcare system. What I didn't know was how we'd reached a similar position politically. So why had we lost a sense of imagination? How could we get back on track?

## **II Values-Based Politics**

The main theme that emerged for me in writing the book was that we have lost a sense of the role of values in politics (at a parliamentary level and at a local or campaigning level). Values are principles we hold dear that contribute to a life well-led. My main argument in the book is that we need a reassertion of a values-based politics. That's a politics more centrally motivated by values, and more focused on securing values in outcome.

To some people this might sound obvious, or what politics is already about. Politicians do talk about values, especially in their maiden speeches when they first enter Parliament; and campaigners often refer to politicians needing to adhere to professed values. So what is holding us back from a more fully-fledged values-based politics? And what's the opposite of a values-based politics?

First, politics has become more technical and technocratic, and that has crowded out space for open discussion of values. The language of our politics is the stunted language of corporate management – the language of “trade-offs”, of clients and consumers, of best practice. It's language that suggests we're a company, not a country. One example of technocratic politics in action is the recently developed “social investment” approach. There is great potential in any policy that attempts to find effective ways to spend money in order to make a difference. But very few people whom I talked to, or whose work I read, understood precisely what the social investment approach is; many felt that important value judgments – about where investment is to go, who is the target of the investment, and how the investment succeeds – were obscured by the language of social investment. But the problem of technocratic politics is not just a problem of language (language, after all, reflects priorities). Nor is it a problem confined to this government, or even this country. Jurgen Habermas, the German philosopher, has described a

similar phenomenon in Europe as a shift from democracy to technocracy. But this shift is one barrier to a more values-driven politics.

Second, politics has become a little directionless – and this has blocked values from being seen as the end-goal of politics. Pragmatism has become the watchword of successive governments in New Zealand. Now, of course there's nothing wrong – in fact there's plenty right – about being practical. But being pragmatic doesn't mean anything in itself. It's all too often a code or cover for value-judgments. And, in my view, pragmatism isn't necessarily a New Zealand way of thinking or doing things. I wonder whether it's a mentality we've inherited from the British. We don't have to take forward all of this British inheritance. Another dimension of our directionless politics is politicians' resistance to talking about big ideas or vision. In 2011, when asked what his vision was, United Future leader Peter Dunne said, "I'm not into visions". And this is a view shared by many. Our politics has become about muddling through and getting by. Again, this is not unique to New Zealand politics. One of the reasons, I think, that we see a strain of nostalgia emerging in some countries' politics – a harking back to Empire in the UK before and after Brexit, the call to 'Make America Great Again' – is that it's easier to look back to some romanticised false past when there's no clear future-facing destination. Muddle-through politics – with a hint of nostalgia might allow us to manage problems or withstand shocks, but it doesn't move us anywhere. In 1943, New Zealand artist Len Lye wrote an essay called 'A Definition of Common Purpose'. It's that common purpose, that shared direction, that feels lacking today.

So values-based politics has been held back by the trends towards politics becoming technical and technocratic, and politics becoming directionless. It's, thirdly, been prevented by a rise – especially since the 1980s – in selfishness and self-interestedness in society at large. It's the product of policies initiated in the

late 1980s by the Labour Party, continued by the National Party in the early 1990s, which chipped away at collective institutions and indeed the idea of a society, and legitimized the notion that an individual does best by pursuing their self-interest. Examples of these policies include a drastic cutting of income tax rates, the Employment Contracts Act 1991 which undermined the power of unions, and harsh reductions in welfare benefit payments. This rise of individualism has been reinforced by technology, and by a celebrity culture that sanctions mean-spirited judgmental competitiveness in everyday life. The fusion of narcissistic politics and mean-spirited celebrity culture is no better represented than in the figure of President Donald Trump. It's a fusion that normalizes talk about what is best for the individual, and makes it harder to talk about looking outside of ourselves; it displaces values with selfishness, and to the extent that any values are left over, they are a narrow set of individualistic values.

