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Cuba Trains Doctors for Pacific Islands, New Zealand's Supporting Role

This is an abbreviated article by Sharon McLennan, a senior lecturer in development studies at Massey University, with some additional information by Edgardo Valdes Lopez, Cuban Ambassador to New Zealand from 2019 to 2023. Both articles were originally published in the New Zealand International Review, March/April 2024, the bi-monthly N Z Institute of International Affairs magazine.

It is republished to highlight the tremendous success of this Cuban programme, supported by New Zealand, to address health care challenges that has been going for over five decades and which is committed to training doctors for Pacific countries.

Over the past decade Cuba has contributed to more than doubling the number of doctors in some small Pacific countries.

Remarkable increases have occurred in Kiribati (18 to 51), the Solomon Islands (79 to 170), Tonga (44 to 80), Vanuatu (27 to 67 and Tuvalu (7 to 27). Until 2022, 220 professionals from that region graduated in Cuba, and 34 young people from the Pacific are currently studying medicine in Havana.

Cuba has a high number of doctors and nurses of recognised quality with years of experience working abroad, particularly in remote areas with less favoured population groups.

Thousands of Cuban doctors have served in Latin America and Africa in the five decades since the 1959 revolution. Cuba has a commitment to train doctors for the world. Currently, Cuba's doctors and nurses work in countries like Italy, Vietnam and Qatar.

In the 1960s, the United States imposed severe economic and commercial sanctions and a financial blockade against Cuba, which applies today. It is a deliberate attempt at regime change and to isolate the country to make it fail.

In the late 1990s, Cuban researchers' work was useful for developing a vaccine to stop the spread of meningococcal B in New Zealand. The vaccine was used in the country between 2004 and 2011.

Craig Hawke , acting CE of New Zealand's MFAT and Cuba's Ambassador Maria del Carmen Caseiro sign the co-operation agreement to support health care in the Pacific Islands, 12 February 2015

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New Zealand and Cuba have had good bilateral relationships with a history of cooperation in different areas. In 2003, eight Cuban specialists advised a literacy programme in New Zealand that started in three communities with 525 participants: two Maori and one South Island Pacific group. Later the programme covered more than 5,000 participants, using the Cuba method 'Yes I can'.

After Nelson Mandela came out of goal for his opposition to apartheid, after 27 years on Robben Island, to become South Africa's President, Cuba sent doctors, nurses and medical technicians to South Africa to operate on two special trains, kitted out as hospitals, travelling in remote country areas, because of the need for doctors and because white doctors were fleeing the country.

Public and Primary Health

Much of the work of Cuban doctors is directed towards long-term public and primary health care. It is based on solidarity and the right to health and on Cuba's relatively well performing health system. This provides Cubans with better access to healthcare and longer life expectancies than most developed countries.

Until 1999 Cuban medical co-operation was largely based on sending their health professionals to serve in other countries, but this was unsustainable. To address this, Cuba created the Latin America School of Medicine in Havana, and does not charge as they provide medical scholarships for international students.

Cuban doctors prepare to go to Jamaica to help fight Covid-19

Under agreements with countries, students from lower income and medically under resourced communities return home to serve their communities. Programmes are aimed to build health care capability in countries around the globe.

Timor Leste

The first nation in the wider Pacific to receive Cuban assistance was the newly independent nation of Timor Leste, one of the poorest countries in the world. At the time of independence from Indonesia, their total income was a mere US$9 million from the sale of high-grade coffee. Subsequently they are attempting to develop oil and gas from deposits off their coast.

Over a decade Cuba trained nearly 1,000 Timor Leste doctors in Havana and deployed 300 Cuban doctors to Timor Leste to provide medical care and to supervise and train students and new doctors.

This was the programme that spread across the Pacific. This now includes specialists in oncology, nephrology, psychiatry, endocrinology, internal medicine and others – many of whom were the only such specialist in their own country at that time.

The newly trained doctors have returned home over the past decade and their impact has been significant.

Doubling the number of doctors in the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu has meant many key health statistics have continued to improve across the region.

