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Making Sense of Neoliberalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand: A Response to Nicholls, Duncan, Neilson, and Foucauldian Governmentality

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Abstract
This article provides a new and original consideration of the contemporary relevance and usefulness of approaches that deploy conceptions of neoliberalism to make sense of Aotearoa/New Zealand's changing economy, society and polity since 1984. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, an article of mine focused on the Fifth National Government was published in *New Zealand Sociology*, with responses to the article from Duncan, Nicholls and Neilson appearing in the following issue. Among other things, this symposium discussed whether: (1) conceptions of neoliberalism were about to become less relevant, (2) the entire period of New Zealand's political history from 1984 to the present is best understood using a conception of neoliberalism as an analytical lens, and (3) there are foreseeable future developments that might bring the dominance of neoliberalism to an end. These issues frame my consideration of the contributions by Duncan, Nicholls and Neilson, as well as those who use Foucauldian governmentality as an analytical lens to analyse neoliberalism. The key takeaways are: there has been a large increase in scholarship focused on neoliberalism, Foucault, capitalism, Marx and Marxism since 2008; historical materialism continues to provide sound heuristic guidance for analysing neoliberalism; New Zealand's political history from 1984 to the present is best understood as centrally involving the rise, modification and entrenchment of a neoliberal policy regime; and neoliberalism is likely to remain entrenched despite resistance from the left and challenges from the far right.

Keywords: neoliberal; neoliberalism; New Zealand politics; political economy; Marxist; governmentality

Introduction

The global financial crisis (GFC) marks a turning point in world history, ending the period of triumphant cosmopolitan neoliberalism and economic growth from 1982 to 2007 while ushering in a period of polycrisis from 2008 to the present (Callinicos, 2023, pp. 5–7; Tooze, 2021, p. 6). In the aftermath of the GFC, many commentators on both the right and the left thought that the neoliberal era might be coming to an end. An article of mine focused on the neoliberal policies of the Fifth National Government (FNG) was published at this time in *New Zealand Sociology* (Roper, 2011a), with responses to the article from Duncan, Nicholls and Neilson appearing in the following issue (Duncan, 2011; Neilson, 2011; Nicholls, 2011).[1] The long delay in providing a published reply to these responses has proven to be intellectually useful for three main reasons. First, among other things, this symposium discussed the future prospects for

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[1] David Neilson passed away on 2 November, 2022. David was a good friend of mine and I found it emotionally challenging to write a response to his typically generous, insightful, constructive and thought-provoking criticism of my analysis of neoliberalism and the Key-English Fifth National Government. The last time I saw David was in Kakanui where we discussed some of the issues traversed in this article while walking my dog (Lisa) on the beach at All Day Bay under a blue sky in bright summer sunshine. It saddens me that I won't get a chance to hear David's response to this article, but I suspect he would have agreed with most of it and that we would have continued to agree to disagree about some points in a mutually enjoyable conversation punctuated with smiles and laughs. For illuminating obituaries of David, see https://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/news/130635899/squatter-professor-warmhearted-leftie-dr-david-john-major-neilson-19572022 and https://tumblestoneblog.wordpress.com/2022/12/09/a-warm-hearted-leftie-who-relentlessly-pursued-his-vision-of-a-better-world-ten-kakanui-stones-in-memory-of-david/

neoliberalism and considered whether conceptions of neoliberalism were about to become less relevant. In fact, since 2008, 'actually existing neoliberalism' has become even more deeply embedded within the political economies of advanced capitalist countries, rapidly developing countries in East Asia—most notably China, South Korea and Vietnam—and countries in the Global South (Cahill, 2014). There have been major outbursts of resistance from the left, and complexities generated by the rise of the far right with its toxic mix of nationalism, reactionary social conservatism, racism, conspiracy theories, online disinformation campaigns, and so forth. But the general trend seems clear: neoliberal policy regimes remain entrenched throughout the world. Second, a related trend is clearly evident in intellectual history. ProQuest Academic One searches were used to provide a 'satellite view' of patterns and trends in the international literature. These searches reveal a large increase in scholarly output focused on neoliberalism from 1 January 2009 to 1 October 2023, with 152,483 books, dissertations, conference papers, journal articles and working papers identified using 'neoliberal' as a keyword. The searches also show substantial increases in output focused on capitalism, Foucault, Marx and Marxism, with declines or very small increases (depending on the measure used) of output focused on neoconservatism, poststructuralism and postmodernism (see Tables 1 and 2 below). Finally, with respect to New Zealand's political history, the issues canvassed by Duncan, Neilson and Nicholls in their 2011 articles can be given further consideration by reference to the National and Labour governments in power from 2008 to 2017 and 2017 to 2023. The 2023 election resulted in the formation of a National-ACT-New Zealand First coalition government committed to an obviously neoliberal policy agenda. This further enhances the importance of the debate.

This symposium raises three important sets of questions: 1) Is the entire period of New Zealand's political history from 1984 to the present best understood using a conception of neoliberalism as an analytical lens? As a matter of fact, have the key features of a neoliberal policy regime remained entrenched since 1984? 2) Why and how have neoliberal policy regimes persisted for such a long period of world history, despite the polycrisis that they have generated? and 3) What developments might bring the dominance of neoliberalism to an end? What are the prospects for far-right challenges and left resistance to neoliberalism? These questions frame my consideration of the contributions by Duncan, Nicholls, Neilson and those who use Foucauldian governmentality to analyse neoliberalism.

A central theme of my research and teaching is that New Zealand's political history from 1984 to the present is best understood as centrally involving the rise, modification and entrenchment of a neoliberal policy regime. My explanation of the historic shift in economic management, policymaking and politics from Keynesianism to neoliberalism is related to this interpretation. In essence, in *Prosperity for All? Economic, Social and Political Change in New Zealand since 1935* (hereafter, *Prosperity*), I argue that in order to develop an intellectually sophisticated and empirically sound explanation, the analysis must encompass economic, societal, ideological and political factors (Roper, 2005a). Although my analysis did not draw upon Polanyi's (2001) concept of embeddedness, this explanation identifies most of the key factors underpinning the entrenchment and durability of the neoliberal policy regime. This article provides an opportunity to consider and respond to criticism of this approach, reflect self-critically on my earlier work in this area, highlight its unique qualities, and identify how it can be improved and extended into new areas.

The article considers the arguments of Nicholls (2011), Duncan (2011, 2014), and Neilson (2011) in Section 1. Following this, Section 2 situates my research on neoliberalism via a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Foucauldian governmentality approach and 'poststructuralist political economy.' Possible futures of neoliberalism, including a continuation of the turn towards economic nationalism associated with the far right, are considered in the final section as part of the collective endeavour of making sense of the longevity of neoliberalism and what may lie beyond it. Those who are unfamiliar with my previous writing on neoliberalism and/or who want to better understand my theoretical approach and methodology, should read Supplementary Note 1 which provides a definition of policy regime, incorporates the concept of policy regime within an empirically grounded Marxist theory of the state, briefly describes

the Keynesian and neoliberal policy regimes, briefly recaps my explanation of the historic shift from Keynesianism to neoliberalism, and discusses the embedding or entrenching of actually existing neoliberalism.[2]

Is New Zealand beyond or post neoliberalism?

Kate Nicholls, "Beyond neoliberalism: Response to Brian Roper."