It is not just any values-based politics that I support. I believe our first task is to rehabilitate values-based politics generally: a values-based politics has similarities to Māori ways of thinking about dispute resolution and collective action, which centre values. A values-based politics connects to the heart as well as the head. And we know from research – for example, the World Wildlife Fund's Common Cause report – that people's minds are shifted not through numbers, facts, and figures but through an appeal to values. Our next, pressing task, though – to fill the vacuum in future direction and to respond to the pressures of technocracy and individualism – is to propose a specific set of values that could guide our politics.

### **III Care, Community, and Creativity**

I believe those values should be care, community, and creativity. Let me explain what they mean and why they are important.

Care is a deep concern for another thing – a person, the environment, or something else. The Māori equivalent is often said to be manaakitanga, but it may be that aroha comes closer to the expansive notion of care that I support. There is also much important feminist writing on the ethic of care. Care need not be patronising. But it is necessary in the society that we now live in. I've already discussed the rise in self-interestedness – what social psychologists call 'narcissism creep', for which there is some (albeit limited) evidence in New Zealand. Care – the act of looking outside of ourselves – is an antidote to that narcissism creep. It is also needed because we have normalized a set of uncaring narratives about people sleeping rough, people in prison, people receiving a benefit, and others. Those narratives – that homeless people have made bad choices, that we should lock prisoners up and throw away the key, that beneficiaries are lazy – are not just based on inaccurate evidence; they're also stigmatizing and hurtful for the people who are at the centre of these narratives. An ethos of care helps to challenge these narratives.

Community involves recognising that we are all entangled and interdependent – and that we should not drift too far apart. One of the reasons that uncaring narratives have been able to develop is that we've grown apart through rising inequality since the 1980s; the distance between us in society (in terms of economic gaps and physical segregation) has made it harder to empathise with one another and easier to adopt mean-spirited, dismissive rhetoric about other people. Upholding the value of community involves committing to reduce that distance between us. It does not, by the way, have to involve exclusionary, xenophobic political comments about immigrants – of the kind that has been all too prominent of late. I've been reinforced in my view that we need to reassert the value of community by seeing increased concern with loneliness amongst young people, the elderly, and others. Whether people are lonelier now than ever before is hard to

tell. What I think we can say is that the focus on loneliness may well reflect a renewed need for community.

Creativity, the third C (alongside care and community), involves being open to new ways of thinking and doing, being appreciative of imagination, and being willing to produce or create things afresh. It isn't often talked about as a value or in the context of politics – but it is a principle we can hold dear that can contribute to better lives and better politics. The idea that our imaginations have become closed in recent years, our impulse towards creativity stifled, has been expressed in many circles. The Indian writer Arundhati Roy recently collected her essays in a book entitled *The End of Imagination*. Auckland-based artist Judy Millar has said, in Anthony Byrt's wonderful *This Model World*: "It's only through imagination that we know anything." She goes on to say: "it's absolutely crucial right now that humans open their imaginations. We've had them shut down." Bringing creativity into politics also means those in politics drawing on the insights of artists, poets, filmmakers, theatre-makers. They are the canaries in our collective coal-mine – they often express the spirit of our time well before the rest of us can see or feel that spirit.

These values must be secured together, harmoniously, in a way that avoids conflict between them.

I stumbled across a passage in Irish poet Louis MacNiece's *Autumn Journal*, which on this autumn afternoon in Auckland, seems to sum up the significance of these three values well:

*And when we clear away  
All this debris of day-by-day experience,  
What comes out to light, what is there of value*

*Lasting from day to day?*

...

He goes on:

*Life would be (as it often seems) flat,*

*If it were merely a matter of not dying.*

*For each individual then*

*Would be fighting a losing battle.*

*But with life as collective creation*

*The rout is rallied, the battle begins again.*

*Only give us the courage of our instinct,*

*The will to truth and love's initiative,*

*Then we could hope to live*

*A life beyond the self but self-completing.*

MacNiece is asking about our enduring values – “what is there of value lasting from day to day?”. He points out that a focus on “not dying” is part of our project in life: something that has felt true to me. But we can also be more ambitious, he says. We can see life as “collective creation”, as an activity embodying community and creativity, which is – for MacNiece – a way to lead “a life beyond the self but self-completing”: a life of care. It’s worth noting that MacNiece thinks that “love’s initiative” is relevant in this, a point I’ll come back to.

