



## **Truth, Justice & Healing: Changing the Prevailing Health Narrative in New Zealand**

**J.R. Bruning MA(Sociology). 2023 Presentation transcript.**

### **DEMOCRACY'S UNSPOKEN FOUNDATION: Where is the real fourth estate?**

We're observing at least across the English-speaking west, a capture, or corruption of science and research. Politically controlled funding heavily restricts research in contested policy areas while directing it instead, to favoured policy areas. We are the poorer for it. We're vulnerable to false flags and claims from vested interests. In emergency situations, we're less able to respond in a sophisticated or nuanced manner.

Yes - independent scientists globally raise a picture of harm, criticise a policy trajectory, or rebut claimed consensus. This information is ignored and dismissed. We see officials drawing on 'the science' when they want to. But methodological reviews are not in scope nor are they funded for. All too frequently, policy reflects the claims or agendas of dominant vested interests – within or beyond our borders.

As St. Thomas Aquinas warned - 'Beware the man of a single book'.

My talk today revolves around a simple fact: democratic institutions are not adequately buttressed against external influence. My contribution to this debate is to argue that democratic resilience is impossible when information and intelligence are politically neutered. When public good independent experts are unavailable, governments will resort to the claims of vested interests. The informational environment thus becomes propagandised.

Today I will discuss the problem of democratic waning, touching on New Zealand. How justice is understood, is integral to democratic resilience, and I'll elaborate on this topic, then I'll discuss our underpowered and misdirected science and research institutions.

I want to emphasise that partially dismantled democracies present strategic opportunities to state and non-state actors. The history of the world revolves around conquest and resource extraction through strategic alliances and the targeting of weak jurisdictions. My focus is – how intelligent are we? Without independent contradictory science and research, are civil societies at risk of being subsumed by technology and the institutions who control those technologies.

'The decline of **democracy** has accelerated around the world during the last 15 years' - former Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey Palmer 2023. <sup>1</sup> In their 2018 book *Towards Democratic Renewal*, Palmer, Butler and Roberts stated that

'Democracy is on the wane. There seems to be a declining faith in the legitimacy of decisions that are being made'. <sup>2</sup>

They stated plainly that

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<sup>1</sup> Smith P. (2023). Geoffrey Palmer: Strengthen Parliament to watch government. *Stuff*. July 16, 2023. Accessed Sept 17, 2023.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/the-house/audio/2018897936/geoffrey-palmer-strengthen-parliament-to-watch-government>  
<sup>2</sup> Palmer G., Butler A., Roberts S. (2018) *Towards democratic renewal: ideas for constitutional change in New Zealand*. Geoffrey Palmer and Andrew Butler, with assistance from Scarlet Roberts. *Victoria University Press*, Wellington, New Zealand. p.23.

‘the New Zealand style of government is already authoritarian’<sup>3</sup>

– and drew attention to a not so surprising fact - that

‘legal and political systems are finding their legitimacy is slipping away’.<sup>4</sup>

We’re seeing similar patterns in the UK, Canada,<sup>5</sup> the USA<sup>6</sup> and Australia.<sup>7</sup> In the words of UK philosopher AC Grayling, ‘democracy has been made to fail’.<sup>8</sup> We’re seeing an uptick in papers on democratic backsliding.

Palmer: ‘New Zealand needs to refurbish its own democracy and be vigilant to protect its values’.<sup>9</sup>

Democratic values including transparency, accountability, deliberation and representation. These values are intimately related with how we prioritise information flows. Our legislation requires officials to respect individual dignity and promote freedom, and observe natural justice via procedural fairness.

Issues of *justice* permeate human life. Issues of justice arise when our interests overlap. *Just* treatment is something that is due to each citizen, ‘the constant and perpetual will to render to each his due’. To be just is to be morally right and fair. Being reasonable.

Justice isn’t something that is exclusive to the criminal justice system. Justice should course through the veins of government and society. Justice is a profoundly human endeavour. Social, political, economic and cultural logics shape political agendas – which problems we identify, what information is considered, how we use it, for what purposes.

Justice has a knowledge dimension to it. Without information we cannot understand what is fair or what is unfair. How far do we look and where do we look to understand an issue - is bound to this concept of fairness. A decision cannot claim to be fair if the decision-maker has bound their hands, if they have failed to attain a balance of a situation.

This is why for many of the ancient philosophers, justice involved the striving for truth. But truth is multidimensional. Our ancestors linked truth with faith and fidelity – integrity.

One of the best explanations of the effect of justice was provided to me by a retired official. When justice functions well it is like a blanket across all matters. It is protective, calming and soothing. This blanket of justice carries consciousness. It must be nourished. The benefit is felt across all, rich and poor.

The blanket itself is like felt fabric. It is matted and interlocked it promotes resilience beyond the strength of the individual fibres. Justice involves the making of decisions that are far beyond the technical and practical.

When we pretend to carry out justice but ignore metaphysical and spiritual matters we fail. Justice concerns purity of intent, a knowing, a divine or godly intention to do no harm, to remedy by preventing further harm. When justice is uneven, discontent and chaos arise.

Justice is a concept that traverses ethics, law, philosophy and spirituality. Justice and morality are bound together. Because what is fair?

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.8

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.24

<sup>5</sup> Loat A. & MacMillan M. (2014). Tragedy in the Commons: Former Members of Parliament Speak Out About Canada's Failing Democracy, *Random House*.

<sup>6</sup> Webb W. (2022). One Nation Under Blackmail, Vol. 1: The Sordid Union Between Intelligence and Crime that Gave Rise to Jeffrey Epstein. SpokenTome Media.

