

# Sue Bradford and Karen Davis



Sue is married and has had five children. She currently lives in Whangaparaoa, just north of Auckland. She was an organiser in the unemployed and beneficiaries movement from 1983–1999, including three years as national coordinator (tauwiwi) for Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa. She played an active role in helping to set up and run the three Auckland Peoples Centres, Kotare Trust and a number of other community based organisations.

Sue was a Green Member of Parliament for ten years (1999–2009). Her portfolios included welfare, employment, housing and community economic development. After leaving Parliament she completed a PhD in public policy with Professor Marilyn Waring at AUT. During most of 2014 Sue was a lecturer at Unitec's School of Social Practice, but left to work for welfare activist group Auckland Action Against Poverty and for a project aiming to establish a radical left wing think tank in Aotearoa. Contact: [suebr73@gmail.com](mailto:suebr73@gmail.com)

Karen was born in Scarborough, Yorkshire, UK and came to New Zealand as a twelve year old. She met Sue Bradford in 1986 when they worked together at the Auckland University library. When Sue became the coordinator of the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre (AUWRC), Karen helped out as a researcher and then bookkeeper, and treasurer of the national unemployed and beneficiaries' movement, in between working on her PhD and having two children.

Karen started working at AUWRC when the first neo-liberal changes were being made to New Zealand's economy and social policy. This had a huge impact on her as she could see the resulting growth in redundancies. She finds it hard to understand why people who lived through those days can claim that people end up on benefits because they don't try hard enough to find work! Through AUWRC, and connections to the Catholic Brothers and Sisters

for Peace and Justice, Karen learnt about structural analysis and used it her work.

Over the last few years Karen has worked for Kotare Trust, the Green Party, Youth Law and the Public Service Association. She has also been part of Auckland Action Against Poverty, a group set up after the National Government and the Welfare Working Group proposed more draconian attacks on beneficiaries.

**Karen:** When did Paulo Freire come into your consciousness?

**Sue:** The first formal acquaintance I had with his thinking was through structural analysis based on the Freirean model in a workshop which Father John Curnow ran—some of us from the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre (AUWRC) attended. Then we did a three day workshop with Auckland WEA led by Margaret Crozier and Dave Tolich. There was quite a big crowd of us at that, with people from other groups as well. It was a basic model structural analysis workshop, a direct descendent of the Curnow workshops, where you went right back into your ancestry, and then forward in great detail.

I found it very interesting. Having been trained in Marxist methods of analysis from when I was young, and still being in a Marxist organisation at that time, it seemed to me that structural analysis was a direct evolution of Marxism which had been taken further with a socio-cultural analysis as well as an economic one. I was really impressed with the augmentation of traditional Marxist-Leninist methodology with the way it went into your own history, more directly connecting people's personal origins with how we learn about and perceive the world. Freirean structural analysis was also much better than the classic Marxist teaching methods in the way it worked with and from people's own direct experiences from the place they are, so they could learn—but also so that they could be teaching everyone else in the room at the same time. From the time of the WEA workshop onwards we in *AUWRC* began consciously using these kinds of methods and concepts in workshops and in the teaching we did.

**Karen:** We used to do quite structured things in *Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa*<sup>1</sup> workshops. Did that come from structural analysis?

**Sue:** Certainly in my experience. To help with educational workshops at our hui and national planning meetings, we adapted some of the techniques that we learned from formal structural analysis—through experiences like the WEA workshop and learning from Father John Curnow—and combined that with learning from our own analysis and experiences gained through years of working at grassroots level in unemployed workers' and beneficiaries' groups. We didn't adopt formal structural analysis wholesale. One of the main reasons for that was that we never seemed to be able to find or allocate time to very lengthy workshops: we were usually fitting educational sessions into a one or two hour slot within a longer workshop, conference or hui.

Politically I was wary of some elements of structural analysis. I guess the biggest problem I had with some of what I saw as classic Freirean structural analysis was over questions of leadership, around the role of people at the front point of the arrow or the tip

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<sup>1</sup> National unemployed and beneficiaries movement in existence from 1985 to 1992.

of the taiaha. It seemed like a direct challenge to the leadership role of people like me in the unemployed movement and in our home organisations. I used to have arguments with people like Tim Howard, Dave Tolich and Margaret Crozier and others about that.