Language Training by New Zealand

New Zealand's involvement in supporting Cuba's programme to train Cuban Spanish speaking doctors for Pacific nations has been important. A Bay of Plenty English School provides language training for Cuban doctors.

It began in February 2015 when a cooperation agreement was signed between MFAT and Cuba to fund and provide an 18 week English language training programme course for up to 15 Cuban doctors, and to pay for the air fares of those doctors from Cuba to New Zealand and onwards to the islands when they finish their course.

The programme was renewed in 2017 for a further 3 years during a visit to Cuba by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gerry Brownlee. He noted that the programme had delivered positive results in the Pacific and emphasized New Zealand and Cuba's shared interest in the Pacific and an ongoing commitment to small island developing states.

Israel's Treatment of Palestinians

Palestine owned land from 1946 to 2012 shown in green

Israel's policies of segregation, dispossession and exclusion across all territories under its control clearly amount to apartheid. It says the international community has an obligation to act.

Amnesty International's findings build on a growing body of work by Palestinian, Israeli and international NGOs, who have increasingly applied the apartheid framework to the situation in Israel and or the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

In a damning new report released 1 February 2024 by Amnesty International, it says that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid against Palestinians, as defined by international law.

The investigation details how Israel enforces a system of oppression and domination against the people of Palestine wherever it has control over their rights. This includes Palestinians living in Israel and the Occupied Palestine Territories, as well as displaced refugees.

This comprehensive report sets out how massive seizures of Palestinian land and property, unlawful killings, forcible transfer, drastic movement restrictions, and the denial of nationality and citizenship to Palestinians are all components to apartheid under international law.

This system is maintained by violations which Amnesty International found to constitute apartheid as a crime against humanity, as defined in the Rome Statute and Apartheid Convention.

The report reveals and exposes the true extent of Israel's actions since 1946. Palestinians are treated as an inferior racial group and systematically deprived of their rights. Investigators found that

> This report shows the built-up frustration and lack of any hope for the future of Palestinians because of the gradual systematic removal from their land and their rights.
>
> It reveals the true extent of Israel's apartheid regime whether they live in Gaza, East Jerusalem, the rest of the West Bank, or Israel itself.
>
> Investigators found that Israel's policies of segregation, dispossession and exclusion across all territories under its control clearly amount to apartheid.

Identifying Apartheid

A system of apartheid is an institutionalised regime of oppression and domination by one racial group over another. It is a serious human rights violation which is prohibited in public international law.

Amnesty International's extensive research and legal analysis, carried out in consultation with external experts, demonstrates that Israel enforces such a system against Palestinians through laws, policies and practices which ensure their prolonged and cruel discriminatory treatment.

In light of the systematic unlawful killings of Palestinians documented in this report , Amnesty International is also calling on the UN Security Council to impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Israel.

Palestinians treated as a threat

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has pursued a policy of establishing and then maintaining a Jewish demographic majority and maximising control over land and resources to benefit Jewish Israelis.

In 1967, Israel extended this policy to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Today, all territories controlled by Israel continue to be administered with the purpose of benefiting Jewish Israelis to the detriment

of Palestinians, while Palestinians refugees continue to be excluded.

Amnesty International recognises that Jews,like Palestinians, claim a right to self-determination, and does not challenge Israel's desire to be a home for Jews. Similarly, it does not consider that Israel labelling itself a 'Jewish State' in itself indicates an intention to oppress and dominate.

However, Amnesty International's report shows that successive Israeli governments have considered Palestinians a demographic threat, and imposed measures to control and decrease their presence and access to land in Israel and the Occupied Palestine Territories.

These demographic aims are well illustrated by official plans to 'Judaize' areas of Israel and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which continue to put thousands of Palestinians at risk of forcible transfer.

For example, Palestine citizens of Israel are denied a nationality, establishing a legal differentiation from Jewish Israelis. In the West Bank and Gaza, where Israel has controlled the population registry since 1967, Palestinians have no citizenship and most are considered stateless, requiring ID cards from the Israeli military to live and work in the territories.