<sup>7</sup> Stoker et al. (2018). Trust and Democracy in Australia: Decline and Democratic Renewal. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2018-12/apo-nid208536.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Grayling AC (2018) Democracy and Its Crisis. *Oneworld*, London.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.9

Procedural fairness has a moral dimension to it. Deliberation, reasoning, not just on technical facts, but on principles and values. Just behaviour cannot arise without paying attention to what is moral – principles of right and wrong behaviour. How to prevent further injustice?

But *democracy* is on the wane. What is going wrong?

New Zealand is a constitutional monarchy and lacks a written constitution. Restoring democracy as I argue today, is more than fixing the three legs – *Parliament* (or the legislative) who make the laws and scrutinise the executive; the *executive*, Cabinet, and Ministers outside Cabinet, plus government departments who administer the laws; and the *judiciary* who interpret and apply the law, - both statutes and common law.

Democracy depends on a robust knowledge architecture that can speak truth to power. We've eroded our research and academic institutions which, I assert, should be in place to inform all three legs. But I'll talk about that later.

In New Zealand power in executive (central government) vastly overshadows the judiciary and Parliament – so there's no scrutiny of the executive. Parliament instead find themselves led by the executive, as Sir Geoffrey Palmer has described 'like a colossus'.<sup>10</sup>

There are many ways democracy is being made to fail. Parliament is under-resourced and depends far too much on the executive. It's impossible for Parliament to demand accountability from the executive. Regulatory impact statements make unjustified claims, often fail to judge real risk and consider nuanced issues including to future generations and rights. But MPs have limited time to respond to poorly formed policy, even if their electorate appeals to them.

Then there is the secretive nature of the production of Bills, and I quote Palmer:



“The Government introduces a bill, no one knows what's going to be in the bill until it is introduced. It's designed in secret by the Executive Government. And then when it's found to have troubles, you have to amend it later. It would be far better if you worked out the detail in advance”.<sup>11</sup>

Recent law changes increase the speed at which secretive secondary legislation can be produced through Cabinet. In secret, via Orders in Council. New Acts presume that a great quantity of secondary legislation will follow. Secondary, or delegated legislation has all the power of law.

Yet it's produced without democratic oversight. The COVID-19 traffic light system which purposefully used mandates to nudge society towards vaccination, was an example of secondary legislation.

Then there are the select committee processes which review comments and criticisms of new legislation. Unfortunately, the executive can take over as Parliament lacks resources. As Palmer has said

“There is some capacity to get independent advice, but not enough. There's no resources, the resources all go to the Executive. The Executive is enormous because of it”.

For example, if a select committee wants advice on how to best handle a highly technical piece of legislation it is reviewing, the cheapest and easiest advice they can get is from... the staff of the minister whose bill they are reviewing; experts that developed the policy and the bill. But independent advice means paying outside experts, and Parliament is pretty poor”.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Smith P. (2023). Geoffrey Palmer: Strengthen Parliament to watch government. *Stuff*. July 16, 2023. Accessed Sept 17, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Smith P. (2023). Geoffrey Palmer: Strengthen Parliament to watch government. *Stuff*. July 16, 2023. Accessed Sept 17, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

Many of us are concerned that a great deal of new statutes are being drafted that displace public law principles. Civil society lacks processes to appeal other than judicial review. When government officials write out principles and values, they set the stage for authoritarian conduct.

When laws are appealed through the process of judicial review, judges seem unable to value scientific information that is inconsistent with the position of Crown experts, even if external scientists have greater subject-matter expertise than Crown scientists. When judges persistently defer to Crown experts, we can see that there is no separation between the executive and the judiciary.

Is our government biased to big institutional interests? Industry stakeholder meetings, public-private partnerships and commercial in confidence arrangements take place behind closed doors. Management consultants are responsible for policy development and deployment yet move effortlessly between the private and public sector. Officials actively game the Official Information Act.

New Zealand is not alone in the democratic backsliding. Grayling states that in the UK ‘institutional checks and balances on the power of the executive have reduced dramatically ... [and] the absolute authority of the executive ... has grown’. The capacity of ‘courts to check the executive has been restricted to judicial review and advising on the incompatibility with the Human Rights Act’.<sup>13</sup> Party discipline systems have also reduced the independence of MPs – ‘so the quality and reputation of MPs has declined’.<sup>14</sup>

In New Zealand select committees have lacked informed experts that can navigate human rights issues. In the covid emergency not a single bioethics committee was convened.<sup>15</sup>

Our *regulatory institutions* are *designed* to fail. Without independent resources they’re captured by industry claims and industry data. We observe, over and over again the creation of regulatory bodies where the regulator has neither the obligation, the inquisitorial powers, nor the resources to explore issues relevant to the issue that they are charged with overseeing. The latest regulators without such powers include Therapeutic Products Regulator and the Digital Identity Services Trust Framework Act’s so-called Trust Framework Board and authority.<sup>16 17 18 19</sup>

Our regulatory institutions are *never* resourced to methodologically review the latest scientific or technical information - that might challenge the claims of private industry. International court judgements are ignored. We have gaps. Private industry data underpins claimed safety of novel entities which include pharmaceuticals; pesticides, industrial chemicals, gene edited and genetically modified technologies, right through to Electromagnetic Field (EMF) Exposures, and the digital technologies used across government. Toxicological data is priorities while epidemiological data ignored.<sup>20</sup>

Our members of Parliament and our judiciary can’t appreciate the hamstringing of regulatory agencies. Parliament and the judiciary don’t have the resources. They are ignorant by design and lack recourse to expertise in the public interest. This can be remedied but the executive won’t like it.