**Karen:** I remember people like Tim Shadbolt were being put forward as leaders. They were people who would do radical crazy things and were a long way from the people behind them. Your idea of leadership was much more about bringing people along with you.

**Sue:** I always wanted to work with the people, not separate from them, nor as some kind of charismatic or driven individual ‘above’ everyone else. By this time we as Pākehā had been heavily influenced by *Te Whare Awhina*<sup>2</sup> and by Māori within *Te Roopu Rawakore* as well as by our own beliefs about collective and co-operative forms of action. I didn’t believe in individualistic leadership.

However, I disagreed with some people who thought that people like Bill (Bradford) and me should not take leadership within peoples’ organisations but rather step back and play a role further back on the arrow/taiaha. From many struggles and a lot of reflection we felt that every individual who was able to take leadership in some form and work well with workers, unemployed people and beneficiaries was worth their weight in gold—even if their class or ethnicity or religious or educational background was for example middle class, Pākehā and educated as opposed to poor, Māori or uneducated. I felt that the question of ‘Whose side are you on?’ or ‘In whose interests do you act?’ was more important than ‘Is your class or other background appropriate to be at the front of the arrow?’ This was an old debate within Marxist circles as well.

We also felt that structural analysis shouldn’t be used simply as a pedagogical tool, or a way of making a living by using and teaching in this particular way in the abstract. For us it was about taking the methodology and using it to take radical action to change an oppressive system—not just to analyse and talk about the oppressive system. I was very keen—along with others—to try to translate and use it so people in the unemployed movement could understand. We had to shorten the process, constantly adapt it and find ways to try to make it work in whatever context we found ourselves.

We used structural analysis methods in the work of our own home organisations, particularly *AUWRC* but also the Peoples Centre. We incorporated the action-reflection element into our work, into the running of the Rights Centre and of our associated groups, and also into all our campaigns and direct action activities as well. Action-reflection was very important to us. It became an underpinning part—it was critical learning. We tried to keep sharp on it, and one of the ways was through the *New Vision*

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<sup>2</sup> a Maori unemployed and beneficiaries group based in Mangataipa, near Mangamuka, led by Huhana Oneroa

group established in the late 1980s. *New Vision* was made up of any AUWRC activists who wanted to be part of it. We analysed and reflected on the external political and economic situation; spent time working out what we thought the best way forward should be; and by the early 1990s were doing a lot of work on our ‘common vision’ of what a better future for Aotearoa/New Zealand might be politically, economically, socially and spiritually.

We met regularly and used structural analysis methodology all the time as a tool for our discussions and our work ‘to learn a new way of understanding ourselves, the community, the workplace, and the world we live in.’ We put together a formal ‘Belief Statement’ formulated in late 1992 early 1993 which went on to help form the basis of the more comprehensive ‘Peoples Charter’ which came out of the *Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand, Building our Own Future Project*, 1993-1994. The *New Vision* group also played a critical role in support for the broader work and key workers in AUWRC, the Peoples Centre and Kotare.

The *New Vision* group was a very powerful tool for AUWRC. It kept going for years. It was a place where we could do political and social analysis and reflection and talk across religious and spiritual boundaries. A lot of the Rights Centre people weren’t religious at all—in fact were positively hostile to religion. The Christians we were working with in the *New Vision* group were imbued with the teachings of Father John Curnow and Freire, and they brought that strongly into the workings of that group. That was a very strengthening thing. They also brought great expertise in cultural work which boosted the Centre, alongside their amazing commitment to joining us in the front line street action. There was huge mutual respect, because we were hassled and harassed by the state and vilified by what felt like almost everyone, so to have allies like that was incredible.

In our early use of structural analysis as a teaching tool in the AUWRC we would often start with questions like, ‘What are we angry about today? What are our issues today?’ We would carry out situational analysis in relation to the issue and then perhaps use the ‘friends, allies, and enemies’ exercise to strategise and pull out the core ideas for next steps forward as a way of planning political actions or other activities.