Nicholls's "response to Brian Roper" makes some interesting points which helpfully prompted me to investigate several issues in greater depth. Nicholls begins by claiming that the term neoliberalism is not widely used outside of New Zealand and Marxist circles in the United Kingdom as a focal point of academic discussion. To ascertain the accuracy of this claim, I conducted a series of ProQuest One Academic searches in all languages using the following keywords: 'neoliberal', 'neoliberalism', 'neoconservative', 'neoconservatism' and 'Hayek' (see Table 1 below). Three different filters were used: all sources; books, conference papers, dissertations, encyclopaedia, mags, journals, working papers (hereafter, 'books, etc.'); and peer reviewed (mainly journal articles).

The results of these searches paint a dramatically different picture of the prevalence scholarly attention given to neoliberalism within the global academic landscape to that sketched by Nicholls. First, if neoliberal is used as a keyword for the period from 1 January 1990 to 1 of October 2023, then the results in all languages are as follows: 340,182 all sources; 192,653 books, etc; and 92,974 peer reviewed. Second, if the search is limited to the period following the GFC from 1 January 2009 to 1 October 2023, the results are: 290,310 all sources; 159,755 books, etc; and 79,101 peer reviewed. This clearly indicates the vast scale and large increase of scholarly interest in neoliberalism since the GFC, and it contrasts with a relative decline in research focused on neoconservatism. Third, the geographic distribution of scholarly interest in neoliberalism is remarkably broad and dispersed across the entire globe, including all major parts of Asia and the Global South, while being most heavily concentrated in Europe (including the UK), North, Central and Latin America, and China. Relative to population, scholarly interest in neoliberalism is comparatively high in Australia (1591 books, etc. since the GFC) and New Zealand (637). Fourth, a qualitative reading of a sample of these sources quickly shows that, unfortunately, a substantial majority are non-Marxist. Therefore, the arguments of Nicholls and, as we shall see, Duncan in 2011 that the world was moving beyond neoliberalism, that the concept was becoming decreasingly relevant and intellectually useful, have not been borne out by the subsequent trajectory of world intellectual history.[3]

2 "Supplementary Note 1—The Neoliberal Policy Regime: A Brief Overview." Available at https://www.saanz.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Roper_Neoliberalism-in-New-Zealand_NZS-391-2024_Supplementary-Note-1.pdf

3 This quantitative meta review is supplemented by a select bibliography of international and New Zealand sources focused on neoliberalism (Supplementary Note 2). Available at https://www.saanz.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Roper_Neoliberalism-in-New-Zealand_NZS-391-2024_Supplementary-Note-2.pdf

Table 1: Neoliberalism and neoconservatism sources 1990s, 2000s and 2010s

ProQuest Academic One Search: All sources

Decade	Neoliberal	Neoliberalism	Neoconservative	Neoconservatism	Hayek
1990s	8,907	3,288	5,483	1,156	15,255
2000s	49,112	24,892	29,587	5,082	56,482
2010s	152,627	86,046	21,313	4,377	85,236
Total	**210,646**	**114,226**	**56,383**	**10,615**	**156,973**

ProQuest Academic One Search: Books, conference papers, dissertations, encyclopedias, magazines, journals, working papers

Decade	Neoliberal	Neoliberalism	Neoconservative	Neoconservatism	Hayek
1990s	4,959	2,792	3,372	818	5,581
2000s	33,570	22,126	11,851	3,259	18,206
2010s	107,032	70,870	10,404	3,282	30,826
Total	**145,561**	**95,788**	**25,627**	**7,359**	**54,613**

ProQuest Academic One Search: Peer reviewed

Decade	Neoliberal	Neoliberalism	Neoconservative	Neoconservatism	Hayek
1990s	1,958	1,137	687	175	1,633
2000s	14,276	9,242	2,661	871	6,851
2010s	50,200	31,985	1,969	648	13,850
Total	**66,434**	**42,364**	**5,317**	**1,694**	**22,334**

Date of search: 6 October 2023.

Note overlap between neoliberalism and neoconservative; they are not mutually exclusive.

Nicholls's main criticisms of my analysis of neoliberalism are two-fold: 1) I am wrong to argue that "neoliberalism has dominated and continues to dominate the policy programmes of successive governments in New Zealand since 1984"; and 2) that using neoliberalism as an analytical lens is not "the best way to understand the programmes of recent and current governments" because by the mid-1990s "'neoliberalism' had more or less done what it set out to do" (Nicholls, 2011, pp. 77, 86). Perhaps the most perplexing aspect of Nicholls's "response to Brian Roper" in relation to these points is that it doesn't actually consider and respond to my scholarly writing on the shift from Keynesianism to neoliberalism, apart from skimming over my 2011 article on the FNG. In particular, her response makes no reference to my book *Prosperity*. This is a pity because I do in fact address a number of points that Nicholls claims I have missed in my book. The points Nicholls makes regarding the usefulness of a conception of neoliberalism to make sense of New Zealand's political history and contemporary politics are mainly, but not entirely, factual, since to support her critique she argues that "the heyday of neoliberalism in New Zealand was over, if not in 1996 as a result of the shift to a proportional electoral system and coalition government, then certainly by 1999 with the election of the Fifth Labour Government" (Nicholls, 2011, pp. 77–78). This argument is supported by a very narrow definition of neoliberalism in which it is understood as "the unrestrained application of market-based logics to all or most arenas of state activity" (Nicholls, 2011, p. 77). The use of the term unrestrained is troubling since the implementation of neoliberalism during the period from 1984 to 1999 was hardly unrestrained. Indeed, I have written quite a lot focusing on how its implementation was restrained in various ways by, among other things, the scale of actual and potential

resistance to neoliberal policies (Roper, 2005a, pp. 88–116; 2018), the lobbying activity of business associations (Roper, 1992, 1993, 2006), the electoral constraints on government including the shift from 'first past the post' (FPP) to mixed-member proprortional (MMP) representation from 1993 to 1996 (Roper, 2005a, pp. 199–201), the impact of global forces on New Zealand's nation-state autonomy (Roper, 2005b), and the role played by agencies within the state that successfully opposed some elements of the neoliberal agenda (Roper, 2005a, pp. 169–170). But this is a minor point. Of much greater concern is her failure to provide convincing empirical and historical evidence to support her contention that specifically neoliberal "market-orientated reform … had run its course by the mid-1990s" (Nicholls, 2011, p. 78).

The bulk of Nicholls's critique of my analysis of the FNG actually focuses on the Fifth Labour Government (FLG) that preceded it. In this respect she argues that "the agenda of the 1999–2008 government led by Helen Clark can best be understood as an effort to shift from the first phase of market-led economic reform to a second phase that was necessarily accompanied by something other than an orthodox neoliberalism" (Nicholls, 2011, p. 78). Nicholls describes this second phase of market-oriented reform as "constructive and creative", and in this regard she is clearly positioning herself as an academic defender of Labour's Third Way. The neoliberal phase of "market-oriented reform involved the dismantling of the state-centric development model, including the unleashing of market mechanisms, statutory deregulation, privatization of state assets, financial market opening, reduction of tariff barriers among other measures, and thus in many senses can be considered the 'destructive' phase of market-oriented reform" (Nicholls, 2011, p. 79). In contrast, the second phase "is about not only offsetting some of the social costs that resulted from Phase One but also adopting new strategies that will enhance knowledge-based growth" (Nicholls, 2011, p. 80).

