

In the 2020 election, Chlöe Swarbrick won the Green party's second-ever electorate seat, in Auckland Central. A high-profile candidate, an experienced campaign team, some favourable conditions, and mass engagement enabled Swarbrick to build a winning coalition. For socialists, who are returning to electoral politics throughout liberal democracies, the skills required to win electoral campaigns are key. With an emphasis on 'building a community, not an army', the Swarbrick campaign offers useful lessons in how to build and sustain political engagement. With a more explicitly socialist political agenda and a stronger organising theory of change, election campaigns could provide a spark for a left political movement in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Chlöe Swarbrick's Auckland Central Victory

---

HUW MORGAN

Until the 2020 General Election, the Green party had only ever won one electorate seat since its founding in 1990; on 17 October 2020, it won its second.<sup>1</sup> First-term MP Chlöe Swarbrick won 12,631 votes in Auckland Central, overturning an 18-point polling deficit and defying expectations that winning was impossible. While not a socialist candidate, the campaign that was run in her name offers key lessons for those of us on the left seeking urgent, socialist change. If a revolution is going to proceed 'step by step', understanding how the Swarbrick campaign won may help the left in Aotearoa New Zealand jump a couple of steps ahead.<sup>2</sup>

Until May 2020, I had been heavily involved in the Tāmaki Makaurau Extinction Rebellion group. After a year with all the usual problems with which readers will be familiar, tactical disagreements, weak organisational structure, and an absence of a strategy, I left. It was my first serious attempt at engaging in politics and I wanted to join a campaign in which I was a small cog—something well-run, with clear outputs, and, crucially, the possibility of victory. I became the scrutineer coordinator for Swarbrick's campaign,

---

1 Thanks to Jack Foster for prodding me toward writing something more coherent than what this started as.

2 Jon Nixon, *Rosa Luxemburg and the Struggle for Democratic Renewal* (London: Pluto Press, 2018).

ran a couple of training sessions, and spent most weekends door-knocking. I was not a senior or core part of the campaign team. However, as one of the older members—at the grand old age of 31!—I spent time with key organisers in reflective discussions. I have read the campaign review document written by the core team and I have interviewed the campaign's manager and field organiser for my podcast Blueprints. In this article I take care to separate their reflections from my own.

My reflections on the campaign are structured as follows. First, I outline the objective conditions of the electorate Swarbrick contested, the demography of which favours left-leaning candidates. Here, I also detail the assumptions the campaign made about the seat. Second, I compare Swarbrick's victory to similar electoral upsets across the West and attempt to characterise what some say are Swarbrick's ambiguous politics. Third, I detail the strategy and the story of the campaign. Finally, I try to pick out some broader lessons of Swarbrick's electoral success for the left, both in building our skills-base for electoral campaigning and in how these could fit into our grand strategy.

## Objective conditions

Auckland Central is the youngest electorate in the country with 32 percent of voters between 20–29 years of age and only 7.4 percent over 65. It is a highly educated population, with the fourth-highest proportion of people holding a bachelor's or master's degree, at 22.7 percent and 6 percent respectively. At the end of 2020, the median weekly rent in Auckland Central for a one-bedroom apartment was \$400, and the median salary was \$1,060 per week, meaning that an average person was spending 37 percent of their income on rent.<sup>3</sup> It is also an international and diverse electorate, with 45 percent of residents born overseas and 30.5 percent of the electorate Asian,

---

3 See: [https://www.tenancy.govt.nz/rent-bond-and-bills/market-rent/?location=auckland+central&period=1&action\\_doSearchValues=Find+Rent](https://www.tenancy.govt.nz/rent-bond-and-bills/market-rent/?location=auckland+central&period=1&action_doSearchValues=Find+Rent)

61.7 percent European, and 10.5 percent Māori and Pacific.<sup>4</sup> In sum, it could be described as a ‘Generation Left’ electorate: young and ethnically diverse, with a university campus and a high proportion of income spent on accommodation costs.<sup>5</sup>