So these values are ones that are important in themselves, that we need right now, and that I think most New Zealanders would sign up to.

#### **IV Taking This Values-Based Politics Forward**

How, though, do we realise these values in political practice? Having described what a values-based politics is, the barriers to it, and why care, community, and creativity are the values we need, I want to describe the prerequisites of a values-based politics – and then I want to explain what a values-based politics might mean across three areas of politics.

I don't think it's possible to build a values-based politics of the kind I've advocated for without our having a conversation about decolonisation. I'm not the best placed to define what decolonisation is or requires. But Ani Mikaere, Tariana Turia, and others agree that decolonisation involves – at the very least – understanding and undoing the negative effects of colonisation, and recentring the views of indigenous peoples. It's a word that is not often heard in public discussions of politics. But it has been discussed and demanded for years by Māori like Mikaere, Turia, Moana Jackson, and others – and it involves owning our history, redistributing public power so that Māori are guaranteed the tino rangatiratanga promised under Art 2 of the Treaty of Waitangi, and ensuring that Māori are given a significant voice in the New Zealand project. Decolonisation is a precondition of the values-based politics I've proposed for several reasons. First, our politics will only be legitimate in the eyes of everyone when we have reckoned with our past. Secondly, care, community, and creativity cannot be the guiding principles of our politics if our community is on an unequal footing. Ani Mikaere is right that “successful lives as Māori require a good deal more than simply measuring up to a Pākehā standard”. But it is nevertheless true that major inequalities remain between Māori and Pākehā; if those inequalities persist, a push for care, community, and creativity is likely only to preserve existing imbalances – and to mean care, community, and creativity for some of us. Third, the values of care, community, and creativity have a close connection to core aspects of tikanga Māori: manaakitanga, aroha, whanaungatanga, auahatanga. Their promise as values will only be fully realised, and properly grounded in this place, if Māori play a central

part in defining and interpreting those values. That would help to build a politics unique to this place, to Aotearoa New Zealand. Fourth, decolonisation helps to fasten our attention on the issue of power – who holds it and who doesn't have it – which helps us in applying care, community, and creativity in concrete ways.

Two other things need to be secured for a values-based politics to be meaningful. We need to have a conversation about the State – and what we want the State to do within a values-based politics. My view is that we have lost sight of what the State is good at, and some of the special features of the State: its ability to borrow at low cost for major investments, its capacity to connect up different services, its economies of scale. A first-principles conversation about this can help to unwind some of the changes from the 1980s and 1990s that undermined the role of values in politics, and might help us to work towards a new economic model. Additionally and at the same time, we need genuine people power. A more robust role for the State will become top-down if it is not driven by people. For that to happen we need to address the fact that large groups of people – including some young people – are demoralized and desensitized in their interactions with politics. Changing the types of people in parliamentary politics and introducing civics education will go some way towards reversing demoralization and desensitisation, but will not address the root causes. What is also needed is a more thoroughgoing change in political culture – and I'll return to how that can be achieved shortly.

What would a values-based politics look like? How would it be different from the politics of today? Let me give three examples, all of which I expand on in the book.

First, in the sphere of foreign policy: we could reclaim the idea of independent foreign policy, which says that our foreign policy should be driven by values as opposed to just collective self-interest. Interestingly, in recent weeks, the US under

Trump has explicitly disavowed a values-based approach to foreign policy. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said, in the context of describing his ‘America First’ approach to foreign policy, “I think it’s really important that all of us understand the difference between policy and values”. We don’t have to drive that same wedge between policy and values here. It is difficult for foreign policy to involve no element of collective self-interest, and in some ways a values-based foreign policy might also be interest-based: it merely involves redefining our interests so that they include values. But the point is that we don’t have to be as resistant as Rex Tillerson to the role of values in foreign policy.

An independent foreign policy can be broken down into three parts: ethically justified foreign policy, that is relatively non-aligned (that means too closely tied to one country), and creatively pursued. At times in recent years, governments have adhered to this approach, as when the National-led Government withstood pressure to support a UN Security Resolution condemning Israeli settlements. But I think an independent foreign policy could provide a platform for new directions in foreign policy.