Although I agree with Nicholls that the FLG's Third Way constitutes a new phase of market-oriented reform, her contention that this involved a fundamental break from the "orthodox neoliberal agenda" that preceded it is much less convincing. She cites examples to support her contention such as the Employment Relations Act, Working for Families, Kiwibank, social policy aimed at closing the gaps, and so forth, as if this is policy change that I fail to consider. The FLG is considered at length in Chapter 10 of *Prosperity:* "The Fifth Labour Government: A Third Way beyond Keynesianism and neoliberalism?" The chapter carefully ascertains which features of the neoliberal policy regime were retained and which were abandoned or modified "in order to determine the extent to which it really is charting a third way between and beyond Keynesianism and neoliberalism" (Roper, 2005a, p. 229). My central argument, which both Duncan (2007, 2011) and Neilson (2011) accept but which Nicholls rejects, is that the FLG retained the central pillars of the neoliberal policy regime while at the same time implementing a broad programme of policy change. Following a section in *Prosperity* that focuses on the FLG's approach to macroeconomic management, taxation, social policy, employment relations, paid parental leave, growth and innovation, and Working for Families, I make the following argument.

> The hard core of the neoliberal policy regime remains in place. So, for example, the 1991 benefit cuts have not been reversed; the overall taxation system is not markedly progressive by international standards due to the retention of GST and comparatively low tax rates on high incomes and corporate profits; the Employment Relations Act retains the central features of the industrial relations system created by the Employment Contracts Act (ECA); and students still face high fees, inadequate living allowances, and incur high levels of debt while studying. With the exception of the ECA, all of the legislative 'lynch-pins' of this policy regime remain in place: the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986, Reserve Bank Act 1989, Fiscal Responsibility Act 1994, and the Public Finance Act 1989 (the last two essentially incorporated within, rather than being fundamentally changed by, the Public Finance Management Amendment Act 2004). Therefore, although it is the case that the Government's broad approach combines elements of Keynesianism and neoliberalism, the neoliberal elements predominate. (Roper, 2005a, pp. 234–5)

The main problem with Nicholls's argument regarding Phase One and Phase Two is, therefore, its weak empirical basis. Nicholls's (2018, p. 160) illuminating application of a Varieties of Capitalism theoretical lens to explain New Zealand's economic underperformance acknowledges that "New Zealand is rightly assumed to reflect a near pure example of a free-market Liberal Market Economy", so perhaps her position has shifted. But to effectively rebut my argument, factual evidence needs to be provided showing that the central features of the neoliberal policy regime that were constructed by successive governments from 1984 to 1999 subsequently have been dismantled. Nicholls cannot do this for the simple reason that, in reality, these features remain firmly in place. Far from dismantling the neoliberal policy regime, the FNG clearly extended it from 2008 to 2017. The Sixth Labour Government also retained the central features of the neoliberal policy regime, while formulating and implementing its own distinctive variant of Third Way social democracy. The National and ACT parties' 2023 election campaigns received record funding from corporations and the rich ($12.4 million from 2021–2023 compared with $1.1 million for Labour) (Hancock, 2023). Their central campaign promise was to fund tax cuts by downsizing the state, suggesting a return to a more fundamentalist variant of neoliberalism (Boraman, 2023). This will be difficult to sustain politically as the Government is confronted with large-scale opposition to its policies on te Tiriti o Waitangi, use of te reo within the public service, dismantling of Te Aka Whai Ora | Māori Health Authority, and promised cuts to the unionised public service combined with cuts in other areas of public expenditure such as climate change mitigation, higher education and water infrastructure.

Grant Duncan, "Scratching the essentialist itch: Comment on Roper."

Duncan (2011) provides a thought-provoking response (see also Duncan, 2014). Given Duncan's use of the term 'essentialism', it is surprising that nowhere does he actually criticise my work for being essentialist. Assuming that the term is taken to imply some kind of simplistic economic determinism and/or class reductionism, he is unlikely to find anything of that nature in my work, thanks to a serious engagement with Marxian dialectics and Gramsci's writings in my youth. The same can be said with respect to my theoretical and methodological approach to analysing state formations, which explicitly rejects vulgar instrumentalist conceptions of the capitalist state (Supplementary Note 1; see also McKenna, 2014; Roper, 2013).

Second, in my article I briefly mention that the FLG had softened and entrenched the neoliberal policy regime, while referring to the chapter in my book that focuses on the FLG's Third Way. Duncan agrees that the FLG softened and entrenched the neoliberal policy despite its use of social democratic rhetoric that apparently suggests otherwise (see also Duncan, 2004, pp. 213–241). Duncan (2011, p. 60) suggests, however, that my depiction needs to be qualified since "he could have mustered more evidence in favour of it" and then does so by referring to various points that I cover in the relevant chapters of *Prosperity*. A reading of those chapters should suffice to address this point. Note, also, Perry Anderson's (2000, p. 11) kindred argument that the Third Way's "winning formula to seal the victory of the market is not to attack, but to preserve, the placebo of a compassionate public authority, extolling the compatibility of competition with solidarity. [Although] the hard core of government policies remains further pursuit of the Reagan–Thatcher legacy … it is now carefully surrounded with subsidiary concessions and softer rhetoric. The effect of this combination, currently being diffused throughout Europe, is to suppress the conflictual potential of the pioneering regimes of the radical right, and kill off opposition to neo-liberal hegemony more completely."

Finally, Duncan provides some thought-provoking speculation about the future. He correctly raises the possibility that the economic crisis could provide governments with "a convenient rationale for austerity measures, rolling-back of welfare policies, privatisation, attacks on unionised public servants, and the like" (Duncan, 2011, p. 64). Unfortunately, this is what happened in most countries after an initial fiscal

stimulus had been applied to keep the system afloat from 2008–2010.

We disagree, however, on two key points. The first concerns a misreading of the conclusion to my article. Duncan alleges that I assert "without evidence", that "challenges and alternatives to neoliberalism *can only arise from* [my emphasis] 'a major upsurge in working class and social movement struggle'". This is simply not what I actually argue. My view was that "the future direction of government policy-making in New Zealand will depend crucially on developments within the domestic and global economies" and "will also depend on a broad range of other related factors, the most important being the level of working class and social movement struggle both within New Zealand and internationally" (Roper, 2011a, p. 37). Note the reference here to the global economy and the level of international working-class struggle, the emphasis I place on the crucial influence of the prevailing economic orthodoxy upon the thinking and policymaking of New Zealand governments earlier in the conclusion, and my observation that "the extensive integration of New Zealand's financial markets and institutions within the global financial system, especially in view of the very high levels of New Zealand's offshore debt, has also tightly constrained the policy-making options of this Government" (see also Richards, 2010). In view of this, it is hard to see much justification for Duncan's claim that my "views about the potential sources of change are rather too local, and do not take account of the global horizons of what are essentially globalizing forces of capitalism" (Duncan, 2011, p. 65).

