The erosion of democracy in New Zealand – Implications for the environment: a broad survey

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Introduction

Concerns have arisen about the erosion of democracy in countries that have been regarded longstanding liberal democracies. Reasons for such concerns include, among other, the introduction of anti-terrorism legislation, revelations about mass surveillance, the ideological and political capture of governments by capital, and the re-emergence and ascendancy of extreme right groups and populist politicians. Liberal democracies, arguably already very limited in the nature and extent of democracy that they provide, appear increasingly fragile. Their decline has led some observers to speak of the arrival of a post-democratic era (Crouch, 2004; 2016; Swyngedouw, 2011b).

The growing erosion of liberal democracies is not only a threat to democracy as a fundamental or intrinsic value, but also to other values, including the protection of the environment. While some put their faith and hope in less or non-democratic systems to protect the environment (Heilbroner, 1980; Ophuls and Boyan, 1992), history offers little evidence and support for such views. Although the existence of (liberal) democracy may not be a sufficient condition for resolving environmental problems, it likely to be a necessary condition as it provides environmental advocates with more or better opportunities for mobilising support (Hochstetler, 2012; Jänicke, 1996). Most environmental analysts take the view that, to address environmental problems more effectively, we need stronger rather than weaker democracy (Dryzek, 1987; Eckersley, 2004; Paehlke, 1989). Therefore, if liberal democracies are subject to erosion and decline, this is reason for concern for intrinsic as well as instrumental reasons.

These concerns also affect New Zealand. It can be argued that New Zealand's liberal-democratic system, already a very limited form of democracy, is also subject to decline (Marsh and Miller, 2012). This decline manifests itself in a range of institutional and policy changes, but also in the erosion of conditions that can be regarded as elements of the essential infrastructure of a well-functioning democracy. The erosion of these conditions, which is also largely the result of neo-liberal policies, undermines democracy in less obvious but insidious ways, posing as much if not more of a threat to democracy as the institutional changes that curtail public input and government accountability in direct ways.

In this paper, I will first sample the literature on the theme of the erosion of democracy in liberal-democratic systems. Next, I will discuss whether and to what extent these arguments apply to New Zealand, looking at a range of institutional changes as well as the erosion of some of the conditions that are parts that are essential to the infrastructure of a well-functioning democracy. The conclusion pulls together the findings.

Threats to democracy in existing liberal-democratic systems: developments and drivers

For the purpose of this paper, I define liberal democracy as a political system characterised by, *as a minimum*, the following features: regular, free and fair elections of parliamentary representatives by all adult citizens, contested by multiple parties; the separation of powers, notably between the executive and parliament (with the executive being accountable to parliament and stepping down if formally they no longer have the confidence of a majority in parliament) and an independent judiciary; formal recognition of human, civil and political rights and liberties, and the rule of law in everyday life (also respected by governments).

How "democratic" liberal democracies are depends on one's views on the extent to which they meet certain criteria and/or conditions. For instance, liberal democracies have long been subject to critique about the nature and extent to which they provide opportunities for *direct* public

participation in decision-making ((Bachrach and Botwinnick, 1992; Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970). Many ideas have been put forward, not in the least by environmental advocates, about how existing liberal democracies can and should be amended to create more (also ecologically) democratic systems (Doherty and de Geus, 1996; Eckersley, 1996; 2004), how they can and should be enhanced by deliberative processes (Baber and Bartlett, 2005; Dryzek, 2000; Torgerson, 1999), or how to replace them altogether by systems that are regarded as more "genuine", often more decentralised, forms of democracy (Bookchin, 1980; Morrison, 1995).

However, while it is important to think about how democracy can be improved, the reality is that democracy in many "really existing" democratic systems has been steadily eroding, even in countries whose political systems have long been regarded as the heartlands of liberal democracy, such as the United States and in Western Europe. Moreover, while liberal democracy may have become the global "gold standard" of political systems, the political reality in many countries is that it functions more as a veil for legitimising whatever regime is in place, however corrupt, abusive, and unaccountable in its exercise of power. And, of course, there are still countries, including the most populous country on earth, China, whose leaders don't see any need to uphold even a pretence of democracy and actually mock liberal democratic systems for their perceived ineffectiveness, inefficiency and impotence, especially in the face of economic crises. Overall, the survival of democracy, even in its limited liberal democratic form, seems rather uncertain and far from guaranteed.

Here, I will briefly sketch just some of the developments in "really existing" liberal-democratic systems that many political analysts regard as threats to, and indications of, the erosion of democracy. While the extent or severity of these developments varies between countries, they are discernible in most if not all liberal democracies and can be seen as parts of a general trend.

Some of these developments take the form of formal institutional changes that restrict democratic processes or practices in direct ways. Other, not less important, developments that adversely affect democracy relate to the deterioration of *conditions* that are essential for a well-functioning democratic system, sometimes referred to as the democratic infrastructure (McChesney and Nichols, 2016). The decline of these conditions brings about a process of *hollowing out* the formal democratic institutions which, as a result, become hardly more than empty shells that provide a veil of legitimacy to nominally liberal democratic systems.

Some of the institutional changes that *directly* restrict democratic control over the exercise and potential abuse of power are: the introduction of formal measures to combat terrorism; changes that formally allow governments to practice mass surveillance; the extension of rights granted to businesses, among other in free trade agreements, and the concurrent introduction of limitations on the rights of citizens to have input and to participate in decision making, or even to legitimately contest and protest against decisions.

In the wake of 9/11 and subsequent major acts of terrorism in Western Europe and elsewhere, many governments adopted or amended anti-terrorism legislation that justifies the (sometimes indefinite) detention of individuals that are considered to pose a "terrorist" risk, and to declare a state of alert or emergency that limits or suspends a range of individual rights. While such measures may be warranted in the face of real threats, considerable concern has been expressed about how, in many countries, such legislation has been worded very broadly, in particular the term terrorism, potentially making it applicable to legitimate expressions of political dissent. Hence, such legislation can potentially be used (by existing or future governments) to suppress environmental and other activism, and may well have a "chilling effect" on such activities.

Related to such measures, governments have also significantly extended their (mass) surveillance activities, to the point that, as exposed by Edward Snowden, the systems that have been put in place catch virtually *all* electronic communications. This raises serious concerns about the protection of privacy, but also about the potentially wrongful categorisation and treatment of people as "security risks" (including when involved in environmental activism), and seems to bring fears about the creation of Orwellian "big brother" states closer to reality.