<sup>13</sup> Grayling AC (2018) Democracy and Its Crisis. *Oneworld*, London. P.134

<sup>14</sup> Grayling AC (2018) Democracy and Its Crisis. *Oneworld*, London. P.135

<sup>15</sup> Bruning J. (2022, June 8) Official Information Act request to the Ministry of Health (CHOIA278). <https://fyi.org.nz/request/19618-bioethics-panels-reports-relating-to-compulsory-vaccination-masking>

<sup>16</sup> New Zealand Environmental Protection Agency (2022) Risk Assessment Methodology for Hazardous Substances: How to assess the risk, cost, and benefit of new hazardous substances for use in New Zealand.

<sup>17</sup> PSGR (2021) Submission to the Environment Committee, 2021 Inquiry on the Natural and Built Environments Bill: Parliamentary Paper. <https://psgr.org.nz/component/jdownloads/send/1-root/72-21nba>

<sup>18</sup> PSGR (2023) Submission to the Health Committee, Therapeutic Products Bill. [https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/53SCHE\\_EVI\\_130084\\_HE39286/ef604f64850144d01063095c3fe6444eca33742d](https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/53SCHE_EVI_130084_HE39286/ef604f64850144d01063095c3fe6444eca33742d)

<sup>19</sup> PSGR (2021, December). Submission to the Economic Development, Science and Innovation Committee, Digital Identity Services Trust Framework Bill. <https://psgr.org.nz/component/jdownloads/send/1-root/86-digidentity>

<sup>20</sup> PSGR (2023, February) When does science become propaganda? What does this suggest for democracy? Bruning, J.R., Physicians & Scientists for Global Responsibility New Zealand. ISBN 978-0-473-68632-1

It's not surprising that *trust* is declining. The knowledge gaps, the paradoxes and the irreconcilable contradictions are growing. Trust is at the heart of any successful nation. 'Trust breeds legitimacy and legitimacy breeds loyalty'.<sup>21</sup>

Chemical pollution has been kept outside of freshwater policy for a decade.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, we don't monitor our environment for chemicals.<sup>23 24</sup> Impoverished local councils jump at every funding opportunity from central government, even when residents object. Policies keep being made which undermine small business, but benefit large organisations.

The Ministry of Health promotes equity while failing to acknowledge diet as a foundational driver of mental health and immune health.<sup>25 26 27 28</sup> Low nutrient ultraprocessed food is driving the chronic disease epidemic,<sup>29 30 31 32</sup> but Ministry rhetoric implies that multidrug regimes and shorter hospital waiting lists will satisfy equity narratives.

We're learning of secret consultation being held with stakeholders where the stakeholders represent powerful non-state actors, often with complex political and financial conflicts of interest.<sup>33 34</sup> These consultations then shape how policies and laws are formulated. We saw this with the Digital Identity Services Trust Framework Bill.<sup>35</sup>

For decades government representatives have signed on to largely secret multi-national treaties and international agreements which have resulted in amendments to a wide body of legislation without broad consultation.<sup>36</sup>

Disconcertingly, sophisticated policies that stream through our government agencies and educational institutions mirror new policy initiatives and laws that coincidentally arise in other so-called western democracies. These pre-arranged policies are not ground-up policies which arise from deliberative,

<sup>21</sup> Palmer G., Butler A., Roberts S. (2018) Towards democratic renewal: ideas for constitutional change in New Zealand.

<sup>22</sup> Aotearoa/New Zealand Policy Proposals on healthy waterways: Are they fit for purpose? The Soil and Health Association of New Zealand and Physicians and Scientists for Global Responsibility Charitable Trust New Zealand ISBN (digital) 978-0-473-50130-3 <https://psgr.org.nz/component/jdownloads/send/1-root/64-2019-freshwater>

<sup>23</sup> Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (2019). Focusing Aotearoa New Zealand's environmental reporting system

<sup>24</sup> Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (2020). A review of the funding and prioritisation of environmental research in New Zealand

<sup>25</sup> Kau et al (2012). Human nutrition, the gut microbiome, and immune system: envisioning the future. *Nature*, 474(7351): 327–336. doi:10.1038/nature10213.

<sup>26</sup> González Olmo et al (2021). Evolution of the Human Diet and Its Impact on Gut Microbiota, Immune Responses, and Brain Health, *Nutrients*, 13(196), doi:10.3390/nu13010196

<sup>27</sup> Rucklidge J. et al (2021). Nutrition Provides the Essential Foundation for Optimizing Mental Health. *Evidence-Based Practice in Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 6(1)131–154, doi:10.1080/23794925.2021.1875342

<sup>28</sup> Cardoso, BR et al (2022) Association between ultra-processed food consumption and cognitive performance in US older adults: a cross-sectional analysis of the NHANES 2011–2014, *European Journal of Nutrition*, doi:10.1007/s00394-022-02911-1

<sup>29</sup> Leite FHM, Khandpur N, Andrade GC, et al. Ultra-processed foods should be central to global food systems dialogue and action on biodiversity. *BMJ Global Health* 2022;7:e008269. doi:10.1136/bmjgh-2021-008269

<sup>30</sup> Moodie et al. (2021). Ultra-Processed Profits: The Political Economy of Countering the Global Spread of Ultra-Processed Foods – A Synthesis Review on the Market and Political Practices of Transnational Food Corporations and Strategic Public Health Responses. *Int J Health Policy Manag* 10(12)968–982, doi: 10.34172/ijhpm.2021.45.