**Karen:** If we asked a group of unemployed people what they were angry about it would be often be money, we would then go beyond the individual to look at the big picture, the structural causes of unemployment—blame the system not the victim. We had people coming in with very little education, very little self-esteem and confidence, and limited awareness of the world; we were doing a huge education job, helping people and ourselves understand the big picture. I came in not knowing what the big picture was—just having some vague theories. Working through these techniques helped me see those

things—the superstructure, the political infrastructure, and the issues around power. The fact that we were up against that huge corporate power as well as the government.

That analysis really helped to strengthen us. The fact that people developed a common understanding of what the problems were meant we had a bigger goal. There were personal issues as there are in any group, but people were more united because we'd done the analysis and people had that common understanding and it wasn't that we'd imposed it. We didn't do the classic communist party stand up and rave. We let people develop that understanding themselves using those tools and it was really, really powerful.

**Sue:** We were trying to have a different kind of leadership and I'm sure that's why our groups survived so long and why we were so political. So many groups lost the edge of their politics.

Structural analysis as a tool of our educational, organisational and political work was a critical part of our history. The Peoples Centre concept itself basically came out of ongoing structural analysis work within *AUWRC* and the *New Vision* group. Initially we didn't know it was going to be the Peoples Centre, but through a long process of analysis, reflection, discussion and argument we kept working out what the next step was going to be.

No-one had a grand plan, but we had ideas and a lot of experience at working with low income people in Auckland. We knew the realities and we worked together—including with our friends from a liberation theology background in *New Vision*—to work out our next step at any given moment. This was at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when things got really bad. Our first big step was the setting up of the Auckland Peoples Centre and of course the other Peoples Centres, but all that work also helped lead us into making international connections and into the struggles against corporate globalisation and foreign investment and control. We ended up as a key part of the front line of the struggle against corporate globalisation, which was quite unusual for a small unemployed group, but that was because of doing the analysis. The analysis couldn't help but lead to these understandings of what was going on in the world. We learned more and more that it wasn't just about what was happening here in Aotearoa-New Zealand; this was something way beyond us. Our job was to take the struggle clearly to the enemy inside our own country.

**Karen:** We could have had nice middle class existences if we hadn't done that damn structural analysis!

**Sue:** And we kept doing it through generations of people coming and going through the Rights Centre. Things got better after 1987 and a lot of that early generation got jobs. A few of us stayed—we understood that that this was the front line of a new and serious

struggle and there were hundreds and thousands of people that we were working with and for.

In 1993 there was a project called *Building Our Own Future* (BOOF)<sup>3</sup> which some of us at AUWRC helped to co-ordinate. It was funded by the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa-New Zealand. There were a whole lot of strands to BOOF, but one of the key strands was the development of a people's charter. A lot of the work we had done for the charter for the *New Vision* group became part of the *People's Charter*, as did the work of the Christchurch group centred on CAFCA (*Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa*). Another strand that was very strong was around education and training for community organisers and activists. Through all the work we had done over the years we felt there weren't enough new people coming through with high levels of conscientisation and skills in people-centred development and leadership, but we didn't have any educational centre, group or process to pass on knowledge and skills to another generation of activists. We looked at the Highlander School in Tennessee, USA, and the folk schools of Scandinavia, and developed the idea of what became *Kotare Research and Education for Social Change in Aotearoa Trust*.

Right from the very earliest meetings, long before we knew we were going to be calling ourselves *Kotare*, we were very conscious of the Freirean influence, but I'd say for me, the Highlander School, and the way they worked was probably even more influential in terms of the way of thinking how *Kotare* could evolve. There was also the valuable process that John Curnow had brought to us, of the two or three daylong structural analysis workshops. After all the years of reducing things down to their essentials and running short workshops or sessions, we were really excited about the possibility of developing processes and seeing what could be achieved by running the much longer workshops more along the lines of those to which we had originally been introduced.

As we evolved the educational principles of *Kotare*, we brought together people working very actively on the political activist side with people very strongly on the education side—they brought along more educational theories and tools than people like me had ever been aware of. That was a really productive joining together and visioning of the kaupapa of *Kotare*.

**Karen:** *Kotare* wasn't particularly consciously developed as something from Freire alone. It was about using all those different tools we had gathered up amongst us and finding out, once we finally understood something about Freire, that what he was talking about was what we were actually doing!