Auckland Central consistently returns one of the highest party votes for the Greens in the country: in 2011 and 2014 it was 22 percent. Indeed, the seat has historically leaned left, opting for Labour in all but three of the last 90 years before National’s Nikki Kaye won it in 2008. The Labour candidate, Helen White, was not as well-known as Swarbrick, the latter being especially popular with the younger voters who comprise the decisive portion of the electorate. At the time, Swarbrick was the third most-followed politician on social media behind Jacinda Ardern and Winston Peters.<sup>6</sup> In 2017, she stood in the Maungakiekie electorate, doubling both the candidate and party vote from 2014. In the 2016 Auckland mayoral race, running a no-budget campaign and before she had a recognisable profile, she came third with 29,068 votes. Swarbrick was a sitting list MP before the election and so, once parliament was dissolved, available to campaign full-time. Given her long-time support for cannabis legalisation, the referendum held during the 2020 general election also guaranteed lots of media appearances. She lives in Auckland Central and has an authentic relationship to small businesses, the LGBTQ+ community, and the local creative scene.

Finally, the Auckland Central Greens branch was led by the younger generation of members who had experience in electoral politics. Campaign manager Leroy Beckett had run Phil Goff’s successful mayoral campaign in 2016, while field organiser Niko Elsen had worked for the Greens Issues Team from 2011–2014 and was the branch’s membership secretary. Many of the core team also worked together and won several campaigns as part

---

4 All electorate data is available at: [https://www.parliament.nz/en/mps-and-electorates/historical-electorate-profiles/electorate-profiles-data/document/DBHOH\\_Lib\\_EP\\_Auckland\\_Central\\_People/auckland-central-people#\\_44](https://www.parliament.nz/en/mps-and-electorates/historical-electorate-profiles/electorate-profiles-data/document/DBHOH_Lib_EP_Auckland_Central_People/auckland-central-people#_44)

5 Keir Milburn, *Generation Left* (London: Polity, 2019).

6 Farah Hancock, ‘Election 2020: The social media popularity race,’ *Newsroom*, 21 August 2020.

of Generation Zero. Most of them had also worked together on Swarbrick's 2017 campaign in Maungakiekie. If the key to effective campaigning is an accurate assessment of the objective conditions, in Auckland Central they were relatively inviting for Swarbrick and her team, although they were coming up against a high-profile incumbent in Kaye.

In forming the campaign strategy, the core team made the following assumptions. First, given her performance in Maungakiekie, Swarbrick would, by name recognition alone, be able to improve the Green vote by around four thousand. Her presence would bring in enough volunteers to run a massive field operation, which a quite experienced, though young, campaign leadership could use to create a momentum capable of challenging Kaye at her own game; it was said that in 2008, when Kaye first won the seat, she'd knocked 'on every single door'.

Second, Swarbrick's popularity would allow the campaign to raise enough money to buy high-profile ads on billboards and social media, which was deemed essential to signal that the campaign was serious. The initial fund-raising target of \$30,000 was far surpassed by the campaign's end, with well over \$50,000 raised in total, mostly coming from small donations.

Third, that Kaye was a popular, socially liberal, female politician was seen as a challenge, because it was assumed that middle-class voters would be loyal to her. Why change MP when Kaye already appeared to be championing some green issues and offering effective representation? Nevertheless, given the demographics and political economy of the electorate, it was thought that Swarbrick stood a chance of winning.

## Comparison with other left wins

It is worth comparing Swarbrick's politics to other recent left-wing politicians in Western democracies because it demonstrates the importance of candidates emerging from a left ecosystem. Easy comparisons beckon with the much-discussed victories for female leftists such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in 2018 and Cori Bush in 2020 in the US, and Amy McMahon in Australia. However, despite some cosmetic similarities—

young, female, charismatic—the political contexts in which these politicians have succeeded are very different. Both Americans emerged from a vibrant and organised socialist ecosystem. Ocasio-Cortez and Bush were invited to run by Justice Democrats, an organisation that selects and then supports progressive candidates with fundraising and technical infrastructure. They were both endorsed by the Sunrise Movement, a youth-led social-movement organisation that campaigns for politicians who support the Green New Deal. Both are self-described socialists tethered to left-wing political organisations that are active in trying to build socialist power outside of elections.<sup>7</sup> The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) now has 86,000 members, while Sunrise has 400 ‘hubs’ across the country. This is all backed up by a rich ecology of left media such as *Organizing Upgrade*, *Jacobin* magazine, and various YouTubers.