Related to this, is the second point, where Duncan contends that I failed to notice that "We have not seen much working-class or social-movement struggle in New Zealand lately." He missed the point earlier in my conclusion that sadly remains relevant today: "The level of working class and social movement struggle remains historically low, while business continues to lobby government intensely for the retention and further implementation of neoliberal policies and employers remain militant in conflicts and negotiations with workers over wages and conditions of employment. Putting it over-simply for the sake of clarity, the balance of forces within society in recent years weighs heavily in favour of the continued implementation of the neoliberal policy agenda" (Roper, 2011a, p. 36). At this time, I underestimated the extent to which challenges to neoliberalism might arise from the far right, but my focus was on the prospects for a progressive left alternative, hence the reference to working-class and social-movement struggle. My point is that an upsurge in working-class struggle is likely to be a necessary factor in a shift towards a politically progressive alternative, either placing pressure on governments to dismantle the neoliberal policy regime in order to quell a rising wave of unrest from below, in which case the alternative might arise from within elite circles, or alternatively it could emerge as a reformist or revolutionary programme in the context of an international upturn in working-class struggle. (For an account of the last upturn of working class struggle in Aotearoa, see Roper, 2011b.)

David Neilson, "Making history beyond neoliberalism: Response to Roper."

Neilson provides an intellectually sophisticated response that is the most generous of the three, based on an accurate reading of my published work in the area, and provides typically constructive criticism. It is particularly difficult to provide a concise response because his article makes a series of points that can only be discussed fully by reference to relevant debates within the Marxist tradition. Some brief remarks will have to suffice here. One way to briefly summarise the differences in our interpretations of neoliberalism and possible progressive left alternatives to it, is by reference to our different locations within the Marxist tradition. My Marxism is grounded in classical Marxism as it developed from the 1840s to the 1930s, particularly the revolutionary wing of classical Marxism associated with Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Lukacs, Gramsci and many others, and the Marxists who reinvigorated that classical Marxist tradition from the late 1960s onwards. Whereas I became critical of the Frankfurt School critical theory, the structuralist Marxism of Althusser and Poulantzas, and the French Regulation School in my twenties

(Roper, 1991, pp. 52–62; 1996), David Neilson's neo-Marxism starts in the late 1960s with these thinkers, together with an engagement with Marx and Gramsci. Although a friend once joked that 'neo-Marxist' means 'not really Marxist', this would be an unfair depiction of Neilson's neo-Marxism, which retains genuinely Marxist elements, not least of which being a recognition that capitalism is an exploitative, class-structured and crisis-prone system, which is destroying the natural environment upon which humans depend for their continued existence.

As a social and political theorist working within the fields of the sociology of class and political economy, Neilson (2020, p. 94) contributes an original advancement of Regulation School Theory (RST), arguing that its central conceptions of mode of regulation, regime of accumulation, and model of development need to be revised and updated to take account of the extent to which neoliberalism has been successfully promoted by "trans-national agents within trans-national forums [who] design, implement and manage a [neoliberal] model of development in order to achieve calculated national-trans-national regulatory and accumulation effects". Nation states have been transformed into competition states forced by intense international economic competition to operate "export-led national accumulation strategies driven not just by higher productivity but also by lower wages" (Neilson, 2020, p. 98). The alternative to the neoliberal model of development that has delivered "recurring global accumulation crises, deepening ecological instability, destructive zero-sum competition between unevenly developing nation-states, and escalating social insecurity and inequality" is a counter-hegemonic model of development "offering a stable and progressive localised alternative energised by international cooperation" (Neilson, 2020, p. 104). This requires a "blueprint, with location sensitive variations, of a dynamically efficient, locally sustainable, and cooperative national model of production" supported by the democratisation of the main institutions for global governance such as the UN (Neilson, 2020, p. 104; compare with Roper, 2011b).

Writing from the perspective of this third-generation RST, Neilson makes several points that are important and illuminating. First, he correctly argues that "the policy direction pursued in the 1980s integrally connected, and thus permanently reordered and constrained, nation state priorities and capacities to the on-going global neoliberal project" (Neilson, 2011, p. 66). Second, the conception of the "competition state" affords a key insight (Neilson, 2011, p. 68). Successive governments in New Zealand since 1984 have clearly premised their approaches to economic management and policymaking on the taken-for-granted and mainly implicit understanding that "for nation states to be economically viable they must become 'competition states' that like 'hostile brothers' contest with each other to attract and retain capital" (Neilson, 2011, p. 68).

Less helpful is the related conception of the transnational state, according to which the nation state merely functions as "a transmission belt from the global to the domestic economy" (Neilson, 2011, p. 68). This is problematic because it underestimates the extent to which domestic sociopolitical forces impact upon the state, as I hope my account of New Zealand's political history in *Prosperity* shows. But it is also problematic for some of the reasons outlined by Callinicos (2009, pp. 73–93), Harman (2003), Harvey (2003, pp. 26–86) and Wood (2003, pp. 137–142), namely that the "political form of globalization is not a global state or global sovereignty" but rather relies heavily on a "global system of multiple states and local sovereignties, structured in a complex relation of domination and subordination" (Wood, 2003, p. 141). This is because although the capitalist economic system has become increasingly globalised, "the state continues to play its essential role in creating and maintaining the conditions of capital accumulation; and no other institution, no transnational agency, has even begun to replace the nation state as an administrative and coercive guarantor of social order, property relations, stability or contractual predictability, or any of the other basic conditions required by capital in its everyday life"(Wood, 2003, p. 139). In a similar vein, Harman (2003, pp. 43–44) observes that "the world's biggest companies have *both* expanded beyond national boundaries on a scale that now exceeds the internationalisation of the system before the First World War *and* remain dependent to a high degree on their ability to influence 'their' national government.

This is because, at the end of the day, they need a state to protect their web of international interests, and the only states that exist are national states." This suggests that the issue of nation-state autonomy in relation to global forces is highly complex since global capital depends heavily on the nation state to, among other things, ensure the security of its investments within the sovereign territory administered by a particular nation state while at the same time seeking to influence and shape the policy regime maintained by this state so as to allow freedom of foreign investment, international financial capital mobility and foreign trade. In a nutshell, this means that to perform these vital functions, nation states cannot be powerless and largely lacking domestic autonomy.

Fourth, Neilson (2011, p. 70) provides a compelling and illuminating account of why it is that social democrats have become neoliberals since 1984, arguing that "key aspects of the neoliberal project have also become embedded in 'common sense'", appearing as a natural order and as simply the way things are. Fifth, Neilson makes an interesting, and for the most part convincing, argument for a counter-hegemonic project as an alternative to the modified variants of neoliberalism associated with Third Way social democracy. The big question is how such a counter-hegemonic project is likely to come about. Like cosmopolitan social democrats, Neilson has surprisingly little to say about the question of agency (Roper, 2011c). Furthermore, it is problematic to argue that "a counter-hegemonic project seeks a mid-range transformative path that operates between the scenario of a spontaneous revolutionary rupture and capitalism-reinforcing social democratic reform. A counter-hegemonic project seeks to deliberately construct another world on the basis of a clear alternative design or model of development and political/ ideological strategy" (Neilson, 2011, pp. 73–74). There is no 'middle way' between reform and revolution for reasons I have outlined at length elsewhere (Roper, 2011c, 2013, 2017). But we can agree that there does need to be a coherent left social democratic alternative to neoliberalism, which might be something like an eco-socialist political programme that is more clearly critical of capitalism and neoliberalism, and more explicitly pro-working class, than is evident in the policies of the Green Party of Aotearoa (Roper, 2023a).