Moreover, in many countries, governments have introduced institutional changes that further restrict the (already often quite limited) rights to challenge, let alone participate in, decisions on "development" proposals that potentially have serious adverse environmental and social effects. Environmental legislation and regulation has come under fire as being unduly restrictive, inefficient and obstructive of "development" and economic growth. This has led to deregulation and the devolution of decision making to "governance" bodies which, although they may include representatives of environmental interests and seemingly be more "democratic" than derogatorily labelled "command-and-control" government decision-making, are dominated by economic interests and have the effect of legitimising continued development (Davies, 2011).

At the same time, the rights of businesses are being strengthened significantly, among other in free trade agreements that grant corporations to the right to sue governments for adopting policies or decisions that are considered to impinge adversely on the value of the investments and investment opportunities of corporations, with final decisions on such cases being made by arbitration panels biased towards business interests. Such provisions for "investor-state dispute settlement" (ISDS) are also having a "chilling effect" on the adoption of legislation aimed at environmental and/or social protection that could potentially invoke the wrath of big business (Kelsey, 2013; McGiven, 2016).

While these developments in the formal political-institutional sphere are already serious enough in their restrictive effects on existing liberal democracies, they are accompanied by a raft of other political-economic and socio-political developments that have the effect of eroding the *conditions* that are essential to a (well-) functioning democracy (McChesney, 2014). The following are just some of these developments that, in large part, have been the result of neo-liberal policies: growing economic inequality, the decline of independent and politically diverse mass media; and declining civic engagement and belief in the value or merits of liberal-democracy. Several other factors could be added, but given the limitations of space and time, I will confine myself to highlighting the crucial importance of these three factors.

That democracy requires a fairly equitable distribution of wealth and income, or at least restrictions on the emergence of big discrepancies in those respects, is something that has long been regarded by democratic theorists, including Robert Dahl (Dahl, 1985) and Charles Lindblom (Lindblom, 1977), both of whom considered the high degree of concentration of economic power in big corporations, and the associated high level of inequality in wealth and income, as a threat to democracy. However, in reality, in most liberal democracies, inequality in income and wealth has increased significantly since the 1970s (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso, 2014; Piketty, 2014). Such discrepancies and concentrations enable dominant economic interests to exert undue and disproportionate influence over governments, among other through political donations, the ability to fund lobby groups to continuously exert pressure on politicians, to fund think tanks that produce reports and proposals that protect and advance their interests, and to use the PR industry to influence the media and to generate public support for their points of view and to attack those of their (perceived) opponents (Beder, 1997; 2000; Harvey, 2005; Monbiot, 2017).

The latter point overlaps with developments in the mass media, in particular, the growing concentration of ownership and control over newspapers, which has significantly reduced the existence of a diverse and independent press, led to the trivialisation of content, and to a decline of critical and investigative journalism (McChesney and Pickard, 2011; Pilger, 1999, chapters 7 and 8). The same trends have affected television and radio, with public broadcasting having come under increasing pressure from reduced public funding, increased dependence on advertising and therefore a growing influence of ratings on programming, and outright privatisation (McChesney, 2008). While the new (social) media, notably the internet, are often regarded as a compensating development that enables virtually unlimited public exchange and popular political mobilisation (including "clicktivism"), these media have also become subject to forms of management (among other, by the use of segmenting algorithms) and, in some countries, outright control over internet access and operation, while their ability to bring about significant policy and institutional change (which still requires mass mobilisation on the ground) is limited by other factors (Foster and McChesney, 2011; McChesney, 2013). At the same time, the media (including the internet and social media) are being used by a burgeoning PR industry that uses sophisticated as well as very crude means to influence public opinion and to advance the views and interests of its clients, mostly big businesses and governments (Lloyd and Toogood, 2014). In liberal democracies, people are increasingly being subjected to forms of commercial and political propaganda that distract them from learning about developments that really matter and that affect the future of societies (Herman and Chomsky, 2010; McChesney, 2014; McChesney, 1999).

This battle for the minds also affects people's views on politics and their own role and (in-)effectiveness as citizens. After decades of top-down neo-liberal policy development that has taken government economic decision-making out of the realm of politics and concentrated into the hands of Central Banks and experts who claim that there is no alternative to the neo-liberal recipes, it is not surprising that people's belief in their own role and efficacy as citizens has eroded, while their cynicism about governments (who do what they want anyway, whichever party is in power) has increased. (Streeck, 2016; Swyngedouw, 2011a). At the same time, the ability of workers to protect their interests, let alone to influence economic decision-making at any level, has been minimalised with the curtailment of the role and power of the trade unions (Harvey, 2005). Treated, in line with neo-liberal ideology, as "consumers and rate/tax payers" (with an emphasis on tax cuts as a prime carrot), the idea that citizens have a role to play in determining the direction of politics and policy has been pushed into the background.

These developments, among other, have significantly eroded the basis for the functioning of democracies to the point where it is argued that the some countries no longer deserve to be called democracies (McChesney and Nichols, 2016: 16), and that their political systems have turned into regimes of plutocratic elites (Wade, 2013), a conclusion that, for the United States, has been backed up by research (Gilens and Page, 2014). People in many neo-liberal democracies now believe that their countries are being ruled, behind the façade of parliamentary elections and debates, by an unelected and increasingly international political-economic elite that sets the parameters of what governments (can) do. This has created political systems that have been referred to a "post-democratic" and/or "post-political" in the sense that decision making has been largely depoliticised and delegated to experts (Crouch, 2004; 2016; Swyngedouw, 2011a; b). Also, as little if any space is left for seriously contesting the dominant ideology, policies and institutions, this creates highly unstable and potentially explosive conditions (Swyngedouw, 2011b). It also provides a fertile breeding ground for populist politics, political scapegoating (for instance, of immigrants) and for the revival of extreme right groups and parties, as witnessed in many neo-liberal democracies. "Brexit" and the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States may have sent reminders to

political leaders that many people in liberal-democracies are highly dissatisfied with these trends, but these developments do not harbour a move away from neoliberal policies and/or a strengthening of democracy. While ostentatiously aiming to reduce the impacts of globalisation, in practice, they continue and intensify neoliberal policies and their effects under the veil of nationalist rhetoric.

Lucky New Zealand?

New Zealand is sometimes depicted as a stable democracy, with a solid (or even "rock star") economy, a society that values equality and cultural diversity, and with a "green and clean" environment. Being relatively "underpopulated", well-endowed with resources, and surrounded by huge swaths of ocean, one may also think that it is well-placed, compared to many other countries, to cope with the potential havoc that is likely to be brought about by (rapid) climate change. Perhaps not surprisingly, the country has become a magnet for immigrants and refugees, including a growing number of people from the United Kingdom who are seeking to flee from the fall-out from "Brexit", and from the United States after the election of Donald Trump to the presidency.