<sup>31</sup> Baker P. et al. (2018). What Enables and Constrains the Inclusion of the Social Determinants of Health Inequities in Government Policy Agendas? A Narrative Review. *Int J Health Policy Manag*.7(2), 101–111, doi:10.15171/ijhpm.2017.130

<sup>32</sup> Martínez Steele, E., Popkin, B.M., Swinburn, B. et al.(2017). The share of ultra-processed foods and the overall nutritional quality of diets in the US: evidence from a nationally representative cross-sectional study. *Popul Health Metrics*, 15(6), doi:10.1186/s12963-017-0119-3

<sup>33</sup> International Monetary Fund, "IMF Approach to Central Bank Digital Currency Capacity Development," International Monetary Fund, Washington, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Stiglitz JE and Gallagher KP (2022). Understanding the consequences of IMF surcharges: the need for reform. *Review of Keynesian Economics*, 10(3)348–354

<sup>35</sup> PSGR (2021, December). Submission to the Economic Development, Science and Innovation Committee, Digital Identity Services Trust Framework Bill. <https://psgr.org.nz/component/jdownloads/send/1-root/86-digidentity>

<sup>36</sup> Kelsey J (2008). *Serving Whose Interests? The Political Economy of Trade in Services Agreements*. *Routledge-Cavendish*.

participatory processes. They mysteriously arise in bills, in government agencies and in educational institutions. White papers and global meetings arranged by non-state actors without public accountability, reveal that the themes and policies have been in production offshore, for years. It's also unclear to what extent the UK exercises control and influence over our domestic policy and law.<sup>37</sup>

How can we have justice when *procedural fairness* has eroded? New Zealand's executive have amassed unaccountable and opaque powers. Without accountability to Parliament, out-of-sight officials, or *clerics*, effectively operate as a shadow government. People still default to blame MPs. People cannot target what they cannot identify.

Hannah Arendt described bureaucracy as the rule of nobody.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately it means that no one can be held publicly responsible for failed public policies. These clerics benefit from anonymity. Their power is diffuse, behind a curtain. The clerics can then adopt unpopular policies, and increase their powers, including quietly increasing powers of surveillance.

As Montesquieu stated 'experience shows that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it'. Partially dismantled democracies present strategic opportunities to non-state actors. Officials are vulnerable to capture by a powerful faction or a hidden oligarchy. They always have been.

Do our MPs have the bandwidth to assess the depth of problems I am identifying here? Maybe?

Let's not be naïve. It is the most ordinary thing in the world that a foreign entity would seek access to foreign markets and the control of resources for its own benefit. Earth is littered with cities and hilltop villages, buttressed by sophisticated defensive architecture where citizens have worked to protect themselves and their resources from invasion and conquest. The history of the world is one of colonisation and exploitation by larger, more sophisticated operations. With the digital age, the battle-lines have been redrawn to liminal conquest and governance via digital technologies.

With this in mind, it is entirely ordinary, utterly normal that the powerful global institutions that straddle the world would convene to strategically plan to influence the policy and laws of democratic governments for their private gain. Relationships with government officials is part of the deal.

Am I exaggerating? Seventy-six public international organizations exercise immunities, privileges, and tax exemptions.<sup>39 40</sup> These organisations influence the policies and laws of nation states. Their privileges ensure a sustained amassing of power. Then there is the private sector. The \$1.5 trillion pharmaceutical industry.<sup>41</sup> Googles revenue in 2022 was \$282 billion.<sup>42</sup> Then there are the asset managers. BlackRock controls \$9 trillion in assets.<sup>43</sup>

Then there are large private charities who have billions funnelled into them and who ally with biomedical corporations.<sup>44</sup> Then there are the global management consultancy firms who swing between

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<sup>37</sup> For example, Bank of England (2021) Statement on Central Bank Digital Currency. <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/news/2021/april/bank-of-england-statement-on-central-bank-digital-currency>

<sup>38</sup> Arendt, H (1951) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Harcourt, Brace.

<sup>39</sup> United Nations (2023) Privileges and Immunities. <https://policy.un.org/content/privileges-and-immunities>

<sup>40</sup> Lynn, C. (2022, September 29). Report: Laundering with Immunity. Corey's Digs. <https://www.coreysdigs.com/u-s/laundrying-with-immunity-the-control-framework-part-1/> Accessed September 18, 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Statista (2023). Global pharmaceutical industry - statistics & facts. <https://www.statista.com/topics/1764/global-pharmaceutical-industry/> Accessed September 18, 2023.

<sup>42</sup> Johnston M (2023, August). How Google (Alphabet) Makes Money: Advertising and Cloud. Investopedia. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/020515/business-google.asp> Accessed September 18, 2023

<sup>43</sup> Brush s. (2023, April 14). BlackRock Assets Exceed \$9 Trillion in Wake of Bank Failures. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-14/blackrock-assets-exceed-9-trillion-in-wake-of-bank-failures#xj4y7vzkg> Accessed September 17, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Banco E. (2022, September 14). How Bill Gates and partners used their clout to control the global Covid response — with little oversight. Politico. <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/14/global-covid-pandemic-response-bill-gates-partners-00053969>.

the private and public sector, who are strategic partners of the World Economic Forum,<sup>45</sup> yet are contracted by governments to drive and deploy policy.<sup>46</sup>

What is the mission of the WEF?

‘The World Economic Forum is an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas’.<sup>47</sup>

These actors convene at the World Economic Forum, meeting at Davos.

There are alarming developments. The International Monetary Fund has a mandate to ensure that widespread adoption of central bank digital currency (CBDCs) foster economic and financial stability. CBDC capacity development is undertaken by the IMF which educates Reserve Banks on CBDC implementation. Training sessions and workshops cover the legal and macrofinancial implications and design considerations of CBDCs. These workshops have been delivered in the Asia Pacific.<sup>48</sup>

The IMF is providing the policy language for Reserve Banks. Is there a power shift here – from sovereign governments to Reserve and Global bank networks who would control CBDCs? Access to CBDCs is envisaged to be enabled through globally relevant digital ID cards. Unlike digital money in our banks today, CBDCs are programmable. Smart contracts enable targeted policy functions. Big tech would manage the smart contracts. Programmability includes expiry dates for currency.