The insights and limitations of a Foucauldian governmentality perspective

This article provides an opportunity to situate my work on the historic shift from Keynesian to neoliberalism in relation to the Foucauldian governmentality approach and 'poststructuralist political economy'. The Foucauldian governmentality literature is huge and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the first draft of this section was 6000 words long. The following is thus just a few selected remarks. Although this literature is a treasure trove of stimulating thoughts, well-crafted arguments and illuminating insights, Foucauldian governmentality, encompassing Foucault's closely related consideration of historical mutations in the nature of power, is fundamentally problematic if adopted as *the* primary theoretical perspective being used when thinking about and researching, among other things, state, government, policymaking, neoliberalism and resistance. As Dean (2018, p. 21) observes, "For a multitude of important thinkers, [Foucault] has become the starting, not the end, point for coming to grips with the problems and problematizations of our present." In this brief discussion, I highlight some of the more important insights afforded by the governmentality literature, while outlining some of the main weaknesses.

Foucault is a major theorist of power whose substantial body of work defies easy exposition, especially in view of the shifts in his thinking about power during his career, including his late preference for focusing on governmentality rather than power with its ubiquitous, amorphous and ambiguous qualities (for example, Foucault, 2003, pp. 134–135). In its most general sense, Foucault's study of *power* focuses on "'the total structure of action brought to bear' on the actions of others in particular cases, and of the resistance and evasions encountered by those actions" (Hindess, 1996, p. 101). His substantial intellectual influence within English-speaking countries during the 1980s and 1990s was due, in part, to the publications of a group of talented interlocutors (see, for example, Barrett & Phillips, 1992; Butler, 1990; Gordon, 1980,

1991; Dean, 2010; Hindess, 1996, 1997; Miller & Rose, 2008; Rose, 1999; Rose et al., 2006). The resulting theoretical literature has generated a large array of methods and concepts, such as archaeology and genealogy; sovereign, disciplinary, pastoral, and liberal/bio-political modalities of power; domination, freedom, reason of state, art of government and governmentality; practices, mentalities, rationalities, strategies, and techniques of government, apparatus of security, regimes of practices and programmes; formation of subjective identities; and problematisation and resistance.

It is worth highlighting three of the more important insights that this approach provides with respect to analysing neoliberalism. First, Foucault (2007, 2008) was one of the first to argue that neoliberalism is not simply a revived version of classical liberalism but something quite different and, through a consideration of German ordoliberalism and Chicago school neoliberalism, that there are distinctive varieties of neoliberalism. Second, the governmentality literature provides an array of concepts that are illuminating and useful for critical policy analysis. Third, it is illuminating to think of neoliberalism as an art of government and its effects understood in terms of conduct of conduct, subjectivity, subjection and submission (see, for example, Stringer, 2014).

Weaknesses

Poststructuralism and the governmentality approach have some substantial weaknesses that have been widely discussed in the literature. These pertain to intellectual blind spots arising from the vehement anti-Marxism of many poststructuralist writers; the effective disappearing of capitalism, class, crisis and class struggle from the focus of scholarly attention; weaknesses with respect to governmentality as an approach to policy analysis; problematic conceptions of resistance and agency; and the hostility of poststructuralism towards radical and global alternatives to the status quo. A further point is not generally emphasised, which is that Deleuzian and Foucauldian conceptions of neoliberalism are often applied in an over-extended manner in investigations of a wide range of different aspects of 'neoliberal society'. One of the strengths of Foucault's analysis of power is an emphasis on power operating throughout society rather than being confined to the state per se. As an art of government, neoliberalism does centrally involve "government at a distance" in which "authorities of various sorts have sought to shape, normalize and instrumentalise the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objectives they consider desirable" (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 32–35). But conceptualising power and neoliberalism as pervasive within society can lead to a problem with some poststructuralist accounts in which neoliberalism has become a conceptual master key that is used to try to open too many doors and windows. It is important to avoid overestimating the extent and success of governmental crafting of, among other things, neoliberal subjectivities in maintaining the neoliberal ordering of society (Davies et al., 2021). Too much weight is placed on neoliberalism as a result of too little attention being given to, among other things, capitalism, social structure and long-term societal dynamics.

The large body of work produced by poststructuralist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Jean-Francois Lyotard is by no means entirely anti-Marxist, with there being important instances of affinities, influences and appropriations (Choat, 2010; Peters, 2001; Thoburn, 2001). It is, however, more straightforward when one considers the English language interlocutors of Foucault mentioned above—Mitchell Dean, Colin Gordon, Barry Hindess, Peter Miller, Paul Patton and Nikolas Rose. All consistently refer to alleged failings of Marxism to promote Foucauldian poststructuralism. They were influenced by the wider historical context in which they were writing in ways that they often failed to recognise and acknowledge.

This context was a "great moving right show", as Stuart Hall (2017) puts it in a brilliant analysis of the shift to the right in British politics associated with Margaret Thatcher's rise to power. He argues that in order to develop a convincing analysis of the crisis of social democracy and emergence of neoliberalism, it

is necessary not only to understand the economic dimension of the shift, but also its cultural, ideological, intellectual and political dimensions. During the 1980s and 1990s, the intellectual cultures of the advanced capitalist societies moved rightwards. This was simultaneously propelled by developments in the wider society and, in turn, was a contributing factor in many of these developments. The rise of poststructuralism was one of the two most important aspects of this; the other being the growing influence of neoliberal schools of thought within mainstream economics, and the growing influence of economics within and outside the Western academy. As Heller (2016) and many others have pointed out, poststructuralism is kindred with neoliberalism in its shared animosity towards Marxism. Hence, the rise of poststructuralism contributed in powerful ways to the declining presence of Marxism within academic settings during the 1980s and 1990s. Terms such as 'essentialism', 'economism', 'reductionism', 'determinism', 'totalising', 'meta-narrative' and 'monolithic' were used extensively by academics for more than two decades to dissuade students from engaging seriously with Marxism. Little mention was made of the robust critiques of poststructuralism by Marxists, socialist feminists and critical theorists, nor of the defences of Marxism by Marxists (see, for example, Bryson, 2003; Callinicos, 1989; Dews, 1987; Eagleton, 1996; Geras, 1990; Habermas, 1991; Harvey 1989; Hennessy, 2000; hooks, 2000; Jameson, 1991; Norris, 1990, 1993; McNally, 2001; Palmer, 1990; Wood, 1995). Little encouragement was provided to check the factual and textual accuracy of the anti-Marxist claims being made by reference to key works in the Marxist tradition and the historical record. There was little need to do so given that it was considered common knowledge that Marxism was fatally flawed.

A lot has changed since then. First, the crisis and decline of Marxism during the 1980s and 1990s has been followed by its renaissance and rise during the opening decades of the twenty-first century. Associated with this is a qualitative shift in the nature of scholarly writing with a focus on Marxism and Marx, there being less outright critical rejection and more positive application of Marxist ideas to address a broad range of pressing issues. Second, there is clear evidence of a large quantitative increase in scholarly interest in 'Marxism', 'Marxist', 'capitalism', and 'Marx' in the twenty-first century, as Table 2 shows.