New Zealand could invest in peace arbitration and mediation training for diplomats, and seek to be an arbitrator in the same way that Norway and Finland have developed this capability. This would solidify our independent position, and honour the commitment to peace which has marked several moments in our own history – the reference to “peace” in the English version of the Treaty of Waitangi, or Te-Whiti-o-Rongomai’s aspiration to be an “author of peace” in his nonviolent stand at Parihaka in 1881. Finland achieved this through a concerted decision to make peace a comparative advantage in foreign policy; and New Zealand has some of the building blocks of this comparative advantage, including the recently set up National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in Otago. As well, New Zealand might be more vocal in drawing attention to the position of individuals affected by

climate change in the Pacific. Tuvalu and Kiribati face rising sea levels and severe climate effects. Yet New Zealand has been slow to shift domestic policy, and has been inactive in international bodies dealing with climate displacement, such as the Nansen Initiative or the Platform on Disaster Displacement – despite calls by Pasifika activists in NZ, for example from Caritas, for more action. Pasifika people have a long history as part of the New Zealand community; care might prompt greater action on climate displacement, at least in the Pacific; creative steps that could be taken include expanding the number of Pacific migrants from climate-affected countries, or pushing for a global climate change refugee convention internationally.

In the field of justice, many areas cry out for action. To focus on just one, we might approach prison policy differently were we more centrally guided by a values-based politics. New Zealand imprisons 210 per 100,000 of our population, according to the International Centre for Prison Studies. That's 30% more prisoners than Australia, 45% more than the United Kingdom, 84% more than Canada. We only punch above weight on this measure in terms of being the most punitive: and that is nothing to be proud of. The over-representation of Māori has also worsened over time: in 2017, 56% of the prison population were Māori. No other settler society with a majority-European background population has this proportion of indigenous peoples in prison. As well, we hear story after story of ill-treatment of people in prison: irresponsible use of restraints, prison fights in the Serco-run private prison, and regular prison suicides. We need to understand the causes of our high imprisonment rate, over-representation of Māori, and poor treatment of people in prison. Those causes include a punitiveness embedded in our culture, institutional racism, and colonisation. But we also need to act to change this state of affairs. Prisons deny our fundamentally social nature, they rip apart families, they have a poor record of achieving rehabilitation, and they are expensive. They embody a failure of care. It might be said that they are necessary

to provide care for victims. But there is no reason why care cannot be provided for victims (an imperative) while it is also extended to those who have committed offences. I say all this not as some out-of-touch outsider who's never been into a prison. I've done prison volunteer training and work in three New Zealand prisons – Mt Eden, ACRP, and Arohata. I've also spent the last three months in the UK facilitating a course, called Learning Together, which brings together university students and prison students (some of whom have committed very serious crimes) in Grendon Prison outside of Oxford. These experiences form the basis of the views I express here.

It is not true that no one is talking about these problems. The Chief Ombudsman, Judge Peter Boshier, has been outspoken in recent weeks. Journalists have written critical articles. The Waitangi Tribunal has declared a breach of Treaty principles. The organization JustSpeak, which I have been involved with in the past, has demanded radical change, alongside No Pride in Prisons. But politicians do not seem to be serious about addressing what should be a national disgrace, despite Prime Minister Bill English saying in 2011 that prisons are a “moral and fiscal failure”. A values-based approach to politics brings the problems with mass incarceration in New Zealand into sharp relief, and suggests some ways forward.

I travelled to Norway, with the support of the Law Foundation, to find out how a different approach to criminal justice was cultivated there. It's often thought that Scandinavia has always had a more enlightened approach to imprisonment. But a number of people I interviewed – including lawyers, judges, police, and criminologists – told me that it was only since the 1970s that Norway had reduced its prison population, which has stayed low alongside a low crime rate. What factors made this change possible? Three things: (1) an underlying commitment to forgiveness in Norwegian culture, (2) the work of one effective campaigning group, KROM, which tapped into that culture, and (3) a brave politician, Inge-