Denied the Right to Return Home

Palestinian refugees and their descendants, who were displaced in the 1947- 49 and 1967 conflicts, continue to be denied the right to return to their former places of residence. Israel's exclusion of refugees is a flagrant violation of international law which has left millions in a perpetual limbo of forced displacement.

Palestinians in annexed East Jerusalem are granted permanent residence instead of citizenship - though this status is permanent in name only. Since 1967, more than 14,000 Palestinians have had their residency revoked at the discretion of the Ministry of the Interior, resulting in their forcible transfer outside the city.

Palestinian citizens of Israel , who comprise about 19% of the population, face many forms of institutionalised discrimination. In 2018, discrimination against Palestinians was crystalised in a constitutional law which, for the first time, enshrined Israel exclusively as a 'nation state of the Jewish people'.

The law also promotes the building of Jewish settlements and downgrades Arabic's status as an official language.

Dispossession

The dispossession and displacement of Palestinians from their homes is a crucial pillar of Israel' apartheid system. Since its establishment, the Israel state has enforced massive and cruel land seizures against Palestinians and continues to implement myriad laws and policies to force Palestinians into small enclaves.

Since 1948, Israel has demolished hundreds of thousands of homes and other properties across all areas under its jurisdiction and effective control.

As in the Negev/Naqba, Palestinians in East Jerusalem and Area C of the Occupied Palestinian Territories live under full Israeli control. The authorities deny building permits to Palestinians in these areas, forcing them to build illegal structures which are then demolished again and again.

Thirty five Bedouin villages, home to 68,000 people, are currently 'unrecognised' by Israel, which means they are cut off from the national electricity and water supply and targeted for demolition. They are also excluded from the healthcare and education systems because the villages have no 'official' status.

The continued expansion of illegal Israeli settlements exacerbates the situation. The construction of these settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories has been a government policy since 1967.

Settlements today cover 10% of the land in the West Bank, and some 38% of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem was expropriated between 1967 and 2017.

Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem are frequently targeted by settler organisations which, with the full backing of the Israeli government, work to displace Palestinian families and hand their homes to settlers.

One such neighbourhood, Sheike Jarrah, has been the site of frequent protests since May 2021 as families battle to keep homes under threat of a settler lawsuit.

Stringent Movement Restrictions

Since the mid-1990s, Israeli authorities have imposed increasingly stringent movement restrictions on Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. A web of military, territories restricts their travel into Israel or abroad.

A 700km fence, which Israelis are still extending,

has isolates Palestinian communities inside 'military zones', and they must obtain multiple special permits any time they enter or leave their homes.

In Gaza, more than 2 million Palestinians live under an Israeli blockade which has created a humanitarian crisis. It is near impossible for Gazans to travel abroad or into the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and they are effectively segregated from the rest of the world.

For Palestinians, the difficulty of travelling within and in and out of the Occupied Palestinian Territories is a constant reminder of their powerlessness. Their every move is subject to the Israeli military's approval, and the simplest daily task means navigating a web of violent control.

Amnesty International's Recommendations

Amnesty International provides numerous specific recommendations of how the Israeli authorities can dismantle the apartheid system and the discrimination, segregation and oppression which sustain it.

- The organisation is calling for an end to the brutal practice of home demolitions and forced evictions as a first step. Israel must grant equal rights to all Palestinians in Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories, in line with the principles of international law.
- It must recognise the right of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to homes where they or their families once lived and provide victims of human rights violations and crimes against humanity with full reparations.
- The scale and seriousness of the violations documented in Amnesty International's report call for a drastic change in the international community's approach to the human rights crisis in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- All states may exercise universal jurisdiction over persons reasonably suspected of committing the crime of apartheid under international law, and states that are party to the Apartheid Convention have an obligation to do so.
- The international response to apartheid must no longer be limited to bland condemnations and equivocating. Unless the root causes are tackled, Palestinians and Israelis will remain locked in the cycle of violence which has destroyed so many lives.