Table 2: Poststructuralist and Marxist sources 1990s, 2000s, 2010s

ProQuest Academic One Search: All sources

Decade	PSism*	PSlist*	PM*	Deleuze	Foucault	Marxism	Marxist	Cap*	Gramsci	Lenin	Marx
1990s	6,108	8,344	38,982	5,828	33,006	45,100	103,522	179,849	8,515	51,585	116,121
2000s	13,667	19,505	82,903	21,756	89,359	73,075	182,819	351,323	20,806	70,085	232,529
2010s	14,035	20,922	80,926	44,151	132,929	88,672	227,417	512,725	30,039	138,744	342,641
Total	**33,810**	**48,771**	**202,811**	**44,151**	**255,294**	**206,847**	**513,758**	**1,043,897**	**59,360**	**260,414**	**691,291**

ProQuest Academic One Search: Books, conference papers, dissertations, encyclopedias, magazines, journals, working papers

Decade	PSism	PSlist	PM	Deleuze	Foucault	Marxism	Marxist	Cap	Gramsci	Lenin	Marx
1990s	5,982	8,182	33,411	5,508	26,619	30,291	46,832	78,620	8,036	15,470	50,215
2000s	13,377	19,064	72,180	20,000	81,119	56,237	89,443	176,552	19,045	28,878	116,048
2010s	13,788	20,534	71,755	40,945	120,407	65,782	103,252	242,749	25,689	41,601	177,328
Total	**33,147**	**47,780**	**177,346**	**66,453**	**228,145**	**152,310**	**239,527**	**497,921**	**52,770**	**85,949**	**343,591**

ProQuest Academic One Search: Peer reviewed

Decade	PSism	PSlist	PM	Deleuze	Foucault	Marxism	Marxist	Cap	Gramsci	Lenin	Marx
1990s	1,617	2,293	11,621	1,224	7,693	7,191	10,663	22,935	1,521	2,526	11,001
2000s	3,400	5,201	23,531	6,341	27,209	15,054	25,055	62,338	4,752	6,453	37,690
2010s	3,287	5,159	22,821	15,619	44,207	18,630	28,471	93,885	7,723	13,799	70,747
Total	**8,304**	**12,653**	**57,973**	**23,184**	**79,109**	**40,875**	**64,189**	**179,158**	**13,996**	**22,778**	**119,438**

Date of searches: 27 September 2023 to 6 October 2023.

* Postructuralism / Postructuralist / Postmodernism / Capitalism

The scale of scholarship focused to varying degrees on Marx and Marxism is surprisingly large. Despite four decades of neoliberal and poststructuralist anti-Marxism, the volume of Marxist scholarship is actually larger than poststructuralist scholarship, even once the substantial increase in work referring to Deleuze and Foucault during the 2010s is considered.

Third, the period since the GFC has given rise to increased international scholarly interest in Marx and Marxism because this intellectual tradition provides strong foundations for considering issues such as the global economic slowdown and instability from 2008 to the present, capitalism's role in causing and accelerating the ecological crisis, rising tensions between the major powers including Putin's war against Ukraine and the intensifying rivalry between the US and China, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rise of the far right.

Another weakness worth unpacking concerns policy analysis. Poststructuralism, for the most part, generates policy analysis with some major limitations. There is much theory-driven emphasis on complexity, heterogeneity, multiplicity, fluidity and so forth, but no clear conceptualisation or ranking of neoliberal policies in terms their relative importance. Yet some policies are much more important than others. Determining the relative importance of policies requires the application of theory, methodological rigour and empirical research. For example, Marxist conceptualisations of capitalist class interests, plus empirical research focused on the lobbying activity of business associations, strongly suggests that, from a capitalist

vantage point, fiscal and monetary policy, tax, employment relations, welfare, housing, health and education are more important than policy in other areas such as firearms legislation, the national flag, crime and punishment, creative industries and so forth (Davidson, 2018; Roper, 2006).

In contrast, poststructuralist "assemblage analytics" contends that neoliberal policymaking is best understood as involving the "composition of heterogeneous elements", "assembling entities and practices that may be 'diffuse, tangled and contingent'", inviting "analysis of how the elements of an assemblage might—or might not—be made to cohere" (Higgins & Larner, 2017, p. 4). "Rather than foregrounding the 'commonality, coherence and resilience, and incremental advance' of neoliberalism", assemblage analytics aims at "building process-oriented accounts of the multiplicities, complexities, and contradictions at work in situated instances of political-economic processes" (Higgins & Larner, 2017, p. 5). Given the complete absence of a critical analysis of capitalism, the composition and interplay of class interests and class-based interest groups, and much else, there is no rigorous basis on which to determine and demonstrate that tax is much more important to business lobby groups than, for example, the design of the national flag or firearms legislation. Nor is any clear sense given of who the winners and losers are in relation to the political projects considered. Yet it is well-established in the literature that high-income groups, with a disproportionate concentration of cis-gender White men, have benefited far more from neoliberal policy change than low- and middle-income groups in which women, Māori, Pasifika and members of LGBTI communities are disproportionately concentrated.

Furthermore, poststructuralist opposition to 'totalising' and 'monolithic' accounts means that clear historical turning points and periods cannot be accurately identified, analysed and explained. Systematic periodisation of history is rejected in favour of randomisation and a radical indeterminacy (Anderson, 1984, pp. 50–51). Indeed, any meaningful attempt to identify causes of policy change is ruled out on a largely a priori theoretical basis. This is exemplified by Larner et al.'s (2007) poststructuralist analysis of the FLG's policymaking in the areas of globalisation, knowledge economy, sustainability policies, creative industries and social development. No clear sense is given of which of these areas of policymaking might be more significant and why. The best we are offered is that these political projects were chosen because they have "political prominence", which is not defined or substantiated. In so far as there is anything at all holding together "these diverse political projects", it is "a new emphasis on performance indicators across all domains" and "a post-facto consolidation of these political projects into a globalizing governmentality in which the new 'common sense' is a global connectedness, institutional reflexivity, and active citizenship" (Larner et al., 2007, p. 243).

This interpretation is so far removed from, and contra to, what the bulk of the relevant secondary literature has established with respect to the implementation and entrenchment of neoliberal policies since 1984, that it is hard seeing it as much more than a selective rehashing of ideas derived from poststructuralist theory with a few illustrative 'factual' examples being cherry-picked from the 'empirical research', which mainly amounts to a textual analysis of official policy documents.[4] No rigorous distinction is drawn between the rhetoric, ideology and official policy discourse the FLG used in its self-presentation as a Third Way social democratic government rolling back elements of neoliberalism, and the real core features of the neoliberal policy regime that it kept firmly institutionally entrenched. Thin and patchy in its engagement with the scholarly literature on neoliberalism in New Zealand, poststructuralist analysis is heavily ladened with concepts derived from Foucauldian governmentality and Deleuzian poststructuralism. It is hard seeing anyone who is not heavily invested in these particular currents of poststructuralism finding much of value in the analysis since it obfuscates more than it reveals with respect to New Zealand's political economy.

According to Foucault, power generates resistance. Typically, struggles against authority "attack

4 See Supplementary Note 2—A Select Bibliography Focused on Neoliberalism.

not so much such-and-such institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but, rather, a technique, a form of power" (Foucault, 2003, p. 130). Wherever and whenever there is power, there is freedom, and where there is freedom, there may be resistance. Such resistance may assume a vast variety of forms characterised by complexity, heterogeneity, multiplicity, fluidity, hybridisation, contradictions and so forth. Resistance involves "actants" who "may be singular or multiple, large or small, within or outwith the assemblage, and their operation may be sudden or gradual" (Anderson et al. 2012, as cited in Higgins & Larner, 2017, p. 7). *Assemblage* (*agencement*) is a concept developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* to "denote the multiplicities of heterogeneous elements ramifying to infinity and spilling over into each other, forming the plateaux whose very form the book seeks to mirror" (Callinicos, 1989, p. 4). From this perspective, "neoliberalism itself is assembled from diverse and multiple elements", but one cannot identify causes within the processes of composition that produce durable neoliberal orderings because "of the ontic indeterminacy of what might ordinarily be thought of as totalizing practices and processes" (Higgins & Larner, 2017, p. 3). Much the same can be said of the processes that generate resistance. As Callinicos (1989, p. 84) observes, "Whatever the undeniable splendours of many passages in Deleuze's writings, as a corpus they suggest mainly that the only escape from Foucault's dilemmas lies in adopting a modernized variant of Nietzsche's ontology of the will to power."