At the same time as Swarbrick’s win, Queensland Greens candidate Amy McMahon became the MP for South Brisbane. The Queensland Greens have for some time been positioning the party explicitly around a class-based populist narrative, with mining magnates the key enemy to progress, a strategy that has enabled it to make significant inroads into Labor’s constituency. McMahon’s campaign was just the latest in a series going back to 2016, meaning she was deeply tied to the broader political mobilisation in Queensland and had the support and experience of intensive field campaigns to draw upon.<sup>8</sup>

Swarbrick, on the other hand, was recruited into the Green party after her failed independent run for Auckland mayor in 2016. And in Aotearoa New Zealand there are no comparable organisations like DSA or Sunrise able to provide candidates with political and organisational heft through endorsements and material support. Indeed, seemingly because of her urban-liberal background, an absence of explicit class-based discourse, a lack of historical attachment to left organisations, and insufficient confrontation

---

7 See Daniel Marans, ‘How Jamaal Bowman Beat Rep. Eliot Engel in the Bronx,’ *Huffpost*, 2 July 2020.

8 The strategy is discussed at length on my podcast, Blueprints S1E5: Amy McMahon Becomes Green MP for South Brisbane.

with the more centrist side of the Greens, the Green left network, the ‘explicitly anti-capitalist’ faction of the party, omitted Swarbrick from its preferred top-ten list ranking.

But if being strategic involves being resourceful with what you’ve got, then trying to remove Swarbrick, who enjoys wide support from younger people and reach in the media, from the Greens parliamentary party seemed to me absurdly wasteful. If the left-wing of politics begins at social democracy, then Swarbrick seems to me undeniably left. She consistently puts forward a structural critique of capitalism as the cause of inequality and mental ill-health and she cites the experiences of marginalised people as the base upon which to build reforms.

## Strategy

When I first contacted field organiser Niko Elsen to join the campaign, the strategy was explained to me as follows: to win over a critical mass of ‘Ponsonby mums’ who are socially liberal and would vote for the Labour candidate or Kaye but are open to Swarbrick because of her gender and youth; to motivate a few thousand students to actually enrol and vote in Auckland Central; and to reach enough city-centre apartment residents who can’t be door-knocked but are predominantly young and ethnically diverse. By piecing together sufficient chunks of this coalition the hope was that we could make it a close race.

Though there was no core strategy document, what was frequently discussed was the need to create momentum sufficient to persuade people that this was a serious campaign so that their vote wouldn’t be wasted. The momentum would be built through two key channels. First, Swarbrick’s message, a systemic critique of politics-as-usual not being fit for the multiple crises we face, would be promoted widely in her media appearances. Second, it would be dispersed on the ground through intensive contact with voters.

A key battle to win here was the narrative that Swarbrick, as a minor party candidate, would split the left-wing vote in a three-way battle and allow National to win. White was 1,581 votes short for Labour in 2017,

while Denise Roche of the Greens took 2,838. The story went that White would have won if Roche had not stood. This narrative is guaranteed to recur should the left challenge Labour in other electorates in the future. Beckett, the campaign manager, was firm about running a ‘values-based framing’ strategy to counter this. Popularised by George Lakoff, it assumes that in trying to negate your opponent’s frame, you will strengthen it. Thus, in arguing against the other side, ‘Do not use their language’.<sup>9</sup> When building a counter-narrative we took a more positive line, asking Auckland Central to ‘vote for the left-wing candidate that you believe in’.

Swarbrick talked of the campaign as ‘building a movement’, and so what the movement needed was to create a ‘bandwagon effect’. Given her high profile, combined with our voter contact targets, it was felt that we could set our own narrative convincingly. We were confident too, based on her first-term record as a politician, that she had demonstrated both competence and a capacity to disrupt the status quo in parliament. Key to creating this effect though, would be a good political-poll result. For Beckett, a result within 10 percent of Kaye would be close enough. It was the campaign’s intention to raise the money to commission such a poll but, in the end, they didn’t need to as two were carried out externally due to the race’s high profile.