Louise Valle. I visited a prison, Bastoy Prison, in order to see what the Norwegian criminal justice system was like on the inside. Bastoy, located on an island off Oslo, was spacious; had a high staff:inmate ratio (72 staff for 115 inmates); gave inmates options for meaningful work; and was founded on principles of normality and being a good neighbour. The inmates are “not released with hatred towards society”, Tom Eberhardt (the prison governor) told me. “We haven’t taken their hope away.” Justice means more than revenge here, Eberhardt said. “Revenge” in criminal justice “is like pissing your pants in Norway”, Eberhardt told me. “It feels good” at first. “Then you start to freeze.” I also spoke to an MP, Kari Henriksen, who said to me she could imagine herself being violent or being a criminal – and that this was essential to good criminal justice policy-making.

We could draw on some of these lessons in Aotearoa New Zealand. Those prisons that do need to remain in New Zealand could be redesigned along Norwegian lines: with options for meaningful work, an emphasis on normality and being a good neighbor, a high staff:inmate ratio. But we also need to take urgent steps to reduce Māori over-representation and to tackle over-incarceration. Problem-solving courts might be used with greater oversight as a substitute for short prison sentences, and we might consider adopting a Canadian sentencing provision to consider whether the experiences of an indigenous offender ought to reduce the culpability of that offender.

A values-based politics should shift our thinking, as well as our policies – and might lead us, third, to a politics of love. Love could be the fourth value to accompany care, community, and creativity. Love is a deep sense of warmth directed towards another. It is concerned with meaningful relationships. Why couldn’t it be a motivating force and end-goal for politics, which stands in for self-interest, self-protection, and cynicism? Other writers – especially bell hooks, Michael Hardt, and Cornel West – have made this suggestion. It is true that love is

a tarnished word in lots of communities; it might be that a politics of love involves reclaiming the word. Love does not have to be passive, either – love can prompt anger, or struggle.

A politics of love could take us, I say in the book, towards a reimagining of work – which might include a universal basic income pilot, of the kind currently being evaluated in Finland. A universal basic income involves a regular payment to individuals, regardless of whether they are working. It is one way to respond to the fact that as of December 2012, 635,000 people were in insecure work in New Zealand according to the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (though I also discuss other responses to insecure work in the book, including strengthening unions, adopting an Insecure Work Benefit, or measuring insecure work more precisely). A universal basic income would provide “money for a rainy day” for these insecure workers, as Olli Kangas – the man in charge of Finland’s basic income pilot told me, last year. A basic income could also remove some of the stigma and bureaucracy currently faced by those on benefits, since all would receive a basic income (though if some top-up benefits were retained alongside a basic income, which I support, some stigma would be maintained). It could free up time for individuals and communities to pursue projects – whether in the field of the arts, business, community work, or household labour. A basic income is not without weaknesses as an idea: it would prove very costly if rolled out on a national scale. Some have worried that it is a way to dismantle the welfare system by the back-door. But a pilot, which could cost between \$10 and \$30 million NZ dollars, could help to gather evidence and start a much-needed national debate about the place of work and leisure in our lives. In my view such a pilot would give effect to a politics of love. It would express warmth and confidence in recipients of a basic income. It could also create space for love and care in people’s lives, by allowing for more free time and lessening the stresses of paid work. It could honour the

late, great Paul Callaghan's claim that "What really counts in life is love: to do the work that you love, to find the partner you love, to act always with love ..."

Wouldn't people disagree about what follows from care, community, creativity, even love? Couldn't some people use these starting points to reach the opposite of my conclusions? Absolutely. There are three parts to my argument – a call for a values-based politics; a call for a politics grounded in care, community, creativity; and a call for specific changes that I saw flow from these values. I'd like to think I've offered some good reasons to support specific changes – for instance, in how we imprison people and how we do foreign policy. But if a large group of people at least affirm the idea of a values-based politics, and accept the starting points of care, community, and creativity (and love), I'd be happy. All values – like freedom, or equality, or fairness – can be interpreted in different ways. We need to have the argument out, as someone said to me, about where these values should take us.