There are good grounds for challenging each of the characterisations sketched in the preceding paragraph. Here, my aim is not to engage with these arguments other than to demonstrate that the developments that lead to the erosion of democracy, sketched above, also occur in New Zealand, making the country less politically stable and attractive than is commonly thought. This applies to both the institutional level as well as the conditions that are essential for a well-functioning democracy.

The erosion of democracy in New Zealand: formal institutional changes

Before discussing institutional changes that contribute to the erosion of democracy in New Zealand, a few brief and general comments on the nature of New Zealand's liberal democratic system seem in place. Based on the Westminster (UK) model, New Zealand's political system is characterised by the existence of a single House of Parliament (a *unicameral* system) in contrast to its counterparts, and has fewer formal checks and balances on the executive power than most other liberal-democratic systems, to the extent that, prior to the introduction of Mixed Member Proportional representation (MMP), it was referred to as an "elective dictatorship" (Palmer, 1987). While the introduction of MMP has made *some* difference to the ability of main parties to govern, necessitating concessions to minor parties in exchange for support ("confidence and supply"), this has not significantly altered the fundamentally adversarial two-party system and the dominance of the Executive. Although there are several other institutions (including the Judiciary, the Auditor-General, the *Official Information Act*, the *Bill of Rights Act*, the *Office of the Ombudsman*, and the *Privacy Commissioner*) that provide checks on the power of the Executive, the Government, if it commands a simple majority in the House of Representatives, can amend or even abolish most of these institutions, with a few exceptions (notably the *Electoral Act*). Hence, although governments that are committed towards maintaining democracy are unlikely to make such changes, there are few safeguards against a government that is intent on weakening the formal checks on its power. In this respect, although the Executive power in New Zealand's political system may have become less unbridled than prior to the introduction of MMP (Palmer and Palmer, 2004), its formal democratic institutions are more vulnerable than those of many other liberal democratic systems given, too, the absence of a codified written constitution (Moore, 2016).

The vulnerability of democracy in New Zealand to formal-institutional change can be demonstrated in the three issue-areas referred to above. First, with regard to anti-terrorist measures, New Zealand adopted the *Terrorism Suppression Act* in 2002 even though threats of this nature were generally

considered to be very low compared to many other countries. The hurried introduction of the Act raised concerns about the power that it concentrated in the Prime Minister, with insufficient oversight from the courts. But when the police invoked the Act in an operation against what was labelled the establishment of a paramilitary training camp in the Urewera mountains, this failed as the legislation appeared to be too restrictive. Consequently, the Act was amended to give even more power to the Prime Minister to designate terrorist groups, lowering the threshold of its implementation. This led to concern that the Act could be used to quell any form of (more or less) radical political dissent. Recently, such concerns increased with the introduction, in 2016, of the *Maritime Crimes Amendment Bill*, which uses very broad terminology that makes it possible to unduly restrict the citizens' freedom to protest or to take non-violent direct action (Human Rights Law Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2016; New Zealand Law Society, 2016). In this context, the New Zealand Human Rights Defence Council refers to a process of "function creep" by which "each extension eases the way for the next extension" of the powers of government on the one hand while restricting the freedom and civil liberties of citizens on the other. The council argues that this process "has been ongoing for a number of years and, regrettably, shows little sign of stopping any time soon" (New Zealand Council for Civil Liberties, 2016).

Second, on the closely related issue of increased surveillance by governments, New Zealand governments are surely keeping up with the play. As a partner of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia in the so-called "Five Eyes" alliance, New Zealand has been involved in the expansion of mass surveillance of communications and in spying on governments that are commonly regarded as friendly or even allies. Some of these activities were already uncovered in the 1990s by investigative journalist Nicky Hager (Hager, 1996), but the systemic and enormous scale of these activities was exposed by whistle blower Edward Snowden. The information revealed that, despite assurances to the contrary by the Prime Minister, John Key (Edwards, 2015), New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) has been collecting mass data on the communications of New Zealand citizens (which it was not legally entitled to do), that the amount of data gathered was expanding rapidly, and that New Zealand was systematically spying on governments in the South Pacific that are commonly regarded as friendly and posing no threat to New Zealand's security (Gallagher and Hager, 2015; Panda, 2015). The revelations led to an independent review of New Zealand's security arrangements, which recommended, among other, a merger of the two existing security agencies, the GCSB and the Security Intelligence Service (SIS) (Cullen and Reddy, 2016). Accepting most of the report's recommendations, the government introduced a Bill that would make spying on New Zealanders legal (with safeguards), but that contains such broad terminology that it significantly expands the scope for the surveillance of individuals and groups that are involved in contesting government policies that are deemed a threat to New Zealand's "national security", including "economic security".[i]

It pays to put the threat to New Zealanders from domestic sources of terrorism that are claimed to justify mass surveillance of, and extensive spying on, citizens, in perspective. Compared to other threats and risks that harm many New Zealanders, such as from domestic violence, traffic accidents, employment related accidents, unprovoked assault and even murder, the threat from domestic sources of terrorism is extremely low. While cyber security is an increasingly serious threat, this does not require mass surveillance and spying on politically active New Zealanders. This suggests that the New Zealand government's strong commitment in this area serves other goals, including the suppression of (radical) political dissent, especially that which challenges the dominant political-economic order, the exploitation of (commercially highly valuable) mass data for economic ends, and to placate foreign powers, in particular the United States. While privacy concerns are

understandable and legitimate in this context, the more significant threat of these developments lies in their undermining of democracy by facilitating the suppression of political dissent.

With regard to institutional changes that affect the ability of citizens to exert influence over development initiatives that have significant social and environmental implications, New Zealand has arguably gone further than many other liberal democracies in reducing the scope for democratic decision making. This has been most pronounced at the local and regional level, to which much decision making on development had been devolved with the introduction of the *Resource Management Act 1991*. Here, I will mention just a few examples, the dissolution of the Canterbury Regional Council, the creation of the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Agency (CERA), and changes to the *Resource Management Act* reducing opportunities for public input and participation.