What became obvious early on was that the flood of young people, some of high-school age and unable to vote themselves, meant that running a fully distributed model might not work, as Elsen worried about over-burdening inexperienced younger volunteers. This went against the common model of finding neighbourhood captains across an electorate, letting them run their own events, and giving close-to-full autonomy to volunteers as quickly as possible. The organising strategy was thus to provide a wide range of events, many with low barriers to entry, and to focus on building a community atmosphere. Key decision-making power remained centrally coordinated by a core team of around 12 people, though with the hope that those who

---

9 George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate: The Essential Guide for Progressives* (Chelsea: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004).

showed willingness would be allowed to coordinate activities of their own, or to join the core team.

In sum, the theory of change was that if we could have personal conversations with enough voters, we would be able to convince them to shift their vote because they'd be confident enough other voters would do the same. To execute this, we needed to engage hundreds of people in the campaign and create a positive environment in which they felt their contributions were meaningful.

Though the campaign's first volunteer event was on 10 February—an introduction to the campaign—it actually began months before, when the Auckland Central Green party branch discussed running Swarbrick for the seat. Receiving permission to run a 'two-tick' campaign and asking for both the party and candidate vote is rare. Normally, the thinking goes, if the campaign asks voters to vote for a Green candidate, then they would be less likely also to party-vote Green which, since the Greens poll around the 5-percent threshold, is risky. If voters backed the Green candidate but then assigned their party vote to Labour or the Māori party, for example, the Greens could slip below the threshold, with the obvious risk that if the candidate did not win, the Greens would tumble out of parliament. The corollary to that, however, and part of the case made by the Auckland Central branch, was that in the long-term the Greens need to secure electorate seats to provide the party with further resources and establish, as Swarbrick put it, 'proof of concept' of the Greens in power. Since Auckland Central is among the top electorates for the Green-party vote, the national campaign asked for Swarbrick's campaign to send volunteers to other electorates to help, and to ensure we asked for the party vote as much as for the candidate vote.

The campaign drew on the dominant three-phase model for left-wing campaigns. It started with a 'build the crowd' phase from February to April, gathering core volunteers to take on roles. From May to July it moved into 'shifting voters', with one-on-one contacts, engaging in deeper conversations than simply 'how are you expecting to vote?' Finally, there was the 'Get Out The Vote' phase, in which we contacted only those who

registered as maybe-intending or likely to vote for Swarbrick. This was set up by the national campaign team, which the Auckland Central team praised extensively for their meticulous planning and target setting. By the time the campaign got going there were 13 people with specific roles, though everyone was volunteering on top of full-time work or study.

## The campaign

By the middle of June, as we began door-knocking, a flurry of media profiles of the race framed it as a campaign with no chance of success. Despite this, there was no shortage of enthusiasm for supporting Swarbrick. By the campaign's end, we had 1,000 people signed-up to volunteer, with 400 people attending at least one event. Much of the mobilisation for Swarbrick's campaign came from those under 25 and many were hesitant to go straight to door-knocking (several school strike for climate students notwithstanding, who were only too happy to tell Herne Bay residents of the benefits of a wealth tax!).

Political scientist Hahrie Han's research shows that the best organisations create 'a sense of community so people's commitment to activity [isn't] just about the issue, but the people around them'.<sup>10</sup> We achieved this through a consistent emphasis on creating a fun, light-hearted and welcoming community, something the left sometimes fails to do. Before an event or activity, we each reaffirmed what motivated us to join the campaign. This practice was maintained even when only core volunteers who knew each other well were present. Hazel ensured that kai was always available and Bhen texted you to confirm your attendance at each event. The campaign leant on the skills of its volunteers and hosted cultural events where Swarbrick could speak to and enthuse the crowd. It offered an entry point for people to come and build relationships, with politics hovering at the edge. One of Swarbrick's key desires was to run a community campaign, and these events were a demonstration of that.

---

10 Hahrie Han, *How Organizations Develop Activists* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 66–68.

Two early stand-up-comedy shows raised enough money to rent a campaign office, further entrenching the campaign's culture with the K Road space becoming a kind of drop-in centre for volunteers. It was seen as a risk at the time, and was driven by Swarbrick, who wanted a space in which to build community. During weeks with up to 40 separate events, having one meeting place was, for Elsen, invaluable. The campaign-office launch party brought through several hundred people to mingle together with food and non-alcoholic drinks and some inspiring speeches at the end from Green MP Julie Anne Genter, comedian Tim Batt, and Swarbrick. A drag show organised by Max Tweedie, director of Pride, provided a final jolt of energy. For me this was a central lesson of the campaign: make it fun, let people become friends and they will come back.

