

# Talking Cents

May 2021

*This last edition of Talking Cents has been written by Jean Brookes as the first and Anton Hikairo Spelman as the last member of the group. Readers are invited to share it as widely as they feel able and to encourage constructive debate.*

## **E tū tonu Te Wero – the Challenge continues!**

In 1993, the Auckland Anglican Diocesan Bishop, Bruce Gilberd and the Southern Assistant Bishop, Bruce Moore accepted the offer of the Diocesan Social Justice Sector Council to address the alarming development of *free market economics* throughout all sectors of New Zealand's public life in Aotearoa New Zealand. This was in response to the recent visit from a visiting Catholic theologian Fr. Robert Sirico to put the moral case for a free economy. Talking Cents sought to raise awareness and develop alternatives to what came to be known as neoliberalism. The work was focused on faith communities, locally, nationally and internationally.

The right-wing Catholic narrative from Sirico was powerful and it was important to seek an alternative Catholic narrative that could be articulated alongside thinking from the other Christian churches. Kevin McBride, a Catholic leader in the Auckland diocese with responsibilities for Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based bicultural education and action-reflection community development work over many years, became a member of the first working group.

The dual purpose of Talking Cents was to develop an ecumenical challenge to biblical, theological and secular thought that supported *free market ideologies*, and to share alternative responses with networks, including local congregations.

Members of Talking Cents approached these tasks by bringing their personal experiences of economic policies and insights from their secular and religious roles and responsibilities in written monthly articles that were the product of a collective effort in the group, convened by Jean Brookes. Over time, this process encouraged a deepening commitment to the Declaration of Independence 1835, Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840, the making of positive links between personal morality and appropriate political action, and working ecumenically and with an appreciation of liberating theologies and indigenous world views.

Throughout its life, the group drew on international links with the transformative financial and economic development work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia. It also drew inspiration from the action-reflection work of Pope Francis.

In 2012, the WCC Conference in San Paulo published the San Paulo Report that condemned the *free market* outright, something the churches in Aotearoa New Zealand had not done.

In 2013, the Ecumenical Panel on a New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) was created by the WCC, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and the Council of World Mission. It facilitated annual Governance Economic and Management (GEM) gatherings of older and younger church leaders. Over the next seven years they worked on strategies to deconstruct the ongoing forms of *free market* ideology, particularly neo-liberalism, and proposed new financial and economic ways forward, internationally and locally.

In 2019, Anton Hikairo Spelman was asked to join the Talking Cents group to bring an analysis of these issues from a Tiriti/Treaty, two-worldview perspective. Anton belongs to Ngāti Hikairo, an iwi based in Kāwhia on the west coast of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. He is also a parishioner of St Matthew-in-the-City and a member of the Rongopai Eucharistic Community. He brought many years of working with government, secular and community groups on a Tiriti/Treaty of Waitangi-based Relationships Framework designed to facilitate transformative change within groups and organisations across Aotearoa New Zealand and to enable Māori leadership and key elements of a Māori worldview, like rangatiratanga, to operate more widely in the public life of the community.

During 2020, Talking Cents continued to meet face-to-face or by Zoom as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. In September 2020, a Talking Cents article was written by Jean and Anton pointing to the need for a new framework to guide the post-COVID-19 development of Aotearoa. They proposed an approach that would enable us to take stock of our position in relation to our history and to assist the development of more acceptable and effective approaches to the future management of our common good. The approach reflects the key elements of a wide

contemporary analysis of the issues around constitutional reform and the need to implement transformative change in the systems and processes used in governance activity across government, the economy and the community.<sup>1</sup>

Jean and Anton identified four issues concerning the key values that currently drive behaviour and shape the workings of our systems. These issues are significant because of the way they lock in ongoing support for the wider neoliberal agenda and prevent the development of sustainable change in the lives of people in communities or in the workings of our democratic infrastructure. The problematic values are *individualism* where the primary accountability is to ourselves/immediate whānau; a narrow approach to wealth creation where *we reward primarily for individual effort and measure in monetary terms*; a *market approach to the operation of capital*, and our insistence on *taking a controlling interest on environmental matters* at the expense of all other parties in the natural order.

They also suggested a way forward, stressing collectivist values, which are intended to provide the space needed for the indigenous rights of Tangata Whenua to be addressed and for the many voices in nature to be heard.

This work resonates with the politics of love, a values-based approach to politics proposed by Max Harris. It also resonates with Moana Jackson's thinking about the need for an ethic of restoration and has some interesting, but not surprising, parallels with a set of values Jackson has proposed for constitutional transformation:

- *The value of place* — the need to promote good relationships with and ensure the protection of Papatūānuku.
- *The value of tikanga* — the core ideals that describe the 'ought to be' of living in Aotearoa and the particular place of Māori within that tikanga.
- *The value of community* — the need to facilitate good relationships between all peoples.
- *The value of belonging* — the need for everyone to have a sense of belonging.
- *The value of balance* — the need to maintain harmony in all relationships, including in the exercise of constitutional authority.
- *The value of conciliation* — the need to guarantee a conciliatory and consensual democracy.

The September 2020 Talking Cents article saw the shift to relational collectivity as crucial in the search for social justice. By March 2021, changes were happening for some regular members of the group and this key value (relational collectivity) had become unsustainable. It was decided, therefore, to fold up pro-actively with a final article that went some way to begin the process of teasing out a change agenda for the future.

In taking this step, we invite current members of denominational, ecumenical and secular Tangata Tiriti structures to take up the challenge of change using a Tiriti/Treaty of Waitangi Relationships Framework approach both to critique and redevelop the values important to our future and, as part of this process, to acknowledge that Māori leadership, which will reside in the Tangata Whenua house, will be critical to the quality and effectiveness of our future work, as Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti together, to restore and maintain the common good of all people and the world in which we live.

#### **Talking Cents members 1993 – 2021 were:**

Ann Batten, Peter Bargh, Margaret Bedggood, Mary Betz, Jean Brookes, Susan da Silva, Prince Devanandan, David Hall, Kevin McBride, Graham Miller, Chris Richards, John Salmon, Roger Smith, Anton Spelman, Br Thomas Andrew, David Tutty, Godfrey Wilson, Catherine Wood.

#### **Backgrounds of members included:**

Social work, journalism, Creation care, community development, human rights, philosophy, Franciscans, international development, Pax Christi, list MP, Queensland, R/C executive officers, Network Waitangi, Living Wage, evangelical, feminist, missiology, ecumenism, South Africa, working with a Māori worldview in organisations and communities.

#### **Members were:**

<u>Male:</u>	11	<u>Laity</u>	8	<u>Friar</u>	1	<u>Pākehā</u>	16
<u>Female:</u>	6	<u>Clergy</u>	7	<u>Bishops</u>	1	<u>Māori</u>	1

<sup>1</sup> Hirini Kaa, (2020). Te Hahi Mihinare: The Māori Anglican Church. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books.  
Moana Jackson, <https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/moana-jackson-decolonisation-and-the-stories-in-the-land/>  
Max Harris, (2017). *The New Zealand Project*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books.