The most blatant example of the deliberate winding down of democracy at the regional level by central government can be found in the dissolution, in March 2010, of Canterbury's elected Regional Council (*Environment Canterbury* or *ECan*), replacing it with appointed Commissioners. The dissolution followed a review of what the government characterised as the council's "poor performance", notably with regard to the management of the region's water resources, which was "holding the Canterbury region back" (Smith and Hide, 2009). In particular, ECan was lambasted for its slow handling of resource consent applications, which had led to a big backlog of cases. However, *Environment Canterbury*, although it faced many more complicated and controversial water consent applications than any other council, improved its processing record significantly before it got disbanded (Burke, 2010). The fact that the government went ahead dissolving the council anyway suggests that deeper forces and motivations were at work.[ii] Foremost among these was the unhappiness of farmers, business leaders and other councils with *ECan's* perceived pro-environmental orientation, which was seen as an impediment to development, in particular with regard to the use of water for irrigation purposes, which was explicitly mentioned as being of strategic importance by the Minister for the Environment (Smith and Hide, 2010). Government concerns about *ECan's* cautious and balanced stance on this front had no doubt grown after the local body elections of 2007 during which four regional councillors were elected who were considered to be "greenies" (Burke, 2010). At the time, as the dairy industry was becoming New Zealand's biggest export industry, the government was keen to give it all the support that it could, as reflected also in the funding that it has made available for irrigation schemes (Guy, 2015; Ministry of Primary Industries, 2016).

On a general note, the government appeared to be toying with the idea of abolishing not just *Environment Canterbury*, but *all* Regional Councils. Ever since their creation, regional councils have been unpopular with city and district councils who resented the establishment of a separate and independent layer of authority. The environmental oversight responsibilities of regional councils have always been resisted by development oriented councils, businesses and farmers alike, causing the role and even existence of these councils to remain insecure and subject to many efforts towards the usurpation of their powers, such as by the creation of "unitary councils" or the creation of "super cities". Even among environmental advocates, support for regional councils has never been strong, given the soft and lenient approach many councils were perceived to be taking against polluters and development interests (Mahon, 2006). Right-wing (Blue-Green) environmentalists openly advocated their abolition and their replacement by bodies of scientists and professionals, apparently seeing no need for elected representatives to play a role in often controversial decision-making notably regarding the allocation of water. The Minister for the Environment, Nick Smith, and the extreme right-wing Minister of Local Government, Rodney Hide, seemed well disposed towards abolishing this layer of democratic governance. That it did not happen is probably because of the

significant costs that would be associated with the re-allocation of the functions of the councils (Gorman, 2009a; b). In April 2016, the *Environment Canterbury (Transitional Governance Arrangements) Act 2016* was passed, creating a council based on what the Minister for the Environment referred to as a mixed governance model, with seven elected councillors and six appointed Commissioners, confirming the government's instrumental or optional view of democracy, as restoring a fully elected council was considered to be "too risky" (New Zealand Government, 2016; Pearson, 2015).

A second example of institutional change which eroded opportunities of citizens to have a say in the future development of their locality, can be found in the creation of the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA). CERA was established under the *Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Act*, adopted in April 2011 following the Christchurch Earthquake in February that year, and was given the status of a central government agency with the responsibility to develop a Recovery Strategy for the greater Christchurch region. While such an institutional response to disaster events is not unusual, and is often justified as being necessary to get the affected communities back onto their feet, it can raise questions regarding the kind of decisions made under such emergency powers. As Naomi Klein points out (Klein, 2007b), all too often, disasters have been used by neo-liberal political-economic advocates to push through their policy agendas to the benefit of big business interests, expropriating public assets and enabling profiteering from government expenditure, referred to as "disaster capitalism".

While CERA provided some opportunity for community participation (in the form of a community forum of twenty members, appointed by the Minister in charge of CERA), the Recovery Strategy and Plans adopted by the Minister focused on the construction of major "anchor projects" (including a stadium and a convention centre) that bore no connection with the more immediate needs and priorities of the population of Christchurch and little if any with the views and wishes of the Christchurch community for the future development their city (Wright, 2016). A review of CERA's performance undertaken by the State Services Commission in 2014 noted that there was a "consistent message from stakeholders about the desire for a stronger sense of community engagement and empowerment in the rebuild and recovery. In particular, stakeholders emphasised the need to recognise that an important element of the recovery involves rebuilding community connections for displaced people both within new and established communities" (State Services Commission, 2014: 6). However, as even business interests expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of Christchurch's rebuild (Stylianou, 2014), it is difficult to see who actually benefitted from the creation of CERA, although the government used the requirement upon the Christchurch City Council to co-fund the anchor projects to put pressure on the council to privatise community-owned assets, with some success, despite strong local opposition (Braithwaite, 2012; Law, 2016; Macskasy, 2015). In 2016, CERA was abolished and replaced by a more co-operative arrangement with Christchurch City Council, with few mourning its loss (*The Press* editorial, 2016).

That the National-led government regards "too much" democracy as a problem or risk is also reflected in its repeated initiatives to significantly reduce opportunities for public participation and input under the *Resource Management Act* (RMA). The RMA, adopted in 1991, contained very broad provisions for public participation and input into decisions (potentially) affecting the environment. While there is little if any evidence that this has obstructed development, but rather, in the eyes of planning professionals, to have improved the quality of decision-making and outcomes, the RMA has routinely been portrayed by development interests as being costly, inefficient and responsible for delays. Such complaints found willing ears among National governments, leading them to take reform initiatives in 2009, 2012 and 2015. While the 2009 amendments were characterised as

simplifying and streamlining measures, the proposed changes of 2012 and 2015 went much further. They included, among other, changes to the fundamental purposes and principles of the RMA, the introduction of a national template for planning decisions, and the introduction of limitations on the submissions and appeals processes. That the government wanted to change the main purpose of the Act away from an environmental (sustainable management) focus was explicitly stated by successive Ministers for the Environment. In 2013, Amy Adams argued that, fundamentally, the reforms were "about providing confidence for businesses to grow and create jobs" (New Zealand Government, 2013: 3), while, in 2015, Nick Smith expressed the view that "economic growth, jobs and exports need given recognition in the legislation" (Rutherford and Dennett, 2015). Also, to justify this shift in focus, the government blamed much of the escalating housing crisis on the RMA, which was argued to stand in the way of making enough land available for development (New Zealand Government, 2013).

However, environmental advocates, planning professionals, and local government officials expressed grave concerns about the proposed reforms, which were deemed to have "the potential to dramatically reduce public participation in decision making, damage the quality of natural and urban environments, reduce the quality of resource management decisions and add additional cost burdens onto local government" (Tindale, 2016: 1). The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment commented that the proposals gave too much, far-reaching power to the Minister for the Environment, enabling him to exclude certain people, or classes of people, from making submissions (Gudsell, 2016). Legal professionals concurred that "the proposals will significantly impact on the ability of third parties to object to development proposals" (Grierson, 2015). Other commentators on the proposals questioned the need for the changes, the poor quality of the information and analysis on which they are based, and characterised them as a threat to local democracy (Murphy, 2016; Omundsen, 2013; Tindale, 2016).