Amnesty International Report: Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians – A Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity. Abridged.

Podcasts

Download a podcast app from Google Play, or Apple, depending on your phone. Pocket Casts is good, Google Podcasts are disappearing shortly. Then explore, pick a theme, see what's trending. There are thousands of hours of education, information, entertainment, whatever you want.

Here are two of the best.

The Rest is Politics

Alistair Campbell and Rory Stewart, covering British and world politics. Knowledgeable, opinionated, funny, warm. Their spin-off podcast "Leading" has weekly in-depth interviews: eg, Tony Blair, Hillary Clinton, John Major, Gary Lineker, Nancy Pelosi.

The Rest is History

Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook present weekly podcasts on modern and ancient history. From Carthage, to Custer's Last Stand, Pompeii, astronauts to the moon with Tom Hanks, every one of them is fascinating, educational and entertaining.

Word of Warning: Download on Wi-Fi, not data. And they can fill up your phone storage if you get busy subscribing to too many different ones. Unsubscribing will remove the downloads and free up storage.

Parliament Buildings: the New and Restoring the Old

In a recent podcast from RNZ's The House, there is a description of the new wooden building that is soon to be built on the parliamentary precinct to accommodate upwards of 30 MPs. It is expected to be completed by the 2026 election.

Over several decades, Ministers, MPs and their staff have been housed in different buildings including the leased Bowen House but by 2020, this building was vacated when it was deemed in need of seismic strengthening.

The next move for the 'overflow' MPs and their staff was to a building under the Library. This was a short -lived occupancy as a change in the building code meant the offices were down to 15 percent of code necessitating another move to the upper levels of the Library. In the podcast, there is a description of some MPs' offices being "stashed away in virtual cupboards in the attic of the Parliamentary Library."

It would seem that the new building cannot come soon enough and the price tag of $257 million, which includes a new security building, could be seen as money well spent.

Palace of Westminster

New buildings or renovating old ones do not come cheap. In the UK, MPs and peers are being asked to consider options for making the Palace of Westminster fit for purpose. A report in 2022 estimated that essential restoration work could take up to 76 years with a repair bill reaching £22 billion if MPs remained on site.

This year, MPs and peers will be presented with restoration options under the Restoration and Renewal Programme with a final decision to be made in 2025.

Options range from

- everyone who works in the Palace of Westminster moving out but the MPs still meeting in the debating chamber with journalists able to report on proceedings
- a second option, that requires all MPs to move out which would allow restoration to proceed faster.
- A third option for consideration is for MPs and peers to remain in the Palace but face disruptive works around them. This would be the slowest and most expensive option.

Proposed parliamentary building and security wing

The Binnenhof

Meanwhile, the cost of renovating the Dutch parliamentary complex is expected to balloon to €2 billion, more than four times the original estimate.

More asbestos has been found, several walls and ceilings have rotted and the water from the lake on the north side is leaking into the Senate building.

The Binnenhof complex is the oldest monumental structure in the Netherlands, and one of the oldest centres of government in the world, dating back to the sixteenth century.

The Binnenhof

The British Post Office Scandal

For those of you who followed the British Post Office saga either in the media or the dramatisation on television, *Mr. Bates vs the Post Office*, there is a piece written by the politician James Arbuthnot, who helped sub-postmasters seek justice after the Post Office wrongly sought and won convictions for theft, fraud, and false accounting against many of them.

The MP, the Postmistress, and Truth over the Horizon: My pursuit of the Post Office scandal

"During a coffee morning, in 2009, I was told an extraordinary story by a local councillor, about a sub postmistress, Jo Hamilton, who was in court, in Winchester, pleading guilty to a charge of false accounting, when the entire village had turned out in her support. This was my first inkling of what we now know as the great Post Office scandal

The next was a letter from a constituent named David Bristow, the sub postmaster in Odiham, which is about three miles from Jo Hamilton's village. Like Jo Hamilton, he was being told that the Post Office's new computer system, Horizon, had uncovered a huge discrepancy in his accounts, and that he owed the Post Office thousands of pounds.