Aristotle had something to say about this: ‘Both oligarch and tyrant mistrust the people, and therefore deprive them of their arms.’

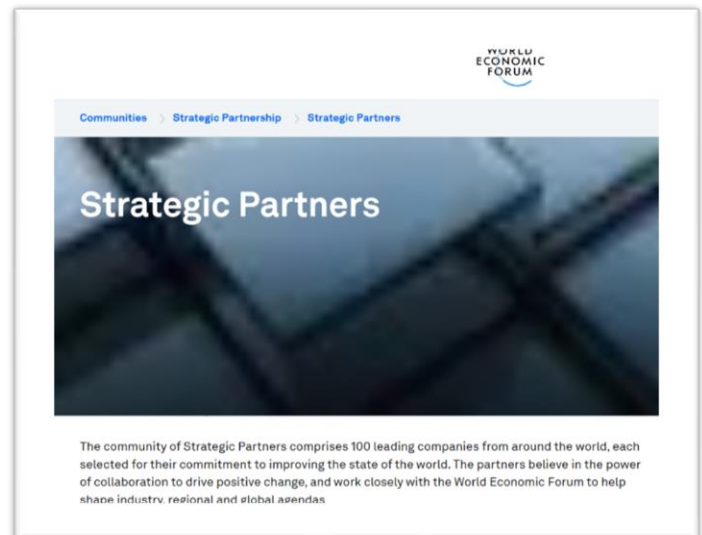
These global institutions, the global banks – by working directly with the executive and with Reserve Banks to develop policy are *short-circuiting democracy*.

Karl Niebuhr ‘Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary’.<sup>49</sup>

Let’s park globalist corporate power on the sidelines, but that’s one big reason to fix our democracy!

**Buttressing public institutions** against the force of external power is an old problem, from Plato’s ochlocracy to Grayling’s hidden oligarchy. How do we guard against these dangers?

Information, moral reasoning, ethics, and justice are the gatekeepers of any enduring civilized society.



<sup>45</sup> World Economic Forum (2023). Strategic Partners ‘community of Strategic Partners comprises 100 leading companies’.  
<https://www.weforum.org/communities/strategic-partnership-b5337725-fac7-4f8a-9a4f-c89072b96a0d> Accessed September 17, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Bruning J (2022, November 9). Blackboxed: New Zealand’s expensive management consultants. The Spectator, Australia.  
<https://www.spectator.com.au/2022/11/blackboxed-new-zealands-expensive-management-consultants/> Accessed September 16, 2023.

<sup>47</sup> World Economic Forum (2012) Institutional Brochure. ISBN-13: 978-92-95044-61-6. Accessed September 17,  
[https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_InstitutionalBrochure.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_InstitutionalBrochure.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> International Monetary Fund, “IMF Approach to Central Bank Digital Currency Capacity Development,” International Monetary Fund, Washington, 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Niebuhr, N. (1944). Children of Light and Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense. Foreward. Republished 2011, University of Chicago Press.

As I've described democratic waning can occur in many ways. I focus on the corruption of information. When public good information is suppressed, propaganda flourishes. When citizens are managed out of participation, and officials stop being accountable, governments have to shape communications to promote their agendas. They have to manufacture consent for policy... this information is best described as propaganda.

Propaganda designed to manipulate and persuade society to comply with policy initiatives. As Chomsky said, 'Propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state'.<sup>50</sup>

Hannah Arendt: 'Propaganda is contempt for facts'.<sup>51</sup>

As I maintain, there has been a surge in agenda driven policies that have not been driven by the electorate. There is no provision for public sector research or deliberative processes to contradict or criticise these agendas, but there is a lot of central government cash being directed, for example, into local councils to deploy these agendas.

If we return to the issue of justice and the felt blanket analogy - the seepage of hidden arrangements, captured information, rot and decay – act like a capillary action to pull more depravity through. Beyond a certain point the corruption – abuse of power - becomes unstoppable.

New Zealand legacy media have barely touched upon these issues. Our publicly owned television and radio refrain from contradicting central government policy. As media ownership has consolidated, we've seen a decline in investigatory reporting and journalistic autonomy. We've observed the speed at which media negatively frames and shames individuals who challenge policy and who critique the scientific and technical claims that uphold these policy positions.

We're also seeing new media displace legacy operations, but there's a parallel increase in social media censorship; and global streaming services never stray from the party line.

Where is the *fourth estate* now? Citizen science and new media has a role to play.

Without knowledge production that can identify risk and which also has sufficient autonomy to challenge policy assumptions and path dependencies, we can't have an informed government, nor can we have an informed citizenry.

Intelligence is the primary mechanism that military organizations use to generate understanding. You can't wage war without intelligence, nor maintain a dictatorship. Nor... protect democratic sovereignty. What is intelligence? Drawing from Rietjens - the main purpose is to provide information to decision-makers that may help *illuminate* their decision options. The information requirements can broadly be divided in three categories: information that contributes to (1) general situation awareness, (2) an ongoing operation, or (3) a future operation.<sup>52</sup>

How can democratic societies ensure that we can be in the position to identify when powerful actors misrepresent risk, either by downplaying risk or exaggerating a particular risk? These games are played.

Drawing from Hannah Arendt: 'The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is ... people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction and the distinction between true and false no longer exist'.

Misinformation is context dependent. But we lack institutions outside of the political control of the executive. What follows from corruption and secrecy is an unevenness of justice that fosters more lies, promoting malaise, polarisation and loss of engagement.