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<sup>3</sup> A Council of Churches NZ funded community building project that lasted from 1993 to 1995 – consisted of Peoples Assemblies, Sector group meetings (Community housing, community economic development, unemployed and beneficiaries, trade unions, Maori (through Maori Council), radical activists and others)

**Sue:** There was a whole side to Freire where we just didn't go—literacy education being the obvious aspect. There was a literacy organisation doing that work and we never had a motivation, even in the Rights Centre—where we worked with a lot of semi-literate people—to pick up literacy education itself. We didn't use that as a political tool, which was when I think back, why didn't we? We wanted to move faster I guess and we were focused on political and economic literacy.

**Karen:** In focusing and developing *Kotare*, it wasn't education for the sake of education or for qualifications or anything. It was always based around campaigns and action; there were longer-term goals. It wasn't, 'come to a workshop to feel good.' It was 'come to a workshop to do something with it.'

**Sue:** It was about building leadership, fomenting activism and training activists; undertaking cultural work training, analysis and direct leadership training. Things like Community Economic Development (CED) were also very important. We saw ourselves as very much part of starting to build our own economic base. Freirean education was very important to that—the understanding that we would only succeed in struggle if we had our own economic base. We were very conscious of that as a model from places like the Philippines and South America, as well as from seeing what tangata whenua were doing here in Aotearoa. I remember doing CED workshops using structural analysis tools; using the method and adapting it to CED.

I used adapted forms of structural analysis in the early days of the *Aotearoa Community Workers Association*, when I used it in teaching as part of that organisation. I was invited in to teach/ facilitate workshops and lectures in other community organisations and at tertiary institutions as well. I'd always be trying to play with structural analysis methods, and to learn from other people—both other teachers and the people I was teaching. It was our philosophy through the 16 years I was in the movement (1983 to 1999) to work with people wherever they are, whether they were random strangers or at the heart of our own organisation, at a local or national level. We worked with who was in the room, starting from where they came from. It was also about keeping a clear eye on the politics. We were always very clear that our teaching had a political purpose; it wasn't just education for the fun of it.

With *Kotare* itself we were very, very slow to start any kind of education programme in our own name. Paul Maunder, Caroline Hatt and I carried out a trial run of a *Kotare* methodology with a series of workshops as part of the second *Unemployed Roadshow*<sup>4</sup> tour in 1998. We did it all under the name of *AUWRC* as we didn't want *Kotare* to be tarnished by our mistakes while it was just getting going. We knew we were in a vulnerable situation because we didn't really know what we were doing. We wanted to

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<sup>4</sup> A touring theatre performance of plays relevant to people concerned about unemployment.

play with our ideas and methods of using a blend of structural analysis and cultural work for political, conscientising and organisational purposes.

We had what some of us felt was a fairly disastrous workshop at Whangarei, the first one on this tour, and it was a big learning curve. That taught me a lot about how quickly things could go wrong and that you have to be very careful about how you involve people, and to be conscious of who is in the room and why. I was glad we didn't do those first workshops under *Kotare's* name. We'd learned quite a lot by the time we got to Mosgiel! That was the last lot of workshops I remember doing before we started running programmes as *Kotare*.

By 1999 we had the buildings, we had the base—and we had Catherine Delahunty on board as our education co-ordinator—so we were ready to go. From then on we ran *Kotare* workshops both at our educational centre and around the country, consciously collecting resources and education tools while building our networks and experience. A lot of our pedagogical resources were from overseas groups that were using Freirean methods, often in the developing world, but also in places like the States and Canada.

**Karen:** In 1997–1998 I did a trip to the States funded by a Churchill Fellowship, studying groups involved in participatory research and education. I also visited groups fighting welfare cuts, and anyone else that was on my route that was doing popular education. One of the first people I met was Aimee Horton, Myles Horton's second wife, who set up the *Lindeman Centre* in Chicago, and she then introduced me to popular educators in Chicago, including the Quakers who were doing coyuntural<sup>5</sup> analysis, which was directly descended from Freirean ideas.