Though the demographics of the seat were favourable, the prevalence of apartment blocks that we couldn't get into meant that we quickly began door-knocking the same suburbs twice. With local artists contributing designs, postcards were printed, and volunteers wrote handwritten messages offering personal stories as to why they were voting for Swarbrick. The postcard sessions became the best-attended events and were the idea of a volunteer whose cousin had done the same in Bernie Sanders's campaign. The postcards were then taken by those who lived in big apartment blocks to drop one to each flat. Though direct mail is at the bottom rung of electoral campaign tactics in terms of efficacy, by creating attractive non-political designs with individualised messages we hoped to see the improved effect that research suggests occurs when it is personalised.<sup>11</sup>

Both tactics were key for ongoing volunteer mobilisation. As Han's work shows, if you provide people with tasks or work that is meaningful and with discrete outcomes, they are more likely to come back. While there was an element of pretending that stuffing and hand-delivering thousands of letters was really important, it *was* essential that, through the two-week second lockdown and break from face-face campaigning, we had things to do. In total, we delivered 15,000 letters.

---

11 Donald Green and Alan Gerber, *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015).

Though the core team said they were campaigning to win, it was only on 15 July, when Kaye stepped down, that the campaign leadership believed victory was seriously possible. National took several weeks to select Emma Mellow as its candidate and were so delayed that, at the first electorate debate, they had to send a stand-in MP.

The second Auckland lockdown came into effect on 11 August and put a stop to ground campaigning. We used the time to catch up on canvassing data entry and organising the logistics of those 15,000 letters. Swarbrick did daily Instagram Live videos, which had between 6,000–16,000 views each, and published a series of photographs of campaign volunteers with a personal story about why they were supporting her. The idea was to continually create a sense that this campaign was working on the strength of the people in it, and that it was a safe and fun place to be.

A key absence in the scramble for tactical innovation necessitated by the lockdown was our lack of electorate phone numbers. We'd already called all 1,600 numbers on our list and so were unable to expand this during the lockdown. One of Elsen's recommendations for the next three years is to build a bank of mobile phone numbers, primarily of apartment-dwellers and students. Likewise, he felt we could make good use of peer-to-peer texting technology, particularly for younger voters. This was echoed in our experiences with volunteer mobilisations of the younger folks, who were uncomfortable with being called by the national campaign office and preferred our campaign's method of texting. On one evening, it took eight of us 90 minutes to text our whole list; better texting technology would allow a 'one-click' mass distribution in minutes.

On 19 September, the first poll dropped, with White ahead with 42.3, Mellow on 26.6, and Swarbrick on 24.2 percent. The media predicted a White victory. However, our leadership team was not too despondent. The 'don't knows' were high and, ironically, with Labour dismissing our campaign as irrelevant, to have Swarbrick so close to the National candidate legitimised her campaign. Plus, our data showed that two-thirds of Labour voters with whom we'd had 'meaningful interactions' said they were considering voting for Swarbrick. We thought it was close enough to persuade them.

When the second Auckland Central poll landed on 4 October, showing us now just nine points behind White, who was down to 35 points with Swarbrick on 26, we were cautiously optimistic that the electorate could be won. Though a nine-point swing seemed far-fetched, we had that ground data about how soft White's vote was.

For many, the high point of the campaign was a 'Meet Chlöe' event in a K Road shop on 25 September. So many people came that the shop overflowed, and people had to move into the carpark nearby. Some speakers and a box for Swarbrick to stand on were produced and the event became open-air. It was a demonstration of the campaign's power.