Is this all too soft for the ruthless world of politics? Are these values nice-sounding, but won't they just get shut down by vested interests and others? We need to catch ourselves, as we ask these questions, boxing ourselves in based on politics-as-usual, forcing ourselves to fit into that Overton window I was describing earlier. Jose Esteban Munoz has written that our climate is "dominated by a dismissal of political idealism. The antiutopian critic of today has a well-worn war chest ... at her or his disposal to shut down lines of thought." Fighting for care, community, and creativity, even love, in a world dominated by individualism is far from soft. It's hard. It involves taking on the crushing, paralyzing cynicism of our era. I think it requires strength and support and toughness.

But how is it possible? How do we change our political culture? How do we create space for our politicians to be bolder and braver, on issues like a basic income or climate change displacement? I don't want to set out a how-to-manual for getting

the changes I've proposed here. That would be over-reaching. Politics is done better together – with all of us: dreamers, doers, and joiners – and we'll improve political culture if we offer our own versions of a New Zealand project. The book aims, in the main, to underscore that a different way is possible, that we can widen our imaginations, and that we can all contribute to the conversation.

I don't, however, want you to leave this room without any concrete suggestions for taking the New Zealand project forward. So here are some ideas. We can tell our politicians to be bolder and braver. We can also show that they can be bolder and braver by joining campaigns, and putting pressure on politicians to shift their positions. As French philosopher Guy Debord wrote in *The Society of the Spectacle*, published 50 years ago this year, “ideas alone” cannot achieve progress – “people must set a practical force into motion”. This is the single most effective way that change has been sparked in New Zealand – from the Māori Land March to the nuclear-free campaign to the recent pay equity victory. And there are lessons we can draw from successful campaigns, whether from here in New Zealand or from effective recent campaigns overseas, such as the work of Black Lives Matter or the indigenous-led opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock. Centre the voices of those most affected by a policy – indigenous people in the case of Standing Rock, African-Americans in the case of Black Lives Matter; they are likely to speak to an issue with the most authenticity and urgency and power. Speak the language of values. And support the work of young people – but do not discount the extraordinary potential of intergenerational coalitions of young and old which can combine the impatience and imagination of young people with the insight and experiences of people who have lived more years on this Earth. How do you find the campaigns? Look for people already doing the work of championing values in this country. They might not be working in what appears to be a ‘political’ role; they might be working in a values-driven business or they might be motivated by values in their work in the public service. In my book, I was looking for people

like this – and I found them in doctors, teachers, musicians, academics, and others. Finally, if campaigning is not for you, have conversations about values – especially with people who you might disagree with. Could love be the basis of our politics? What do we believe in? Where we should be going as a country? These are questions, I should point out, that we can all ask or answer, regardless of where we are on the political spectrum – or whether we’re on that spectrum at all – just as the project of a values-based politics, and a politics grounded in care and community and creativity, can be directed at both the Left and the Right.

This is not all new. People have talked about values-based politics, including Māori and those involved more recently with the Values Party. Some of what I’ve discussed is not orthodox – say, for instance, the idea of a politics of love – and is new for parliamentary politics. But what is different, what we’ve never faced before, is the context of our times. Ahead of us are unprecedented challenges, in particular the threat of climate change. And inequality and other devices of distraction mean that we have ignored other persistent challenges: mass incarceration, child poverty, insecure work, and homelessness. But we also have an opportunity to take on these challenges in New Zealand. We are small enough that a change of heart can be achieved. We need to piece together the best of the past, the best of our bicultural traditions (what Michael King described as “retracing New Zealand footsteps”) in order to cope with this context – and face the future. As Emerson once wrote, “This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it.”

In closing, I can’t help but draw parallels again between my own medical experience and this country as a whole. I discovered almost three years ago that I had a connective tissue disorder. It feels, to me, like there is also a weakness in the bonds holding us together in Aotearoa New Zealand. In that hospital in Oxford almost three years ago, I had part of my aorta corrected to ensure the proper

functioning of my heart and body. Now it's time to repair our country's heart – to get the pulse of our social conscience beating again. But this operation doesn't require surgeons or expert medical practitioners. This project requires all of us – since we are all experts in the future of this country. It requires all of the intelligence that I referred to at the outset of this lecture, all of the experience, all of the imagination, and – yes – all of the love that we can muster.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tātou katoa.