An obvious problem this poses is that after a lot of highfalutin theoretical huffing and puffing, this approach ultimately results in a form of empiricism whereby it is possible to describe but never convincingly explain the instances of resistance being observed. In contrast, perspectives such as radical anti-racism, socialist feminism, class-struggle anarchism, Marxism and neo-Weberian sociology can systematically identify sources of resistance in a manner that is theoretically informed, historically accurate and empirically grounded. Examples include analysis of, among other things, White settler colonial appropriation of land and other resources from Indigenous peoples and the ensuing proletarianisation of Indigenous peoples; capitalism, class structure and class interests; social structure; social reproduction including the bearing and rearing of children; economic and ecological crises; and imperialism and war. Poststructuralists repeatedly raise questions focused on difference, diversity, multiplicity and complexity—but what about commonality, unity, solidarity, resilience and simplicity? In other words, why is mass collective resistance so common in White supremacist, patriarchal, racist, environmentally destructive capitalist societies? What interests, conditions and experiences do workers/women/People of Colour/Indigenous peoples/trans-people share that are sufficiently powerful to propel them into collective forms of organisation, action, radicalisation and resistance? What social structural sources of power enable workers and the oppressed to struggle and, albeit much less often than we hope for, occasionally to win? Poststructuralism fails to provide convincing theoretical and methodological foundations for emancipatory thinking focused on these questions.

Finally, as Dean (2010, p. 46) points out, Foucauldian analytics of governmentality turn "away from 'all projects that claim to be global or radical'". The absence of a collective agency capable of bringing about progressive social, economic and political change, combined with "the suspension of value judgements, has certain political implications. These are that Foucault's analysis of power and subsequently governmentality loses its critical potential and becomes a theory of social reproduction rather than of transcendence" (Kerr, 1999, p. 177). This wouldn't matter so much if it could be safely assumed that neoliberalism and capitalism will continue to exist in something like their present forms for centuries to come. Yet in the long-term, humankind is unlikely to have a choice between piecemeal incremental change to the prevailing neoliberal advanced capitalist status quo or a global radical project of societal transformation. The overwhelming weight of available scientific evidence supports the view that if there is continuation of business as usual for another 30 years, with carbon emissions continuing to rise at or above the top end of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's most recent scenarios, societal transformation is going to happen as a result of catastrophically abrupt climate change and the closely related mass extinction of flora and fauna. The collapse of advanced capitalist civilisation and historical retrogression to some form of

barbarism, in Luxemburg's (1970, p. 269) sense, is a realistic possibility before the end of the twenty-first century. In light of this, the question then becomes not whether radical and global change is possible, since in the historical long-term it is inevitable, but rather what the nature of this change will be? Intellectual approaches to governance that, despite their glittering displays of conceptual cleverness, rule out global and radical projects of progressive change are the last thing humankind needs in the twenty-first century.

The contested future of neoliberalism: Maintaining the status quo, Far Right reaction, Progressive Left resistance

As noted above, the GFC constitutes a turning point in world history. Following a brief moment in 2009 and 2010 when it seemed possible that there might be a shift towards a technocratic form of Keynesianism, in most countries neoliberal policy regimes remained entrenched and the pursuit of fiscal austerity prevailed for the remainder of the decade. Although the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a sharp rise in state intervention in some countries, neoliberalism remains entrenched in the wake of the pandemic, with a generalised adoption of monetarist high-interest-rate monetary policy settings and fiscal austerity being the preferred policy responses of most capitalist states to the sharp rise of inflation in the early 2020s.

Nonetheless, as Callinicos (2021) convincingly argues, the GFC gave rise to a crisis of cosmopolitan neoliberalism, with its emphasis on free trade, that continues to the present day. Barriers to free trade increased in the wake of the GFC leading the *Economist* to claim that the world economy was trending in the direction of "deglobalisation" and "slowbalisation" ("Slowbalisation", 2019). The election of Trump in 2016 further fuelled the rise of economic nationalism and the far right—both internationally and within the US. But there have also been major upsurges of resistance to neoliberalism since the GFC, such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Movement, along with the serious unrest that occurred in many countries during 2011, the climate strikes, Me Too Movement, Black Lives Matter and so forth. Associated with this resistance, there have been significant collective expressions of political opposition to neoliberalism such as Melenchon's strong performance as a socialist candidate in the first rounds of French presidential elections, Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns and growth of the Democratic Socialists of America, and the unexpectedly strong performance of the British Labour Party in the 2017 election when it was led by Jeremy Corbyn and promised a left social democratic alternative. Disgruntlement with the neoliberal policy agenda of the Key-English-led Fifth National Government was a major factor contributing to National losing the election in 2017. Struggles in Aotearoa during the period following the GFC include the Occupy protests, protests against state-owned asset sales and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement, rise of the Mana Movement, important protests by Māori such as those at Ihumātao and Shelley Bay, large protests throughout the country opposing the anti-Māori policies of the Sixth National-led Government, increased strike activity from 2018 to 2023 including large-scale strikes by teachers and nurses, climate strikes and climate justice protests, and mass opposition to cuts to university staff, courses and degrees resulting from chronic government underfunding.

In view of these developments, how can we best prognosticate regarding the future of neoliberalism? What developments might bring the dominance of neoliberalism to an end? What are the prospects for progressive left alternatives to neoliberalism? Providing answers to these questions from within the Marxist tradition, combining Marxian dialectics, critical realism and historical materialism, entails a high degree of thematic continuity from explaining the rise of neoliberalism in the past and its entrenchment in the present to prognosticating about its possible passing in the future. In other words, it entails, among other things, a focus on the changing state of the capitalist economic system and the crises capitalism generates (including pandemics, war and ecological devastation); shifts in the balance of power between the sociopolitical forces on either side of the capital/labour divide; shifts in the prevailing orthodoxy within economics and the influence of neoliberal ideas, research and policy advocacy on

policymaking elites; and developments within the polity including electoral politics and the institutional configuration of the state apparatus. Future crises, with global impacts, may emanate from different sites within capitalist societies as illustrated by the GFC, as well as the narrowly averted financial crisis that arose from the Silicon Valley Bank collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war against Ukraine, and increasingly severe weather events resulting from climate change. The latter reminds us that material factors can have real societal impacts. Young people, in particular, are having to live with the increasing likelihood of catastrophic abrupt climate change if carbon emissions are allowed to continue rising in future at the rates of the past 40 years.