Although the government failed to garner sufficient support for the proposed reforms of 2012, and was again forced to abandon the proposals in 2015 after losing a seat in a by-election that deprived it of a majority support in the House of Parliament, in November 2016, it appeared to have been able to persuade the Maori Party to give its blessing to the proposals in exchange for relatively minor concessions (Sachdeva, 2016). Combined with other legislative changes that have been introduced to restrict the right of citizens to participate in development decisions, notably in the *Housing Accord and Special Housing Areas Act 2013* and the *Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf (Environmental Effects) – – Non-Notified Activity Regulations 2014* (Tindale, 2016), the RMA proposals reflect the government's strong and persistent determination to give precedence to "development" interests at the expense of democratic rights of citizens.

Finally, New Zealand governments also appear to be willing, or even keen, to strengthen the formal rights and powers of transnational corporations in the context of free-trade agreements such as the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA). Such agreements, which increasingly incorporate clauses aimed at the protection of the rights of foreign investors, can and have been used to challenge decisions by governments (at all levels) that foreign investors consider to have an adverse effect on the value of their investments, including legislation aimed at social and environmental protection. Although such agreements may recognise the "legitimate" right of governments to pass legislation aimed at social and environmental protection, considerable uncertainty surrounds the interpretation of the term "legitimate" (McGiven, 2016). The vague nature of this term enables investors to challenge government decisions and policies on the grounds that they adversely affect the value of their investments. As such disputes are settled by arbitration courts that are biased towards the protection of business interests, such agreements expose governments (and citizens) to

potentially large financial (compensation) compensation costs. Even the risk of incurring such challenges and costs are likely to have a chilling effect of the passing of legislation aimed at social and environmental protection (Capaldo, *et al.*, 2016; Kelsey, 2008; 2013; Kelsey and Adamson, 2010). Even though the TPPA, following the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency, now seems "dead in the water", this does not appear to have any influence on the determination of the New Zealand government to pursue other free trade agreements that are likely to include similar investor protection provisions that fundamentally undermine New Zealand's sovereignty and hence capacity for democratic decision making on matters of crucial importance.

Eroding conditions for democracy in New Zealand

As discussed above, to have a well-functioning, even of the limited liberal-democratic type, certain conditions must be met. Many of these conditions relate to the creation and maintenance of a (relatively) "level playing field" to prevent that some groups are able to exert undue influence and power over the government, the extent to which governments are held to account, and the ability and willingness of citizens to exert their rights. Some of the key factors that affect these conditions are the degree of inequality in a society, the existence of diverse and vigorous mass media, and conditions that kindle citizenship, political efficacy, and belief in the legitimacy the political institutions.

The importance of containing the degree of inequality in wealth and income for maintaining democracy has been described above in general terms. A high degree of inequality undermines democracy from both ends of the spectrum: it adversely affects the ability and willingness of people in the lower socio-economic strata to exert their role and rights of citizens (given, among other, their preoccupation with surviving, the fact that often they are educationally disadvantaged, and their lack of financial means to advance or even protect their interests), while it privileges those at the other end, especially those who occupy leading positions in the business sector, who are able to mobilise far more resources to advance their interests.

During the last 30-odd years, New Zealand has become a much more unequal society. In terms of income, according to Rashbrooke, between the mid-1980s and the mid-2000s, the gap between the rich and the rest of New Zealand has grown faster than in any other developed country. The average household in the top 10 per cent now receives nine times the income of a household in the bottom 10 percent (Rashbrooke, 2013: Location 128). However, most of the increase in inequality occurred in the period between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, and inequality since then appears to have remained roughly at the same level (Easton, 2013: 21; 31). Although these figures do not make New Zealand one of the most (income) unequal societies in the world, it has dropped significantly in the (Gini) rankings among the OECD countries (Easton, 2013: 22; 41-46).

Although increased inequality has affected many white people, including a growing number of working couples that have sunk below the poverty level (Easton, 2013: 51-52), it has had most adverse effects on Maori and Pacific Islanders, who are at the bottom of the heap with regard to poor housing and homelessness, unemployment, poor health, educational outcomes, imprisonment and many other social issues (Te Ahu Poata-Smith, 2013; Workman and McIntosh, 2013). On most social indicators, there is a significant gap between the New Zealand European population on the one hand, and Maori and Pacific Island people on the other. Although, in some respects, between 2002 and 2012, some of these gaps have somewhat decreased, they have become bigger in most areas (Marriott and Sim, 2014; Te Ahu Poata-Smith, 2013: Location 3221). However, it should be noted that inequality among Maori has also grown, with some Maori, notably those involved with

tribal corporations, now being (much) better off than 10 or 15 years ago, causing inequality among Maori to be even greater than among Europeans (Te Ahu Poata-Smith, 2013).

While, as mentioned above, income inequality in New Zealand significantly increased between the mid-1980s and 1990s, the situation with regard to developments in the distribution of wealth, especially in recent times, is less clear, given the gaps in data and information. Some facts can be established. Around the 1890s, the richest 1 percent of the population held about 55-60 percent of all wealth, and the wealthiest 10 percent about 90 percent. This inequality decreased by the 1930s, when the share of the top 1 percent dropped to 25-30 percent, and the top 10 percent's share to around 65 percent. Evidence from a 2003 survey indicated that the top 1 percent held 16 percent of all net wealth, the highest decile group some 50 percent, while the bottom half only 5 per cent (Rashbrooke, 2014: Location 128). While the figures indicate a decline in wealth inequality, there are grounds for thinking that inequality has been on the increase again in recent decades, associated with the significant rise in the amount of capital of those on New Zealand's "Rich List" (from $12 to $60 billion), the abolition of inheritance tax and gift duties (Rashbrooke, 2014), and the boom in property prices. Moreover, given the gaps in the data for New Zealand, especially with regard to distribution within the top percentile, a more detailed breakdown of the distribution of wealth and income and extent of inequality, cannot be established. This is significant because, as Piketty points out, wealth and income in most countries are heavily skewed towards the 0.1 percent, and it is this (relatively small) group of people who are likely to be the most influential in political-economic terms (Piketty, 2014: Location 4341).

