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She has joined the corporate lobbying group Capital Government Relations, which is headed up by chief lobbyist and political commentator Neale Jones. This latest shift from someone in a top Government role to corporate gun-for-hire indicates that the “revolving door” of vested interests keeps on spinning under the Labour-Green coalition.   The CEO of Capital Government Relations, Neale Jones, was once Chief of Staff for former Labour leader Andrew Little. He then worked as Chief of Staff under new leader Jacinda Ardern, but moved to become a lobbyist when she became PM. Jones continues to dine out on his status – his social media publicity photo is a selfie with Jacinda Ardern, and he makes mention of his connections to Ardern in his media commentary and pitches to corporate clients, to indicate his closeness to power and decision-makers.   Of course, this would be illegal in other countries. But New Zealand has barely any rules about lobbying, and absolutely no rules to stop the “revolving door” of Beehive staffers shifting into lucrative corporate jobs to leverage their political connections and information. The likes of Jones and Whanau move freely and frequently between jobs in the Beehive and roles in which they lobby their ex-colleagues on behalf of the wealthy.   The most extreme example was Jacinda Ardern hiring lobbyist GJ Thompson to run her Beehive operations and help set up the Government. The only supposed protection was that Thompson was to “put on hold” his lobbying job while working for the PM. He was free to return straight from his role of Chief of Staff to run his lobbying company, having been responsible for appointing Beehive staff. The glaring conflicts of interest and problems for transparency and probity would render this arrangement illegal in comparable democracies, but they were essentially ignored.   I wrote a number of columns on this at the time – see, for example: [**Have corporate lobbyists been running this government?**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=40a1de2349&e=33257ad5dd).   Incidentally, although Thompson has not declared what corporates he went on lobby for after leaving the Beehive, he was discovered earlier this year to be working on behalf of the infamous union-busting venture capital employers that locked out bus workers in April – see Joel MacManus’[NZ Bus hires PR firm led by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's former chief as contract dispute drags on](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=fb6f8d8987&e=33257ad5dd).   To provide a fix of sorts for the highly unethical state of lobbying in this country, in 2012 the Greens put forward lobbying legislation, but it was limited and ineffective, and was widely seen as too badly thought out to continue with, so they gave up. As a result of such inaction, now parliamentary staff, including from the Greens, continue to be able to shift with ease between lobbying and powerful official roles.   Greens Chief of Staff, Tory Whanau, has easily stepped into the new role sitting on the other side of the table from Government, where she will now push the interests and agendas of her corporate clients.   Whanau was originally meant to set up another lobbying firm with others departing the Beehive. According to an article in July by Jo Moir, Whanau was joining up with two Labour Beehive staffers, Deborah Mahuta-Coyle and Nevada Halbert to start a bespoke lobbying firm with the former Chair of the National Māori Authority Matthew Tukaki – see: [**Māori political talent exits Parliament**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=0f270147be&e=33257ad5dd).   The Māori-led firm was meant to launch in November, and would “focus specifically on helping Māori organisations engage with Labour’s work programme”, but Whanau has now taken her skills and contacts to Capital Government Relations instead. Incidentally, the above news item reports that Whanau isn’t ruling out a return to direct political activity next year – this time to run for the Wellington mayoralty. And on her website, Whanau advertises that she can “provide government relations expertise with some of the best connections across Parliament.”   Whanau’s new colleagues at Capital Government Relations, apart from CEO Neale Jones, are Hayden Munro, Clint Smith, and Mike Jaspers – all of whom have worked as spindoctors and strategists at the highest levels of Government. Jaspers, also just started at the firm, three weeks ago.   Hayden Munro is another recent recruit. The long-time Labour campaign strategist and spindoctor has worked in the Beehive for years, most recently as campaign manager for Labour’s historically successful re-election bid last year. As a result, he now advertises to clients that he “has wide connections across the political spectrum, as well as throughout the New Zealand media”.   Clint Smith worked in the office of Housing Minister Phil Twyford, including during the infamous Kiwibuild rollout. And he now writes media commentary on housing policy.   