I met them both in Jo Hamilton's post office/café, but concluded that there was not much I could do, at this stage, apart from writing to the Secretary of State, Peter Mandelson, who passed the matter to the post office minister, Pat McFadden, who replied that this was an operational matter for the Post Office.

All guilty?

Then I heard that another MP, David Jones, also had a constituent – the now famous Alan Bates – who had fallen foul of the Horizon system. David and I fixed a meeting with officials from the Post Office, and were firmly told that Horizon was 'completely robust', that no other sub postmasters had had problems with it, and that these three – Jo Hamilton, David Bristow and Alan Bates – were guilty of what they had been accused of. I came away feeling very uneasy, but as far as David or I could see, we were at a dead end.

About 18 months later, I heard that Odiham village was up in arms over a new threat to their post office, because David Bristow's successor had been removed, after Horizon had found a discrepancy in his accounts.

This was too much of a coincidence. If I was to believe what the Post Office had told me, there were four sub postmasters in the entire country having this problem with Horizon, and three out of the four were in my constituency. So, I wrote to every MP to see if they knew of other cases, and quickly discovered that there were many more, though we could not yet know how many. We formed a core group of six or seven MPs who were troubled by this problem, including Oliver Letwin and Andrew Tyrie – but not David Jones, who had to recuse himself when he was appointed to the Cabinet.

'I can't believe you're crooks!'

In February 2012, we had a meeting in Parliament with about 30 sub postmasters, and their solicitors, Shoosmiths. I looked around the room, and told them: "I can't believe that you're a load of crooks. You wouldn't be coming to the House of Commons to complain about this, in these numbers, if there was nothing in it. I am going to pursue this with the Chairman of the Post Office."

That Chairman, recently appointed, was Alice Perkins, Jack Straw's wife, whom I knew from my time as Minister for Defence Procurement. Oliver Letwin and I arranged to meet her, and Paula Vennells, Managing Director of the Post Office. They were adamant that the Horizon was 'robust'. I had also written to the Chief Executive, Moya Greene, who replied using that same word 'robust'. But they knew Alan Bates was organising a group of aggrieved former sub postmasters, and wanted a resolution.

The accountants

Paula Vennells suggested that the Post Office should bring in forensic accountants, which was exactly what we needed. Andrew Tyrie had already suggested it to the MPs, but any accountants we hired would not have had access to Horizon, and there was a problem of who would pay. Paula Vennells's offer got round both problems. She brought in two accountants, Ian Henderson and Ron Warmington, from the London firm, Second Sight. (In the TV drama, they are morphed into one character, called Bob).

Paula Vennells also agreed with me and other MPs that there should be a mediation scheme that allowed individual sub postmasters to take their grievances to the Post Office, and to Second Sight. That scheme was set up, with a retired judge, Sir Anthony

Hooper, in the chair.

But this promising start came to nothing. In the end, Second Sight's involvement did not solve anything – not through any fault of theirs, and not for the reason that we originally feared. We, the MPs, had had our doubts about whether accountants hired and paid by the Post Office could be trusted to act independently, but when we met them, we were impressed by their determination to hold a proper investigation. We introduced them to Alan Bates, who was also initially suspicious, and brought along his own forensic accountant, Kay Linnell.

At first, it went slowly, but well. Second Sight produced an interim report, in which they said that they could not find any systemic issues that would affect every post office, at that stage, but that there were issues with software and bugs that had caused real problems in about 74 sub post offices. The Post Office treated this report as a clean bill of health for Horizon, despite the caveats.

Jo Hamilton's file

Second Sight was also allowed to study Jo Hamilton's file. There, they saw that the Post Office had accused her of theft, but dropped the charge when she agreed to plead guilty to false accounting, but also discovered that there was no evidence to support the charge of theft. It was wholly improper to use the threat of a charge for which there was no evidence to extract a guilty plea to an offence for which there was evidence. Second Sight warned that this could amount to abuse of public office.