However, in what way(s) the growth in inequality in New Zealand contributes to the erosion of democracy is a question that cannot be answered simply on the basis of data about the distribution of wealth and income. As noted above, in the literature on this topic, the common assumption or argument made is that the concentration of wealth and income enables the rich to exert disproportionate power and influence in the political process. Many commentators simply claim that the growth in inequality will lead (or has led) to a form of "Plutocracy", without providing much in the way of evidence or references to research on this front (Wade, 2013: 208-209). While this argument is plausible, it can only be verified by research, in particular on the ways by which different forms of power and influence, such as identified by Bachrach and Baratz (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963) and Lukes (Lukes, 1974) are exercised, directly and indirectly. Given the growing linkages between economies related to the multiple processes of globalisation, research on this topic at the local or national level needs to be set in an international or global context. Much of the focus of research undertaken in this field also goes beyond a focus on the wealthy as individuals (and their personal influence and power), and looks at the institutions (such as corporations, financial institutions, international organisations, think tanks, media and other) that provide the basis for the exercise of power and the continued accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few.

Therefore, how inequality of wealth and income, and the developments therein, in New Zealand contribute to the erosion of democracy is a question that needs to be put in the wider political-economic, political-institutional, and social context. Much of the research that has been undertaken in this area indicates that, despite the myth of egalitarianism, New Zealand society has always been highly unequal (even among the European population, let alone when the position of Maori is taken into account), and that politics has been largely dominated by small elites, drawn from big landowners (or leaseholders), industrialists, and professionals (Simpson, 1984), while the efforts of the working class and trade unions to reduce inequality and to institutionalise their power have consistently been fought, repressed and overturned (Trotter, 2007). The ascent of neo-liberalism and the acceleration of globalisation, although bringing about shifts in the (structural) power bases

within the political-economic elites, notably in favour of financial capital, both New Zealand based and international (Jesson, 1987; Kelsey, 1995, 1997), has not fundamentally altered the power and influence of big business interests in policy development.

Research on the political economy of New Zealand (Deeks, 1992; Roper, 2006; Roper and Rudd, 1993; Rudd and Roper, 1997; Vowles and Roper, 1997) offers support for the argument that wealth (capital) and economic power have a significant influence on policy development. For instance, Jesson reveals how, during the 1980s, the concentration of economic power in a small number of conglomerates and corporate finance was accompanied by the rise of neo-liberalism ("Rogernomics")(Jesson, 1987), while Deeks states that, under the Fourth Labour Government (1984-1990), the appointment of top business executives to the boards of state-owned enterprises and to key positions in the public services legitimated "the place of major business interests and their agenda at the core of the community of policy-makers" (Deeks, 1992: 11). Roper demonstrates that, between 1990 and 2005, business interest groups have been quite consistent and effective in their advocacy of retaining and extending the neoliberal policy regime that was put in place between 1984 and 1990 (Roper, 2006). However, much research remains to be done on the link between (developments in) capital ownership and political power and influence in New Zealand. Overall, there is significant evidence to support the view that, also in New Zealand, major business interests have consistently enjoyed a "privileged position" (in other words, exerted disproportionate power) in the development of government policy, even though the precise nature and extent of that influence has been contingent on contextual factors.

With regard to the existence and maintenance of diversity and vigour in the media as a condition for a well-functioning democracy, New Zealand is in dire straits. The international trends of privatisation, commercialisation (financialisation), and concentration sketched above, arguably have been even more pronounced in New Zealand than in many other countries. These developments have resulted in an ever greater cross-media control by a handful of businesses interested primarily in maximising profits, and has led to a deterioration of the diversity, independence, and quality of reporting and analysis, and of investigative journalism, notably in the realms of newspapers and television. At the same time, the role of the PR industry in the manipulation of political and business communications, including through the new (social) media, has grown to such an extent that public scrutiny of policy development, let alone public input into that process, has become increasingly difficult and rare.

As for the print media, the number and diversity of newspapers in New Zealand has always been smaller compared to bigger countries. Nonetheless, from the early colonial days, newspapers played a role in putting forward a diversity of political views, some as mouthpieces for opposing political parties, while others from a more independent (be it commercially-based) position (Ellis, 2016: 236-238). However, since the establishment of the United Press Association in 1879s, newspaper ownership was consolidated in local or regional monopolies, with little competition amongst them (Cocker, 2006: 460-461), with the result that, unlike in many other countries, no newspapers emerged with nation-wide readership. However, during the 20th century, steadily growing competition led to a situation that, by the early 1980s, two major press groups had emerged (Wilson and Horton Ltd and Independent Newspapers Ltd) that, between them, controlled around 82 percent of newspaper circulation in New Zealand (Cocker, 2006: 461). Hence, the ownership of newspapers was already highly concentrated by the time restrictions on foreign media ownership were lifted in 1991, which led to both major groupings being sold to Australian-owned companies, APN News and Media, and Fairfax Media, who between them exerted a near duo-poly over the newspaper market in New Zealand (Hope and Myllylahti, 2013; Rosenberg, 2008). In 2011, both

companies pulled out of the New Zealand Press Association (NZPA), effectively closing down New Zealand's non-commercial news agency that had been in created in 1880 to service the New Zealand media (Hope and Myllylahti, No date). The print media, in particular, came under further pressure from the growing role of online news offered by the new (including social) media. In 2016, this led APN/NZME and Fairfax Media to announce their intention to merge their New Zealand branches, thus creating a virtual monopoly in the print media sector (Read and Pullar-Strecker, 2016). Although the government appeared not inclined to put any obstacles in the way of the merger, the Commerce Commission indicated that it would likely withhold its approval given that the merger would "substantially reduce competition in a number of markets" (Commerce Commission New Zealand, 2016).

At least as worrying as the decline of the traditional mass media in New Zealand is the growing role of the PR industry in politics. Following developments that first occurred in the United States, politics in New Zealand also increasingly became a matter of style and image rather than of public discourse about substantive issues. Governments and politicians of all parties increasingly rely on public relations experts and advisors to manage their communications with the public. While this may be legitimate and even desirable if it helps politicians to better get their message across, and to find out what is important to citizens, the increased reliance of PR has some worrying features. Foremost, it primarily serves top-down, one-way communication, and seems preoccupied more with protecting and advancing the interests of PR clients, whoever they are. Concerning also is that at least part of the PR industry unscrupulously uses methods ("dirty tricks") like attacking and discrediting people and groups that have different views and interests than those of their clients. Such practices imply undermining the legitimate right of citizens to advance views that may differ significantly from their clients. A good example of this are the activities organised by the PR company *Shandwick NZ* for (the then still existing) state-owned enterprise *Timberlands*, aimed at defeating a campaign to halt the logging of indigenous forests of the West Coast of the South Island. The systematic, comprehensive and orchestrated actions undertaken by *Shandwick* and *Timberlands* would have been successful had not a new (Labour) government been elected in 1999 that put an end to the logging of native forests on public land (Hager and Burton, 1999).