Part of the necessary energy to drive the bandwagon effect was the need for others to recognise that people were switching their vote so that they also felt able to do so. While White had dropped seven points and was under-polling the Labour party vote, which was sitting around 50 percent, the dominant narrative was still that White would probably win; something more was needed. People like Penny Hulse, Laila Harré, and others whom the core team wouldn't tell me about had offered to endorse Swarbrick publicly. They were never organised and acted on—which we agreed was a mistake—since burnishing Swarbrick with established credibility could be a powerful way of signalling her capacity to win. In the end, it was journalist Simon Wilson who was the highest-profile person to endorse her, writing publicly what we'd figured out internally: that just 1,400 Labour voters needed to switch and vote for Swarbrick for her to win.<sup>12</sup> For us, the 1,400 became a rallying cry. Every time we went door-knocking, we knew we each had the opportunity to turn a handful of people, and collectively meet that critical amount. Having such a clear target was extremely motivating. As it turned out, data from the Electoral Commission showed that, along with Waiariki, in Auckland Central we were able to do this most effectively. One third of people who party voted Labour also voted for Swarbrick.

Though successful, not everything the campaign did worked. A scheduled film screening and fund-raiser was almost cancelled the night

---

12 Simon Wilson, 'Vote 2020: Simon Wilson's election diary – why Chlöe Swarbrick in Auckland Central?' *NZ Herald*, 6 October 2020.

before because only a handful of tickets had been sold. More significantly, on 4 October we had a rally marking the opening of advanced voting, which was planned as the final peak of the campaign. We wanted to mobilise hundreds of people in the CBD and then to march down to the Ellen Melville Centre to vote. Tactics that require a media story with high numbers are always high-risk, since a story or image about how few people came signals weakness. The rally was intended to produce news clips of a mass of people turning out to vote for Swarbrick, which would add to the bandwagon effect. As it turned out, the rally in Khartoum Place was quite small, with maybe 100–150 people. It felt to me like it was close to being a demotivating event. As it started, many of us acting as marshals had to remove our Green party hi-vis vests because we made up the majority of the crowd! Harré did speak and offered Swarbrick her endorsement, which landed Harré in trouble with her local Labour party!

By election day on Saturday 17 October, most of the people we went to door-knock had already voted, so I had a mid-afternoon nap in the empty office. By the campaign's end, we'd raised over \$50,000, mobilised 400 volunteers, posted 15,000 letters, and spoken to 11,000 voters—more than any other Green campaign—having meaningful interactions with some voters three or four times.

As someone from the UK who, since 2010, has lived through repeated political defeats, election night in Auckland was a moment of joy mixed with genuine disbelief. Experiencing winning, after most people saying it wasn't possible, after doing all the things you thought might work and feeling them having worked, was glorious. The final vote saw Swarbrick take 12,631 votes and become the Green MP for Auckland Central with a majority of 1,068.

## Reflections

Exactly how much the win had to do with Swarbrick, with the field campaign, or with the external conditions is hard to know. It is possible that the cannabis referendum increased the youth turnout, up 10.8 percent

from 2017 for those aged between 18–24 and 8.5 percent for those aged 25–29.<sup>13</sup> It is also possible that Labour’s dominance in the polls meant people were more open to giving Swarbrick a chance since they expected Labour to win. It is possible, too, that if Kaye had remained the National candidate we wouldn’t have won. For the core team, it was ‘90% down to Chlöe’, with a well-run campaign pushing it over the edge. It is undeniable that her high profile was a significant factor.

The campaign suffered no interpersonal fallouts and made volunteers feel valued no matter how much time they could commit to it. Swarbrick’s narrative that people should pick the best candidate for Auckland succeeded because it was heard in the media and volunteers carried it into thousands of face-to-face conversations.

Han defines mobilising as ‘identifying groups of people already most likely to take action’ and speaking to them. She labels this ‘transactional’ because those being mobilised are given discrete tasks inside a fixed structure. This is the essence of electoral campaigning. Organising, though, she writes, is about ‘making activists into leaders . . . and developing the number of leaders you have’. She calls this ‘transformational’ because it ‘transforms people’s ability to act on their own behalf’.<sup>14</sup> This is something we could have focused on more in Swarbrick’s campaign. Some volunteers did coordinate events, but there was no systematic attempt to transform the mostly younger volunteer base into campaigners as part of a broader movement. There isn’t yet a movement outside of the campaign, a key absence that separates it from the Green victory in Queensland and the electoral success of the likes of Ocasio-Cortez.