<sup>50</sup> Chomsky, N. (1992). On Propaganda. WBAI. Interview [https://chomsky.info/199201\\_\\_\\_/](https://chomsky.info/199201___/)

<sup>51</sup> Arendt, H (1951) The Origins of Totalitarianism. Harcourt, Brace.

<sup>52</sup> Rietjens, S (2020). Intelligence in Military Missions: Between Theory and Practice. Handbook of Military Sciences. A. Sookermany (ed.). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02866-4\\_96-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02866-4_96-1)



A ‘real’ fourth estate is essential – no intelligence, no insight, no foresight.

Therefore, I propose that alongside the three estates – the legislative, executive and the judiciary, a functioning democracy must have independent institutions where interdisciplinary public research can be carried out. I always thought 3 legged stools were far less structurally safe than 4 legged stools.

Our science and research system should have a space to produce ***public good knowledge*** – but it’s been suppressed while our population and economy have grown. My Masters thesis, completed two years ago, shed light on New Zealand’s problem of a captured science enterprise.<sup>53</sup> Our science enterprise is controlled by the Business Ministry, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. This is unique.

For 40 years policy-makers have pivoted New Zealand’s scientific and academic enterprise to face the market. Neoliberal reforms commenced in the 80s. The DSIR, the independent Department of Scientific and Industrial Research was dissolved and broken into commercially run Crown Research Institutes in 1992. In 2011 the *National* government dissolved the interim organisation and tucked New Zealand’s entire science enterprise inside the Business Ministry, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. “Science” in New Zealand is now arguably inseparable from industry.

From the late 1990’s *innovation* was embraced as a central theme. The OECD informs us that innovation concerns ‘the implementation of a new or significantly improved product or process’.<sup>54</sup> Innovation mindsets struggle to prioritise problems unless they promise a marketable product.

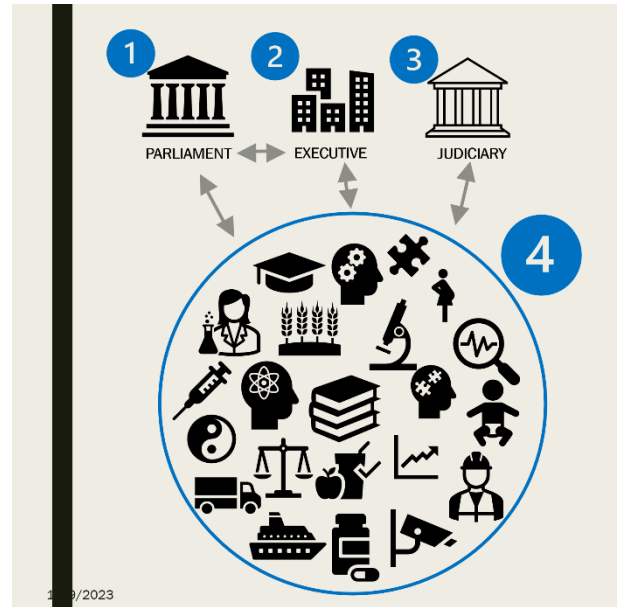
My 2021 thesis identified politically structured barriers to funding for health research. Government policy sets the direction, towards innovation, excellence and investment. Interviews with scientists revealed that if public funding proposals are not associated with innovation, funding was impossible to secure. Innovation policies encourage and fund applied, specialist research.

Discussions with scientists outside the health sector indicate the problem is widespread.

Our democracy problem extends to the political capture of the humanities, arts and social sciences. Professor Jane Kelsey has for years attempted to inform and spur debate on the issue of trade agreements. Kelsey’s Auckland University valedictory speech highlighted the barriers to the conducting of interdisciplinary research across law and the social sciences.<sup>55</sup>

Democratic societies depend on free speech. Free speech must include a role for the production of science and research that can reveal the drivers of problems. But science and research are expensive.

Research institutions should be a resource for Parliament and the judiciary to turn to. Academia should be where the public interest, ethics and values could be debated and fleshed out in public forums. But



<sup>53</sup> Bruning J. (2021). *Innovation and Ignorance: How Innovation Funding Cultures Disincentivise Endocrine Disruption Research*. Thesis. University of Auckland. Master of Arts, Sociology (research). 2021. <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/57929>

<sup>54</sup> OECD. (2005). *The Measurement of Scientific and Technological Activities, Oslo Manual: Guidelines for Collecting and Interpreting Innovation Data*, 3rd edition. A joint publication of OECD and Eurostat.

<sup>55</sup> Kelsey, J. (2022, August 17). Professor Jane Kelsey Valedictory Lecture, Auckland University. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSCik1U3p1s>

academic and research staff are trapped by tight funding budgets, funding agreements and institutional cultures.

In this climate, scientists, lawyers and academics are reluctant to discuss complex policy issues. The polymaths have gone. This is why we rarely see ‘experts’ explaining the arbitrariness nor misdirection of policy, or outlining how policy actions overestimate risk. They’re fighting for their lives in underfunded corporatised institutions.

We need a Fourth Estate.

In 2022 I gave a paper presentation at TASA The Australian Sociological Association Conference in Melbourne. I proposed that during *COVID-19* authorities manufactured social consent for government policies through the control of science production.

Key public health elites involved in risk framing including Ian Town, Michael Baker, David Skegg, Amanda Kvalsvig and politician Ayesha Verrall persistently excluded epidemiological analyses by John Ioannidis.<sup>56</sup> Why was it so easy for senior public health officials to ignore probably the most highly regarded scientist in epidemiology in the world? A giant in the field?