My assessment would be that the most likely scenario is a continuation of the dominance of neoliberalism, in the form of entrenched neoliberal policy regimes. Should the far right continue to make political gains and successfully take power in a sufficient number of countries, including several of the world's most powerful states, then beyond neoliberalism may be a future for humankind even worse than a continuation of the neoliberal status quo. More hopefully, major outbursts of resistance to neoliberalism, and the associated rise of campaigns, movements and political actors promising progressive political alternatives, are also likely to occur. The future is so hard to predict precisely because we are likely to see complex and often rapidly changing configurations of these developments occurring concurrently on a global scale, recurrently propelled by rapidly emerging crises.

Conclusion: Implications for future research

Debating neoliberalism is important for three reasons. First, because New Zealand's political history from 1984 to the present is best understood as centrally involving the rise, modification and entrenchment of a neoliberal policy regime, deploying a conception of neoliberalism enables a more intellectually sophisticated and robust analysis of New Zealand's society, political economy and politics than one is likely to find in mainstream media commentary, the publications and briefing papers produced by policy ministries, political party policies and the rhetoric of politicians. One source of confirmation of this view has been the experience of teaching, and learning from, several groups of highly talented master's students. It has been inspiring to witness the extent to which these students have been able to use their understandings of neoliberalism to analyse a broad range of different aspects of New Zealand politics that would have been largely inexplicable in the absence of these understandings. Second, it is important because academic work that fails to use the analytical lens of neoliberalism thereby comes to play the ideological role of obscuring and legitimating the neoliberal policy regime and its effects, including high levels of socioeconomic inequality. Third, academic work that effectively makes neoliberalism disappear makes it harder to argue for progressive alternatives, because such work contributes to, rather than challenges, the entrenchment of the neoliberal policy regime as the 'taken for granted' and only partially publicly visible intellectual, institutional, regulatory and legislative underpinning of economic management, policymaking, political discourse, parliamentary debate, and media reporting and commentary.

My central argument is that those who want to argue that neoliberalism ended in New Zealand in 1996 with the first MMP election, or in 1999 with the election of the FLG, or most recently, in 2017, with the election of the Sixth Labour Government, need to provide an empirically grounded account of policy change showing how the neoliberal intellectual underpinnings and central legislative, regulatory, institutional and fiscal features of the neoliberal policy regime have been dismantled and replaced by another qualitatively and quantitatively different intellectual paradigm and policy regime. This they cannot do because empirically rigorous policy analysis supports the view that the neoliberal policy regime remains firmly in place and is likely to remain so in the short to medium term. The 2023 election resulted in the formation of a National-ACT-New Zealand First coalition government committed to a fundamentalist neoliberal approach to economic management and policymaking, centrally involving tax cuts funded with

large public expenditure cuts, which strongly indicates that the neoliberal policy regime is likely to remain entrenched for the foreseeable future.

I have always considered my work to be part of a collective endeavour to make sense of neoliberalism, formulate alternatives, and work out what possible futures may lie beyond it. We still have much to do, and so this article concludes with suggestions for future research. First, due to government underfunding of tertiary education for most of the neoliberal period, and the discouragement of New Zealand-focused research by the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) assessment criteria and university administrations, New Zealand universities have a greatly reduced capacity to provide independent critical analysis of government policymaking and the societal impacts of this policymaking. Yet there clearly needs to be future research focused, among other things, on neoliberal policy change pertaining to key areas of the political economy and society, such as: economic management including fiscal and monetary policy and taxation; employment relations; welfare; all levels of education and healthcare; housing; local government, public transportation and water infrastructure; industry, agriculture, forestry and fisheries; Treaty settlement claims and outcomes; climate change, renewable energy generation, the environment and conservation; socioeconomic, gender and ethnic inequality; the media; and New Zealand foreign policy.

Second, the bulk of the New Zealand literature focused on neoliberalism is in print form and not generally available online. Scholarly review of this literature requires old-fashioned library work.

Third, existing neoliberalism has not actually involved a reduction of the size of the state when measured in quantitative terms, and 'deregulation'—although it has emphasised 'self-regulation' by business and often diminished the effectiveness of regulatory control over business activity—is better understood as 're-regulation' in which neoliberal regulation replaces what came before. As exemplified by the environmental impacts of the poorly regulated dairy industry, cruelty to animals such as live animal exports and so-called winter grazing, and the deaths of 29 workers in the Pike River Mine disaster, the ineffectiveness of pro-business neoliberal 'regulation' contributes to workplace death and accidents, is detrimental to animal welfare, and often prioritises profits over the environment. Inadequate neoliberal regulation of business activity, therefore, needs to be a focus of ongoing analysis, critique and activism.

Fourth, as Gowan (1999), Kelsey (2015), Richards (2010) and McNally (2020) have shown, financialisation and the integration of New Zealand's financial and so-called 'capital' markets within the Dollar-Wall Street Regime, including the removal of capital controls and high levels of offshore debt, has helped to lock in the neoliberal policy regime. Duncan (2011) and Neilson (2011, 2020) also point to the need to investigate further the impact of global forces on the domestic economy, society and polity.

Fifth, critics of neoliberalism in Aotearoa need to develop a clearer understanding of the drivers and sociopolitical effects of asset inflation in the housing market. Among other things, by offsetting stagnating low and middle incomes, capital gains in the housing market have helped to quell popular opposition to neoliberal policies and have become a significant factor determining the popularity (or lack thereof) of governing parties.

Sixth, when viewed as an intellectual tradition, neoliberalism has developed and diversified since the initial implementation phases of neoliberal policy agendas in the 1980s and 1990s. The ongoing development of neoliberalism viewed as elite ideology and intellectual paradigm requires regularly updated analysis.

Seventh, as Bhattacharya (2017) and Welch (2015) have shown, neoliberal policy regimes have generally promoted 'lean reproduction' as well as lean production, in which employers and the state minimise the costs to them of social reproductive labour. But there are other respects in which neoliberalism has been able to accommodate progressive policymaking that has ameliorated gender inequality. More work is required to make sense of the complexities, tensions and contradictions with respect to the impacts that neoliberal policies and practices have had on gender inequality.

Eighth, much the same can be said of the impacts of neoliberal policies on ethnic inequality. There

clearly needs to be further consideration of the way in which neoliberalism has failed effectively to remedy socioeconomic disparities between Māori, Pasifika and Pākehā, while simultaneously reinterpreting the principles and role of te Tiriti o Waitangi and seeking to incorporate them within, among other things, an increasingly neoliberalised public sector.

Ninth, further work needs to be done to strengthen our understanding of the sources of the durability of neoliberalism and what may lie beyond it in the future. This includes considering why there has not been a wave of working-class struggle in opposition to various aspects of neoliberalism. There have been recurrent outbursts of mass collective resistance to neoliberalism, both internationally and in Aotearoa, but nothing on the scale that many Marxists expected to occur earlier in the period of neoliberal hegemony. What has caused the longest downturn in working-class struggle in the history of capitalism? Pointing to mass unemployment, anti-union legislation, with its entrenchment of free-riding and curtailment of the right to strike, government at a distance fostering neoliberal subjectivities, and so forth, is necessary but not sufficient to provide a convincing answer to this question. It is an open question requiring further collective investigation.

Finally, for critically minded social scientists and humanities scholars, research on neoliberalism should always aim to provide intellectual resources of hope. "To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing" (Williams, 2022). The intelligent young people whom we are lucky enough to teach and learn from are dealing with the negative effects of neoliberalism on their daily lives now, and also experiencing mounting eco-anxiety. We owe it to them to contribute to collective thinking about how and why better policies and a better world are necessary, feasible and possible.

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