That contributed to a rapid deterioration of the relationship between the Post Office and the accountants they had themselves brought in to examine the problems. Second Sight was told that they would not be allowed access to any more files, because they were accountants, not lawyers, so weren't appropriately qualified. This was nonsense, and not what the MPs had agreed to.

We had been told at the outset there would not be any 'no-go' areas, but now the Post Office ruled that the mediation scheme was to be open only to sub postmasters who had not pleaded guilty or been convicted of a criminal offence. So, Jo Hamilton, for instance, was not going to be allowed to go before Sir Anthony Hooper to ask why it was that a loss suddenly appeared when she was putting figures into the Horizon system, and as she was on the phone to the helpline, the loss doubled, in front of her eyes.

In fact, 90 per cent of the cases that MPs wanted to bring to the mediation scheme were being excluded. And even on those cases that qualified there was no feedback, because the Post Office insisted that the scheme was confidential, and giving feedback would threaten its integrity.

The show down

The build-up of frustration among MPs, and Second Sight, came to a final bust up at a meeting in November 2014, with Paula Vennells, Angela van den Bogerd, who was handling complaints, and Chris Aujard, the Post Office's new general counsel. I told them: "You are trying to exclude Jo Hamilton from the mediation scheme. She was the entire reason I came in. What on earth makes you think I would agree to a scheme such as this, if my constituent is excluded from it?"

They had no answer to that. We, the MPs, said we were breaking off negotiations with the Post Office.

Then for the first time in my 28 years in Parliament, I arranged an adjournment debate, held on 17 December 2014, to which numerous MPs contributed, including Andrew Bridgen, who raised the case of his constituent, Michael Rudkin, who had visited Fujitsu headquarters and had seen a roomful of technical wizards who appeared to be altering sub postmasters' accounts remotely, which was supposed be impossible. Michael Rudkin was ushered out of the building, and the next day he was suspended from his post office and accused of being £40,000 adrift.

I stopped being an MP at the election in 2015, but meanwhile, somehow, Alan Bates managed to assemble 555 people to take the Post Office to court.

First two turning points

The first turning point in the entire saga came in 2019, when Mr Justice Fraser delivered an absolutely stonking judgement against the Post Office, finding that the Horizon was not at all 'robust', that the contract imposed on sub postmasters was unfair, because it made them liable for apparent losses, whether or not they had done anything wrong, and that remote access to postmasters' accounts was not only possible, but it had been happening. He also found that Post Office witnesses had sought to mislead him.

The Post Office agreed to pay £57 million compensation, but only about £12 million of that would actually go to sub postmasters. The rest would be swallowed up by the cost of litigation, but the sub postmasters had to accept what was on offer, because they were running out of money.

The second turning point was when Kate Osborne

MP asked Boris Johnson during Prime Minister's Questions for a public inquiry into the post office scandal, and – much to the surprise, no doubt, of his officials – Boris Johnson said yes. Boris did the right thing, by mistake.

Sixty postmasters had died without receiving full compensation; some went to prison, some committed suicide. Families were broken up. There were a number of shocking divorces, bankruptcies, and mental health problems. Yet all of this was still under the radar of the British public.

The drama

Then came the third turning point, when the ITV drama, Mr Bates vs the Post Office, was broadcast earlier this year. It was, by the way, very strange to see myself being portrayed in a drama: my family say that the actor, Alex Jennings, caught my mannerisms perfectly. Far more importantly, the drama caught the attention of a shocked public. The outcry brought the scandal to the full attention of Rishi Sunak, who agreed that all the criminal convictions that relied on the accuracy of Horizon would have to be quashed. About 100 already had been, but the court system simply could not cope with the 700 to 900 still outstanding, which was why Parliament had to legislate.

I have been serving now for two years on the Horizon compensation board. I suspect that the total bill for compensation will come to £1 billion or more. Part will have to come from the Treasury – meaning you and me – because the profits made by the Post Office went into the public coffers, but I would say that a good 50 per cent should come from Fujitsu.