Finding those amazing resources, meeting the Puerto Rican independence movement—all their ideas of educating themselves and setting up alternative schools— influenced me and then going up to Canada and meeting Budd Hall, the participatory research person. I didn't get to meet the people who were doing the Doris Marshall Institute<sup>6</sup> because they had closed down, but found their book which was very directly influenced by Freire because he had spent time in Canada setting up programmes with them for migrant workers. Then there were people in Boston doing on-the-ground analysis, working with low-income people. *The Welfare Warriors* in Milwaukee, a version of *AUWRC*, struggling but determined to do it for themselves. I saw other people going through similar experiences to those we had—running your own organisation, not letting someone else take you over, all those kinds of ideas. Then I went to *Highlander*, where I

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<sup>5</sup> Critical Thinking for Meaningful Action. Coyuntural comes from the Spanish word 'coyuntura' which means the intersection of various social forces and their effect upon a particular moment in history. For further information see: <http://www.popednews.org/collection/pub42.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Doris Marshall Institute in Toronto, an organization committed to popular education and social change.

used what was left of my money to pick up another ten books. I brought back all these resources that everyone just pounced on and took away and read. So you see all these little exercises from those books being used in workshops.

**Sue:** I remember going through those. It was so exciting to learn from people who had been working on these things for years in other countries and seeing what they had done, and getting all these ideas, of which of course we only ever used a fraction.

**Karen:** There were ideas from Saul Alinsky too, because some of the Chicago groups I met with were influenced by him. Some of his stuff was good, but some of it wasn't as deep or challenging as we wanted. He was always on about winnable goals and the process would stop at the winnable goal. In *AUWRC* sometimes we needed to go for the unwinnable goal.

**Sue:** It was always unwinnable goals. It was a strange concept to think of running programmes where you reached a goal and stopped. For us there was always a next step, something more. If we'd only been focused on winnable goals, we wouldn't have existed at all, or we would have given up early on.

**Karen:** It was amazing to know there was this whole network of popular educators, doing the same kinds of things we wanted to do. That was an inspiration I was able to bring back, so we didn't feel like we were doing it all on our own, totally in the dark. There were these other people to learn from.

**Sue:** The learnings and materials you brought back from your trip were a huge boost to our thinking and our ability. In the late 1990s I was teaching on a regular basis at *Unitec* (Institute of Technology) as well, and transported some of my learnings about this into my teaching inside the institution—just a little bit because you can't do it very much within the formal tertiary education system. With *Kotare*, as with *AUWRC*, we were always absolutely determined to retain our autonomy from the system, and not be dependent on any one source or be controlled by any external body. That meant that we stayed outside of the *New Zealand Qualifications Framework*, and outside the system, which I think is a characteristic of Freirean methods.

**Karen:** At *Kotare* we often run skill share sessions where we reflect on our use of a pedagogical method or tool, including the whole reason why we're using it. There's no point just using a tool because it's an interesting tool—we also want to be clear about who is going to benefit from using that particular tool, and why.

I think that we go beyond training in our workshops because we take the discussion deeper—coming back again to structural analysis—and focus on personal motivations. If people aren't personally motivated to do something, it's not going to happen, so we look at why people are motivated to do this work, and build relationships between people who are in a workshop. I think that's some of the powerful stuff we do.

**Sue:** And that full range of analysis underlies just about everything we do—nothing that happens is abstract or disconnected. There’s politics, economics, social and of course Māori struggles and environmental struggles; and you keep all those things inter-linked and underpinning at all times, no matter what the workshop is or what the groups are. You’re always moving between and connecting the big picture, the local picture, and the personal, the political and the economic. We are continually reflecting, planning and analysing to improve and extend our work and learn from our mistakes and mishaps. We have quite a few meetings a year, where a large group of people are thinking and working on our educational kaupapa and what we’re doing with our workshops; what direction we’re taking strategically. Asking questions like, ‘What are the most important areas to work in this year or next year? What the hot issues are right now? What groups are in the struggle? Where should we be placing ourselves? Where aren’t we (gap analysis)? What can we do?’

We know there’s heaps more we could do—we can’t do it all because we’re so small—but we do our best to maximise our small resource to its capacity. All that analysis and reflection is still happening, so we use our structural analysis legacy not just in the actual education programme, but also in how we run *Kotare* itself. It’s still exciting and constantly being renewed, while always remembering both where we come from and where we’re going.