Did these officials preclude themselves from inquiring into relevant matters?<sup>57</sup>

Was it *relevant* that Pfizers’ trials signalled an extraordinary range of adverse events, that trials were not complete, that a titan of epidemiology emphasised that risk was contingent upon age and multimorbidity? The secretly produced secondary legislation locked in a traffic light system and mandates that was purely in place, as Michael Baker acknowledged, to increase vaccination.

Was the Ministry of Health so medicalised – or pressured - that natural immunity, informed consent and vaccine risk could be downplayed? The Technical Advisory Groups, or TAGs, were not funded to review the scientific literature to understand the changing circumstances and provide intelligence, especially regarding relative risk.

It is not *fair* or *reasonable* that government officials would favour private industry against the open peer reviewed literature throughout COVID-19. But this is exactly what they did.

In COVID-19 court cases the judges consistently deferred to the industry science supplied by officials representing the interests of the Crown. The officials whose evidence underpinned the vaccine program.

There was no public town square – where the claims of the elite epidemiologists, physicists and statisticians could be publicly debated. It appears that this was a coup – a coup of captured information. It was inevitable that New Zealand echoed the global narrative of case rate fear, population level surveillance through QR codes and medical uniformity.

And now, after COVID-19, are we seeing sham inquiries? The Hon Judith Collins Regulations Review Committee [Inquiry into COVID-19 Secondary Legislation](#) did not examine the policy behind secondary legislation, but narrowed their scope to technical processes - whether secondary legislation was ‘made in accordance with its empowering provision and consistently with *constitutional principles*’.<sup>58</sup>

I struggle to understand how constitutional principles can be upheld when the inquiry scope fails to firstly, look at background policy and secondly, the information that supported that policy.

<sup>56</sup> Bruning J. (2022). Science for Whom?: Manufacturing social consent for government policies through the control of science production. Paper presentation. The Australian Sociological Association, Conference, Melbourne Australia. November 30, 2022. <https://jrbruning.substack.com/p/tasa-2022-conference-paper-presentation>

<sup>57</sup> Joseph, P. (2021). Joseph on Constitutional and Administrative Law. Thomson Reuters, Chapter 23, Illegality.

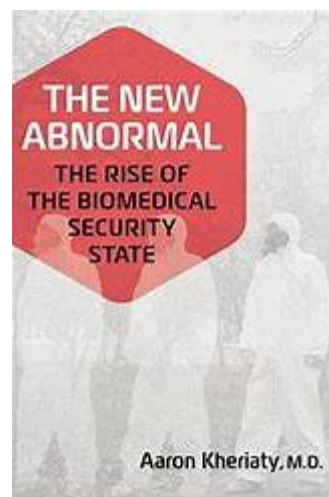
<sup>58</sup> Collins J. (2023, June). Inquiry into COVID-19 Secondary Legislation, Final Report of the Regulations Review Committee. New Zealand Parliament. P.5 <https://selectcommittees.parliament.nz/v/6/598a07f5-0ea1-49f1-8949-08db6d443690> Accessed Sept 17, 2023.

The [Royal Commission of Inquiry \(COVID-19 Lessons\) terms of reference](#) similarly limits their scope of consideration.<sup>59</sup> Strangely, modelling is in-scope. It was the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet who funded the majority of COVID-19 modelling. Out of scope are the questions of science, including epidemiology and vaccine efficacy. Scientific and technical issues were central to justifications for surveillance, testing and injection. My own official information act requests to the Ministry of Health and the Minister for COVID-19 reveals the published literature was instead used selectively, to support policy aims.

These two inquiries highlight the authoritarian style of Government, and the power of the Crown in New Zealand.

Perhaps we are witness to what ethicist Aaron Kheriaty terms a novel legal doctrine.<sup>60</sup> One where the protection of public health overrules any individual or privacy rights. By ignoring Ioannidis, officials bound their hands from preventing hospital waiting lists from blowing out, and they created a perfect storm of isolation and division to amplify mental illness.

The *capture of information* set the stage for co-ordination between non-state and state actors in what Aaron Kheriaty terms an ‘unholy alliance’ – where public health merge with digital technologies of surveillance and control; and with the police powers of the state. The Biomedical Security State.<sup>61</sup>



Propaganda researcher Piers Robinson has proposed that we shouldn’t turn away from considering the remarkable shifts in policy and rhetoric over the past three years - that provide grounds for what might be described as a ‘structural deep event.’ As Robinson has discussed, powerful actors frequently work to instigate, exploit or exacerbate events in ways that enable substantive and long-lasting societal transformations.<sup>62</sup> A great deal has been published on the confluence of events over COVID-19, the capture of public agencies with conflicts of interest, political arrangements of non-state actors, the weaponization of nudging technologies and the consistency of narrative across the global news and social media.

Robinson emphasises that the agendas ‘present dangers to our civil liberties, freedom and democracy’. Robinson urges that the stakes are too high for those in politics, media, or academia to turn away due to shyness, or a fear of being tarred a conspiracy theorist.<sup>63</sup> I tend to agree.

We shouldn’t turn away from the pursuit of uncomfortable knowledge which potentially undermines the institutional principles, arrangements and goals of powerful institutions.

Sociological studies of ignorance reveal how ignorance can play as important a strategic a role as knowledge. Steve Rayner shed light on how, for powerful interests, societal ignorance could be a necessary social achievement, applied as a strategic tool. Uncomfortable knowledge could be suppressed via processes of denial, dismissal, diversion and displacement.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry (COVID-19 Lessons) Order 2022. Commissioners: Professor Tony Blakely (Chair), Hon Hekia Parata, John Whitehead <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2022/0323/latest/whole.html#LMS792965>

<sup>60</sup> Kheriaty, A. (2022) *The New Abnormal: The Rise of the Biomedical Security State*. Regnery Publishing

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Robinson, P. (2023) *Cockup or Conspiracy? Understanding COVID-19 as a ‘Structural Deep Event’*. PANDA. Updated July 2023 based upon article originally published in March 2022. <https://pandata.org/cockup-or-conspiracy/>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Rayner, S. (2012). Uncomfortable knowledge: the social construction of ignorance in science and environmental policy discourses. *Economy and Society*, 41(1), 107-125.