Though volunteers did take on more responsibility, it was not a key objective to bring people through a ‘ladder of engagement’. It was noticeable that, by the final weeks, despite 400 volunteers, it was the same 15–20 people who regularly went door knocking. Perhaps with a clearer political ideology behind the campaign that focused on Han’s conception of organising, we could have emphasised political education. To be clear,

---

13 Henry Cooke, ‘Youthquake?’ *Stuff*, 30 November 2020.

14 Han, *How Organizations Develop Activists*, 89–123.

I don't mean discussing the merits of socialism, but rather skills-based training (such as how to have persuasive conversations, of which we only had one event) and the development of a broader strategic understanding that elections are one tactic in a larger toolbox that, once Swarbrick won, would enable us to win more and to hold her accountable.

Though the campaign leadership was completely sure of what our winning coalition was, there were still last-minute questions of how to reach older voters and ad-hoc events without clear objectives. A better analysis of the electorate would have highlighted organisations like sports clubs, business associations, neighbourhood-watch groups, and churches that we could have tried to use to access larger groups more efficiently.

Ultimately, what so often happens in electoral cycles is that an organisation springs up, grows rapidly, engages a lot of people, and then disperses once the campaign is won. For us in Auckland Central, a new strategy is required, one that utilises the resources and power of an electorate office to stop this from happening. One area on which Swarbrick is clear is that she wants to build and be part of a movement. Whether the Green party branch can be what Chilean theorist Marta Harnecker calls 'a political instrument' of the left is open to debate, but looking to the work of other left-wing politicians and how they have transformed their offices into campaigning hubs certainly provides inspiration.

Swarbrick's discourse on a politics of participation and movement-building will have the opportunity to be tested. Key to this will be galvanising those organisations that do exist, such as AAAP, NZPC, and some of the unions, into something like a political movement.

Running an election campaign for socialist candidates should be one tactic in a larger strategy to build socialist power. No matter how much power we build outside of parliament, at some point we will still need to campaign and elect socialists who can pass the laws and implement the policies for which we create the political space. But they must be tethered to movements and organisations outside of parliament that have the power to support them when they take a shellacking and rescind support if their compromises go too far.

Over the last decade, the left has almost shortcut it's way to parliamentary power in a number of countries, but has lacked sufficient extra-parliamentary power to defend itself against backlash from the establishment. Swarbrick's victory risks being a continuation of this trend as there is no clear long-term strategy around her.

Election campaigns bring people into politics, eager to find meaning and to be involved. They occur regularly enough that they should always be in our plans and each one can be used as practice for new tactics or strategies. The transformational organising that we can do during a campaign is dependent on creating a community that people enjoy being in. We have the opportunity to transform mostly younger people, fed up with neoliberal life, into committed campaigners ready to engage outside of elections. Absent an explicit socialist political narrative, the narrative that Swarbrick uses, of power and agency being stripped from people, and how it should be returned, offers an engaging entry point. If the left can create a wider master narrative, built collaboratively with a range of organisations across Aotearoa New Zealand, we could link up these local victories into a single political movement that does not need to run through the Greens. We always start with the resources we have, and in Auckland we have an electorate office with two paid staff and a popular candidate with a motivated constituency. Let's see what happens.

██████████ ECONOMIC  
██████████ AND  
██████████ SOCIAL  
██████████ RESEARCH  
██████████ AOTEAROA



## Whose Futures?

Many have become accustomed to speaking of what comes next in terms of a singular ‘future’. Such accounts tend to operate within the narrow confines of colonial capitalism and assume continued economic growth. But there is no ‘one’ future; there are many. As the contributions to this book attest, irreconcilable and interrelated futures are already playing out in the present.

This collection brings together voices and perspectives from Aotearoa New Zealand to interrogate whose lives are at stake, whose voices and visions count, and what elements are at play in the unfolding of certain futures over others. Authors highlight the need to be attentive to how various social technologies and institutions invite certain ways of being, thinking and acting and exclude others. In doing so, they offer a series of reflections on futures ‘from below’, in order to amplify voices and fight for alternatives.

### **Contributors**

Hana Burgess  
Luke Goode  
Kassie Hartendorp  
Aitor Jiménez González  
John Morgan  
Anna-Maria Murtola  
Te Kahuratai Painting  
Anisha Sankar  
Sy Taffel  
Arcia Tecun  
Samuel Te Kani  
Shannon Walsh  
Toyah Webb

**Available for purchase  
at Unity Books, Strange  
Goods and via email  
contact@esra.nz**