Arguably even more concerning is the use of such unscrupulous methods by politicians and their allies in the "blogosphere". Hager's book *Dirty Politics* offers a detailed account of the efforts of bloggers allied to the National Party aimed at "destroying" any opposition, including politicians from other political parties, journalists, academics and public interest groups. Undertaken with the tacit approval, or even outright support, from high level politicians and their personal advisors, such practices enable politicians or governments to follow a two-track approach whereby they politically benefit from such dirty practices while officially distancing themselves from them. It speaks for itself that such practices are highly damaging to the functioning of democracy, or even deliberately aimed at dispensing with it, as reflected in the stated aims expressed by of one of the bloggers involved, namely to entrench the power of the National Party in perpetuity (Hager, 2014).

In large part, as Hager points out, both the growing role and power of the PR industry, and the emergence of dirty politics in the blogosphere and the internet in general, can be attributed to the weakening of the traditional mass media, and in particular of quality and investigative journalism that might expose and counteract such practices. With the mass media increasingly focused on boosting ratings and advertising income, entertainment and sensationalism replace serious topics and investigative journalism, allowing politicians and their advisors to get away with the massaging of communications and the distortion of information while making it difficult if not impossible to have broad, well-informed public debate about issues of importance.

That New Zealand governments are less than fully committed to a well-functioning democracy is also reflected in how, during the last few decades, they have implemented the Official Information Act 1981. Without timely access to public information, notably via the media, it is hard to see how citizens can have an input in public policy development and decision-making, and how governments can be held accountable for the way they make decisions. Yet, with some exceptions, government ministers and departments have been less than forthcoming in making information available to the public, using delaying tactics and censorship to avoid fully informing the public about the grounds on which policies are developed and decisions are made. With many citizens, in particular journalists, complaining about the way the Act has been implemented, the Ombudsman saw reason to undertake an investigation that confirmed that there is considerable scope for improvement of the government's and departments' performance on this front (Office of the Ombudsman, 2015). Again, as in the case of the use of PR and the blogoshere, the main concern of governments in this area appears to be the careful management of communication and information to protect and advance their own interests, thereby diminishing rather than strengthening New Zealand's democracy.

Although it can be argued that the role of the media has never been to contribute to or enhance democracy (as a separate branch of power, the "fourth estate"), but to distract and misinform rather than to educate and inform citizens, as Herman and Chomsky discuss in their "propaganda model" of the media (Herman and Chomsky, 1988), nonetheless the decline in diversity of views, ideological positions and information, even within the mainstream of opinion, constitutes an undesirable and even dangerous development. We may not yet "live the Orwellian nightmare", as some argue (Diglin, 2014), but the developments sketched above provide enough reason to be concerned about the ways the media assist rather than counteract the erosion of democracy, also in New Zealand.

The final area discussed here where conditions essential for a well-functioning democracy are eroding is that of citizen engagement with the political process, such as through voting, membership of and participation in political parties and (public) interest organisations, and of the beliefs on which this engagement is based. These include the belief in the notion and importance of citizenship, belief in the political efficacy of participation and organisation, and belief in the fairness and legitimacy of the political system. Arguably, these processes and beliefs lie at the very heart of a democratic system. When they erode, the very existence of democracy is under threat. While, in theory or principle, inequality and a poor state of the media are problems that can be addressed and remedied by the concerted political action of citizens, a loss of citizen engagement itself is much harder to remedy and is likely to feed a negative spiral that ultimately results in democracy's total demise.

One of the often referred to indicators of a well-functioning democratic system is the proportion of eligible voters that bothers to vote. In many liberal democracies, there has been a declining tendency in voter turnout, and New Zealand is no exception. In the early and mid-1980s, voter turnout for general (parliamentary) elections was higher than 90 percent (93.7 percent in 1984), but since then it has dropped to below 90 percent during the 1990s, and to less than 80 percent for most of the 2000s (Ministry of Social Development, 2016). Although this participation rate is still higher than in many other liberal democracies, notably the United States, and puts New Zealand close to the average for OECD countries (Statistics New Zealand, 2016), the trend is worrying, especially as non-voting is more pronounced among the young (Statistics New Zealand, 2016). Voter turnout for local government elections has always been lower than for general elections, but also here the trend is down, dropping from more than 50 percent in the 1980s to close to 40 percent in the 2010s (The Department of Internal Affairs, 2016), and dipping just below the 40 percent in 2016 (Morton, 2016).

This trend is accompanied by falling numbers of people who become members of political parties, and/or who are involved in campaigning and political activism of some sort (Miller, 2015: 25, 199). According to Miller, whereas some decades ago one of four voters belonged to a political party, today that proportion is closer to just two percent (Miller, 2015: 152). This reflects a broader development of political parties appearing to lose much of their traditional role in the mobilisation of citizens behind political programmes and in the aggregation of a plurality of views and interests. Whereas, in the past, political parties played a central role in the formation and expression of the political identities of citizens, usually around more or less coherent worldviews or ideological positions and programmes, the main parties have lost much of this capacity as their political orientation and positions have converged towards an unspoken consensus around the main (notably economic) policy areas, based on neo-liberal principles and the assumption or claim that "there is no alternative", a phenomenon which has been referred to a "cartel politics" (Marsh and Miller, 2012). At the same time, a growing number of citizens form and express their political identity on a different basis, such as gender, ethnicity or on particular convictions or issues (including environmentalism, nationalism), often aiming their demands at governments via the media, for instance through talk-back radio, bypassing political parties in the process. This development may be considered positive in the sense that governments are confronted more directly with the needs and demands of citizens, but it also leads to an even greater emphasis on *ad hoc* and reactive political decision-making and to a lack of transparency in the aggregation of different interests, a role traditionally played by political parties. In the meantime, as noted above, governments continue to be lobbied and influenced by major business interests that, judged by the policies that governments have adopted, have been able to ensure the continuation and expansion of policies based on neo-liberal principles.