It makes me deeply angry and very upset that a British institution should have behaved like this towards people who had been pillars of their communities. They were the glue holding communities together. We need a network of community hubs across the country, but these good people were hounded and vilified.

It happened because the people in charge thought that they must make the scandal go away, or it would be an existential threat not only to the Horizon accounting system, in which they had invested nearly £100 million, but also to the Post Office itself. As it turns out, they may have been right. The Post Office may not survive the scandal. I am in two minds about whether it should.

Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom was MP for Wanstead and Woodfors, 1987–97, and for North East Hampshire, 1997–2015.

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The Death of Serving Member Fa'anānā Efeso Collins

Fa'anānā Efeso Collins' parliamentary career was cut short by his sudden death in February 2024.

Described as an inspirational leader who left an enduring legacy for his South Auckland community, he will be remembered as a champion for the Pasifika communities across Tāmaki Makaurau.

His contribution to local politics began in 2013 with a term on the Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board . He went on to serve two terms as an Auckland Council Councillor, representing the Manukau ward from 2016 to 2022.

He ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Auckland in the 2022 election and then in February 2023, he announced he was seeking and won selection as the Green candidate for Panmure-Ōtāhuhu, and a place on the party list. In October, he became one of fifteen Green MPs as part of the 54th Parliament.

The Death of Former Speaker Jonathan Hunt

One of the longest serving MPs, Jonathan Hunt, died at the age of 85 during March, having served 39 years as a parliamentarian until he retired in 2005. He then was appointed as the New Zealand High Commissioner to the United Kingdom for three years.

He entered Parliament in 1966 as Labour MP for New Lynn at the age of 27 and was known as the 'Baby of the House'. Under the David Lange government of 1984-1987, he became Chief Whip and Minister of Housing, Tourism, Broadcasting and Postmaster General.

Rt Hon Jonathan Hunt ONZ PC

In 1996 he became a list MP and was appointed Speaker of the House in 1999 by the Helen Clark's Labour Government. He held this position for 6 years.

Nobody knew Standing Orders and Parliamentary Procedures better than Jonathan. He was a walking encyclopaedia about these matters. It was often said he was married to Parliament, even though he was single.

He boycotted the state dinner for United States Vice President, Spiro Agnew, in the 1970s, together with Martyn Findlay, Arthur Faulkner and Bob Tizard, to protest American policy on Vietnam.

Jonathan contributed to major reforms of Parliament when the Office of the Clerk's functions were split, and the Parliamentary Service was established.

In his valedictory speech to Parliament, he spoke of his work to help save the National and Concert programmes and keep them commercial free.

Jonathan implemented the 1984 Labour policy of establishing Maori and Pacific Island radio. He also promoted the establishment of New Zealand on Air and the Symphony Orchestra being separated from broadcasting.

He was legendary for his kindness, warmth and hospitality and a deep love of cricket. He was generous with the time given to young people with an interest in politics and was very supportive of new MPs.

He was affectionally known as the 'Minister of Wine and Cheese', and many parliamentarians from all sides of the House were subject to his hospitality. His efforts to restructure the wine industry in the 1980s by paying grape growers to remove some varieties from their orchards helped put the industry on its feet.

Most importantly, during his parliamentary career he was successful in promoting his private members bill, resulting in the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985.

This gave thousands of Kiwis the opportunity to know who their birth parents were, and for birth mothers to find out about their adult adoptees. To this day it is still relevant and used by many.

Jonathan enjoyed participating in the three yearly fun concerts with Labour Caucus members at Parliament and other parliamentarians to raise funds for the Mary Potter Hospice.

He had the honour of being called 'Father of the House' by the time he retired.

He was awarded the Member of the Order of New Zealand.

President's Message

There would have been much justifiable concern at the recently released study by Otago University and Mental Health and Addiction Services on threats and harassment of Members of Parliament.

The report showed a dramatic increase in the level of threats against and harassment of MPs over an eight-year period, with 98% of MPs surveyed in 2022 reporting they had been the subject of some form of harassment. This figure was up from 87% reported in a similar survey in 2014. Threats made against MPs rose from 43 in 2019 to 101 in 2022, before falling back to 43 in 2023.