Leftwing commentator Chris Trotter has been very suspicious of the work that Capital Government Relations does on housing, noting that Neale Jones appears to be putting forward policies that would be beneficial to the big property developers – see his blog post, [**Democratic socialism from the ground up? Not in Neale’s backyard**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=e401bf3597&e=33257ad5dd).   The arguments that Jones was making in his Spinoff article were later realised in the Labour-National agreement on intensifying housing development in the big cities – something that many residents and local authorities had concerns about, but housing developers would supremely profit from.   It can’t help but raise questions about what role lobbyists with corporate clients played in bringing about this bipartisan housing policy. The problem is, who would know? We will always have lobbying, but the key is that it should be transparent and there needs to be a lock put on the revolving door of government advisors and lobbyists. It is extraordinary and undemocratic and would simply not be tolerated in other countries.   Other Labour Party lobbyists are also becoming more powerful because of their links to the Beehive. Former Labour Party general secretary Andrew Kirton, who ran Labour’s 2017 election campaign, has recently set up a lobbying business. He has Air New Zealand as a key client which, according to the Herald, is critically dependent on “his deep connections to Labour” – see: [**Another key Air New Zealand departure, who's running NZGCP, Ben Cook's Cavalier deal (paywalled)**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=5cdb9b39e0&e=33257ad5dd).   This article says these Labour and Beehive connections will be crucial for other firms “wanting an entree to Government circles”. The Herald comments that “business has woken up to the power of the Beehive and finance minister Grant Robertson's chequebook. Kirton's Labour connections have got deeper still. His wife Camilla Belich entered Parliament on the Labour list this year after she stood in the Act stronghold of Epsom”.   Lobbyists were the subject of an excellent Herald article in September by journalist Hamish Rutherford – see:[Cool, calm and connected: Meet New Zealand's top lobbyists (paywalled)](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=8ebf27e5b4&e=33257ad5dd).   Rutherford’s feature focuses on Neale Jones and his Capital Government Relations firm, but other lobbyists are also profiled. According to Rutherford, “Jones is arguably the highest-profile lobbyist in New Zealand, and the most nakedly partisan”, with the observation that although in the media he is “not quite a complete shill for the Labour Party, Jones' commentary is largely aligned with the party.”   Explaining his business model, Jones says that appearing in the media helps lift his business profile, and “Jones believes his support of the party helps build trust with those in the Beehive.” And his colleague Clint Smith is “even more aggressively pro-Government”.   Other lobbyists profiled include GJ Thompson (and his firm Thompson Lewis), who is still “recognised as being one of Ardern's inner circle”, Mark Unsworth (and Saunders Unsworth), former Labour MP Clayton Cosgrove, Mai Chen, and Russell McVeagh’s Tim Clarke (“the leader in the field, according at least to the mainstream lobbyists”).   Finally, perhaps all of this concern is unwarranted, and this new generation of lobbyists represent a more progressive politics. That’s the impression you get from a new lobbyist on the scene – Holly Bennett, who has set up the firm Awhi, based in Auckland. In July she wrote about how she wanted to use lobbying to empower the “voiceless”, such as small businesses: “Modern-day lobbying looks vastly different from how it once looked. It is less about profit maximisation and more about impact and outcomes. The new generation of lobbyists – those I get to work with and teach – are often driven by the desire to give a voice to the voiceless” – see: [**Political lobbying: The influential tool that small businesses should be using**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=ccebc1a155&e=33257ad5dd). | | | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | [Twitter](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=9696fbd0ad&e=33257ad5dd) | | | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | [Facebook](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=0e79769057&e=33257ad5dd) | | | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | [Email](mailto:bryce@criticalpolitics.nz) | | | | | | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | You are receiving this email because you have indicated you'd like to receive NZPD You can [update your preferences](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/profile?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=827d6f9e7e&e=33257ad5dd&c=fac74f788f) or [unsubscribe from this list](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/unsubscribe?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=827d6f9e7e&e=33257ad5dd&c=fac74f788f).   **Our mailing address is:** 1/3 Alameda Terrace Aro Valley WELLINGTON 6021  [Email Marketing Powered by Mailchimp](http://www.mailchimp.com/email-referral/?utm_source=freemium_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=referral_marketing&aid=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&afl=1) | | | | | |