One of the more insidious aspects of these developments has been their impact on political beliefs and attitudes, in particular with regard to the notion of citizenship and the role of citizens in a democracy. Neo-liberal ideologues and advocates commonly redefine politics in market terms, framing the role of governments and citizens based on the notion of a contractual relationship between "clients" and "providers", thus narrowing and depoliticising the broad nature of the relationships between governments and citizens, the role of governments, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Citizens are referred to as consumers and taxpayers (with one political party in New Zealand, the Association of Consumers and Taxpayers, ACT, explicitly expressing that view even in the name of the party). The consumerist approach has, of course, been pursued and applied in "user-pays" policies in a wide range of policy areas, appealing foremost to people's self-interest rather than the public and collective good. At the same time, governments have made a priority of reducing income and corporate taxation, which is labelled as fundamentally undesirable or bad, emphasising the "tax payer" role of citizens. Neo-liberal advocates have had no qualms about arrogantly imposing such views and policies on citizens while displaying a contempt for democratic principles (Marsh and Miller, 2012: 251). What is worse, however, is when citizens start accepting this redefinition of their role and position in the political system, thereby effectively abandoning the idea of democracy itself. However, the end of democracy does not mark the end of politics; it creates fertile soil for non-democratic forces, presenting themselves as populist political movements, a trend that has already become all too obvious.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to assess whether or to what extent arguments about the erosion of democracy in liberal democratic systems, a topic of considerable research and debate in the international literature, are also relevant to New Zealand. New Zealand is commonly regarded as a

stable democracy, relatively free from the social and political turmoil that affects many other political systems, including those that can be considered to be the heartlands of liberal democracy. Given my special interest in environmental politics and policy, a secondary aim of the paper was to highlight the environmental aspects and ramifications of these developments.

The paper singled out six trends or developments that are often said to be associated with the erosion of democracy. Three of those relate to institutional changes, the introduction of anti-terrorism legislation, the increase of mass surveillance, and institutional changes aimed at reducing perceived (environmental and other) obstacles to economic growth and development. Three developments relate to the erosion of conditions that are often seen as essential for a well-functioning democracy: growing inequality, the decline of the (mass) media, and a decline in civic engagement.

It is not hard to find evidence of these developments in the New Zealand context. Following the example of many other liberal democracies, New Zealand has adopted stronger anti-terrorism measures, even though, by comparison, the actual threat of terrorism is low. The New Zealand government has also been engaged, in a cooperative arrangement with its other "Five Eyes" partners, in tacitly allowing and condoning mass surveillance of communications, and recently introduced legislation to legitimise spying on its own citizens. Given the broad definition of terrorism used in the legislation, and the very low risks and limited effects of domestic terrorism, it would appear that these institutional measures are targeted foremost at the surveillance and suppression of domestic political dissidents and/or opposition groups, including environmental activists, that are perceived as a (potential) threat to the existing political and economic order. On the other hand, the New Zealand government has introduced or is in the process of introducing, a range of institutional changes, including the suspension of the Canterbury Regional Council, and radical amendments of the *Resource Management Act 1991*, that remove perceived environmental and other obstacles to development and economic growth.

At the same time, there is evidence that some of the essential conditions for a well-functioning democracy have also been in decline in New Zealand. Between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, inequality in New Zealand increased significantly, contributing to the concentration of economic wealth and power. In the mass media sector, a process of ownership concentration, deregulation (including to allow foreign ownership), financialisation and privatisation, have led to a largely diminished ideological diversity, to the homogenisation and trivialisation of content, and to the decline of quality journalism, conditions essential for healthy public debate about matters of collective importance. Combined with the steep rise of the role and influence of PR and the use of "dirty politics" in the blogosphere, both of which involve the manipulation of information and communication to serve the narrow interests of wealthy and already powerful parties, the media contribute to the decline of democracy rather than to its functioning as a fourth, independent branch of power. Perhaps most concerning are the signs that the belief of New Zealanders in the importance and efficacy of civic engagement, and the value and legitimacy of the existing liberal-democratic institutions, are also weakening, which has the potential to lead to the ultimate and complete demise of democracy.

Marsh and Miller (Marsh and Miller, 2012) argue that much of the decline of democracy in Westminster systems (but probably most western liberal democracies) can be attributed to a combination of factors: increasing social plurality and identity politics, the demise of socialism as an alternative ideology, the rise of neo-liberalism as the hegemonic ideology and its grip on the main political parties, and a shift in the style of politics with greater reliance on image and PR management techniques. However, the often-claimed depoliticisation of governance and decision

making should not obscure the underlying political-economic and political-ideological nature of the drivers of these processes: the rise and spread of neo-liberalism did not just happen, but has been the result of the politics pursued by powerful economic interests that were able to capture most governments in liberal-democratic countries, ideologically and in the development of policy. It has been argued that neo-liberalism, or capitalism in general, and democracy have always been on uneasy terms with each other (Chomsky, 1997; Klein, 2007a; 2014; Wade, 2013), and it is therefore not surprising that the significant rise in power of capitalist interests through globalisation and concentration has also led to the erosion of the already limited and increasingly fragile degree of democracy contained in liberal-democratic political systems.

These developments do not bode well for democracy, and neither do they for the environment. A common theme running through all of them appears to be to keep capitalism, with its inherent imperative of economic growth, safe from democracy. As governments remain in the grip of global economic powers and continue to assist in the erosion of democracy, they are also responsible for the inevitable environmental collapse that will follow.

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[i] In the Bill, national security is defined as follows:

Clause 5 - Meaning of national security

In this Act, **national security** means the protection against—

(a)

threats, or potential threats, to New Zealand's status as a free and democratic society from unlawful acts or foreign interference:

(b)

imminent threats to the life and safety of New Zealanders overseas:

(c)

threats, or potential threats, that may cause serious harm to the safety or quality of life of the New Zealand population:

(d)

unlawful acts, or acts of foreign interference, that may cause serious damage to New Zealand's economic security or international relations:

(e)

threats, or potential threats, to the integrity of information or infrastructure of critical importance to New Zealand:

(f)

threats, or potential threats, that may cause serious harm to the safety of a population of another country as a result of unlawful acts by a New Zealander that are ideologically, religiously, or politically motivated:

(g)

threats, or potential threats, to international security.

Arguably, under this definition, those who strongly oppose an international free trade agreement like the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement on the grounds that it is harmful to New Zealand's "status as a free and democratic society" and to its vital economic interests, could equally be labelled by the advocates of such an agreement, notably the government, as potentially causing "serious damage to New Zealand's economic security or international relations" if, for instance, such opposition would take the form of unsanctioned forms of protest. See Locke (Locke, 2016)

[ii] If inefficient, slow, inadequate, flawed or questionable decision making were to be a legitimate argument for the dissolution of democratic institutions, a strong case could be made for dissolving all (liberal) democratic

institutions, including those of New Zealand. While this may sound like a flippant comment, the fact that the New Zealand government and the business sector buy into this instrumental argument against democracy, like the Chinese rulers, among others, suggests that the view of democracy as an intrinsic value still has rather shallow roots in New Zealand, which is highly worrying.