Many of us will relate to these statistics, having been on the receiving end of threats or harassment during our own time in Parliament. In my case, I was subject to two serious death threats and one major blackmail threat, all of which were dealt with appropriately by the Police at the time.

However, the trend of increasing threats towards MPs is not limited to New Zealand alone. In 2016, British MP Jo Cox was fatally shot and stabbed at her constituency clinic. United States Congresswoman Gabby Giffords was shot and seriously wounded during a constituency gathering in Arizona in 2011.

And just recently, the new Irish Prime Minister, Simon Harris, warned that politics was becoming more dangerous and that warning signs around the abuse of politicians and public figures must be taken seriously "before the unthinkable happens".

In New Zealand, MPs told the Otago University study that they and their staff needed more support and resources to manage the threats they were facing. One of the study's co-authors concluded that "for new politicians, de-escalation, safety, and cybersecurity training should be part of the induction package, and resources made available to increase home and office security measures".

In response, Speaker Gerry Brownlee said the Parliamentary Service was taking a wider look at security arrangements in the increasingly tense political environment, and that he had already received a report on the issue. One specific suggestion that he raised was paring back on the 4,000 swipe cards that allow unrestricted access to Parliament.

Our Association will obviously support any practical and worthwhile steps that can be taken to improve the safety of MPs, and to reduce the levels and types of harassment many, especially women MPs, have been subject to. We do not want the "unthinkable" to happen here.

Hon Peter Dunne, President

However, there is a wider and more worrying context to this. Around the same time the Otago University and Mental Health and Addiction Services report was released, the IPSOS research company released results of a first-time survey of New Zealanders' attitudes to populism and discontent. It showed some concerning results about our attitudes, including three that might explain – but certainly not justify – the rising level of threats against MPs.

According to the IPSOS survey, 63% of New Zealand respondents agree that "the political and economic elite don't care about hard-working people" and only 19% disagree. 60% agree (and 20% disagree) that "the main divide in our society is between ordinary citizens and the political and economic elite". 55% agree (and 18% disagree) that "traditional parties and politicians don't care about people, like me".

While these results should be taken with a grain of salt, and are less polarised than those for other countries, they should be heeded nonetheless, especially in difficult economic times.

Much of the increasing polarisation occurring around the world at present is an undoubted consequence of the Covid19 pandemic and the social and economic disruption it caused. What is less clear, however, is how that division can be healed.

The combination of more aggressive attitudes in the community and rising levels of disillusionment with traditional politics and the capacities of governments to respond effectively to the public's concerns poses a huge challenge for MPs across the spectrum. As former MPs, we need to think about what role we can play in this more divided environment.

Hon Peter Dunne

Association Directory

To maintain and encourage the system of Parliamentary government in New Zealand

Office Holders

President:	Peter Dunne	[redacted]
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Jill Pettis.....	[redacted]
Ian Revell	[redacted]
Graeme Reeves	[redacted]
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Association's Presidents Emeritus

The late Gerald O'Brien, the late George Gair, Hugh Templeton, Graham Kelly, Graeme Reeves

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Subscriptions to Association

We greatly appreciate members paying their subscriptions via internet banking. Please make sure you include your name. The Association bank account number is: 38 9014 0325181 00

The Association's Office

The office is available for members of the Association to use. It is located in the Parliamentary Library in Room 1.025. To access it, you will need to have a current ID card.

All names of members of the Association have been included on Parliament's security database and so with your ID card you can access the Association's office by swiping the lock on the door of Room 1.025.

The room is set up to provide a modest workspace or meeting room for up to four or five people.

How to Apply for a Security ID Card – Former MPs and their Partners

If you don't have a current ID card, you can obtain one from Security Systems.

Their office is on the ground floor of the Executive Wing or you can contact them on 04 817 9999 and ask to be put through to the Security Systems office. Open 7am-5pm, Monday-Friday.