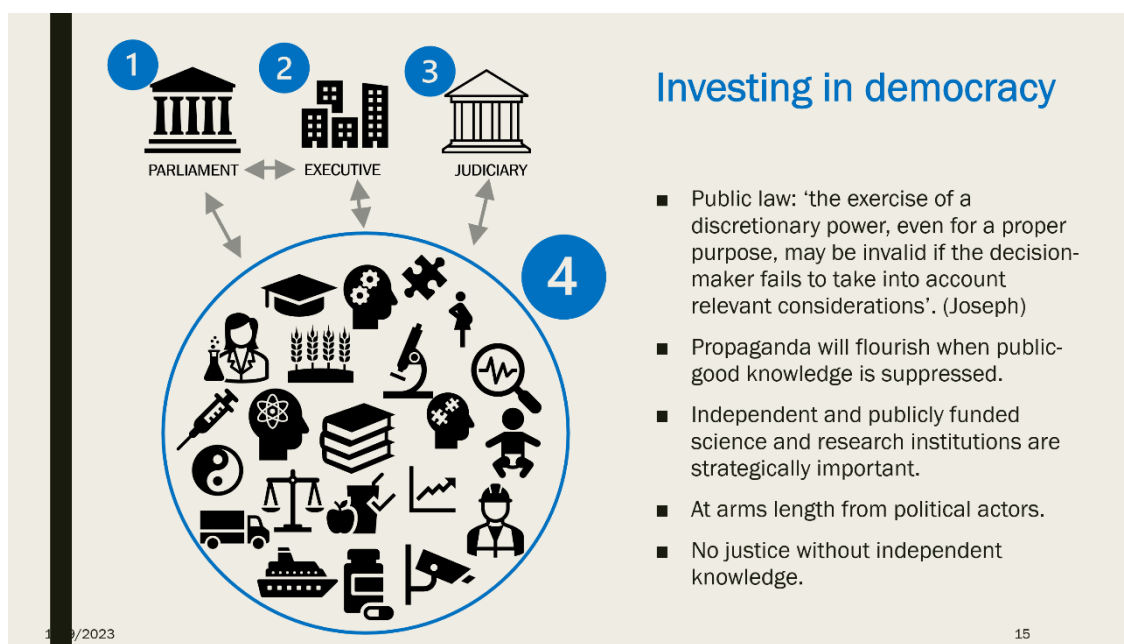
In public law '*the public interest*' is a yardstick of indeterminate length'.<sup>65</sup> The requirement that government officials do not limit their enquiry, that they consider all relevant matters in decision-making, threads through our constitutional and administrative law. 'the exercise of a discretionary power, even for a proper purpose, may be invalid if the decision-maker fails to take into account relevant considerations'.<sup>66</sup>

This was not done.

The Physicians and Scientists for Global Responsibility recently published a paper: *When Does Science Become Propaganda?* In this paper I argue that when science or technical information is kept private by governments due to commercial in confidence arrangements, when officials ignore or fail to transparently review independent science and technical information that might contradict or undermine their policy position, the information is *propagandistic* – it is in place, *designed*, to persuade society to comply with government policy decisions.<sup>67</sup> When transparency fails and secrecy prevails, such information might be better characterized as a form of non-consensual organised persuasive communication, AKA propaganda.

New Zealand 'does not pay sufficient attention to the future or guard against risks that can be readily foreseen'.<sup>68</sup> (Palmer and Butler 2018)

Civil society, prominent lawyers, and experts in science and medicine are increasingly subject to authoritarian in style policies, select committee processes, and laws which demonstrate that the judiciary, executive and the legislature are *not* separate; and that policy is not ground up, but top down.



In finishing, I propose that to ensure the survival of Western democracies we must consider the strategic importance of independent and publicly funded science and research institutions that might be drawn upon as a resource in contested environments. We can physically separate institutions with innovation priorities and commercial partnership arrangements away from institutions undertaking public good research. We can ensure these projects traverse the basic and social sciences, law, resource management

<sup>65</sup> Joseph, P. (2021). Joseph on Constitutional and Administrative Law. *Thomson Reuters* 23.2.3(3) p.1013.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid 23.2.3(1). p.1009

<sup>67</sup> PSGR (2023) *When does science become propaganda? What does this suggest for democracy?* Bruning, J.R., Physicians & Scientists for Global Responsibility New Zealand.

<sup>68</sup> Palmer G., Butler A., Roberts S. (2018) *Towards democratic renewal*. P.8

and ethics. Such projects have potential to shed light on complex, open-ended ambiguous issues that can only be addressed when public values and ethical context are incorporated.

There must be guardrails. Such institutions must strategically be kept at arm's length from political actors, yet obliged to explore issues of common concern. They must have sufficient block-funding that they might independently and transparently conduct research that address issues of concern raised by the public, the executive and the legislature.

We can have no justice when we do not invest in the production of independent knowledge, and guard the processes. It's always going to be messy, because human life is messy.

Alberto Moravia nailed it: Dictatorships are one-way streets. Democracy boasts two-way traffic.

Let's get the traffic flowing in both directions.

Thank you, you can find myself, Jodie Bruning at Talking Risk on Substack and Brownstone Institute. Lastly, and importantly, Physicians and Scientists for Global Responsibility can be found at [PSGR.org.nz](http://PSGR.org.nz).