

How do we create change?

Published: June 17, 2026, 6:09 am

As I [have already noted](#), I have been thinking about a question that people often ask me, which is how do we actually create the change that might lead to a politics of care?

It is a fair question to ask me. After all, I have spent decades writing about tax justice, economics, public finance, inequality, and the failures of neoliberalism. But if there is one thing I have learned, it is that movements that create change are not built from arguments alone. They are, instead, built from stories.

People need a framework

Let me contextualise this.

The principal reason why neoliberalism has been so successful is not that it is right. It is not, has not been, and never will be, not least because its economics are deeply flawed.

Its success, then, lies elsewhere. It has come from providing a simple framework through which people can understand the world. That message is straightforward. It is that:

- * Individuals compete.
- * Markets allocate resources.
- * Government interferes.
- * Success is personal.
- * Failure is personal, too.

That story is easy to tell, easy to remember and easy to repeat.

That is why facts alone cannot dislodge that narrative. Something else has to take its place.

So what might that alternative framework look like?

For me, it begins with a very different understanding of what it means to be human, from which I can develop what I call a politics of care.

This is that alternative narrative:

- * We are social beings.
- * We are interdependent.
- * We rely on one another throughout our lives.
- * We flourish because we care and because others care for us.

From that, there follows a very different understanding of society:

- * The purpose of society is to create the conditions in which everyone can flourish.
- * The purpose of the economy is to support that goal.
- * The purpose of the state is to help us achieve it together.

That is a framework. It is simple enough to remember, but it also has profound implications for how we think about everything from taxation and housing to health and education. It is enough to build a political revolution on, and that is what we need.

People need a language

Ideas spread when people can borrow the words.

Looking back over my own work, some of the concepts that have had the greatest impact have been those that gave people language they could use for themselves.

“Tax justice” is one example. The term was unknown when John Christensen and I began using it. It has been in widespread use since then.

“Secrecy jurisdiction”, a term I did not invent, but did define so that it became useful, is another.

“The Green New Deal”, of which I was co-creator and principal scribe for a long time, is definitely another.

These ideas mattered because they provided ways of describing realities that people could already see but had struggled to articulate. And they have had a significant impact.

The same challenge exists now

If we want to create an alternative to neoliberalism, we need language that people can adopt and use in their own lives and communities.

Perhaps that means talking about a politics of care and an economics of hope.

Perhaps it means describing the last forty years as an Age of Indifference and asking how we might create a new Age of Compassion.

Perhaps it means putting ideas such as flourishing, belonging, security, creativity and care at the centre of our political vocabulary.

The precise phrases matter less than the principle. If people cannot repeat an idea, it will never become a movement.

Change takes time

There is another lesson in all this. It took me a while to learn it, but more than a quarter of a century of campaigning has made me realise a truth, which is that narratives do not change overnight.

Neoliberalism did not suddenly appear in 1979 or 1980. Its intellectual foundations were laid three decades earlier by Hayek, Friedman and the Mont Pelerin Society, which they co-created. The ideas were developed, refined, debated and promoted long before they became politically dominant.

The same is true of most major social transformations. I have seen this in my own work on tax justice, country-by-country reporting, tax havens, and the Green New Deal. A decade or more was required for anything to happen.

That can be frustrating. We live in an age of instant communication and immediate reaction. We are encouraged and want to think that change should happen quickly, but history suggests that is a vain hope. The ideas that matter often spend years, or even decades, taking root.

That, however, is not a reason for despair. It is a reason for persistence. What matters is not whether a particular post, article, event or video changes the world tomorrow. What matters is whether it contributes to a larger story that people can understand, share and eventually act upon.

Which brings me back to the question of change and the creation of a politics of care. Having reflected on this, I no longer think the most important task is proving that neoliberalism is wrong. There is already ample evidence of that, and we also know what can and should replace it, and that all the intellectual foundations we need to replace neoliberalism now exist. The more important task is helping people imagine that thing

which we know is better.

In that case, the need is for a relatable and repeatable story that explains who we are, why we matter, how we depend on each other, and what kind of society we want to build together. That is the challenge. And it may also be the opportunity. It is from that story that a politics of care can be built.