



## Do Justice!!

“Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly With Your God” Micah 6:8

### A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the March 2015 edition of Do Justice. This newsletter prepared by Auckland Diocesan Social Justice Group looks at various Social Justice Issues.

#### Will Housing be the Justice issue of the year?

Jane Clifton in her Listener article for the November 22 2014 edition started with the following:

*The Government is setting off on its mass shake-up of social housing in the manner of an inexperienced but gung-ho tramper packing for an unguided trip into the Ureweras.*<sup>1</sup>

Four months later it would seem that the tramper has become lost in the thick bush of ideology and illogic. On 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015 an announcement made by the Prime Minister that the Government, as the first step in reforming the provision of social housing in New Zealand, planned to sell up to 8,000 Housing New Zealand (HNZ) properties to social housing providers including church agencies and other NGOs. This policy is also designed to meet the increasing need for affordable housing, particularly in Auckland City. How selling a large number of houses actually increases the total number of social house available is difficult to understand unless HNZ builds new houses. Bill English when asked about the proceeds for house sales was reported in the NZ Herald as saying

*“the proceeds from selling state houses are unlikely to be spent on new state houses and may go into the Consolidated Account.”*<sup>2</sup>

Much has been written about this new Government policy, a policy not included in the National Party election manifesto, but we do not intend to repeat all the possible problems and supposed benefits of selling State Houses but rather to look at the reasons why the HNZ and its predecessors were established in the first place and the issues they tried to address.

For many centuries there has been a significant part of human society that has been unable or unwilling to own their own house. Renting was the only alternative available. In many societies, the renting option is not confined to the

“poor” but is seen as an attractive alternative to the responsibility of paying off a large mortgage. Those societies, mainly in Europe, developed legal frameworks for long term renting of accommodation. In New Zealand our legal framework for renting has developed around a short term time frame. The potential abuses of poor people renting from private landlords led to the establishment of the Housing Corporation in the 1930s and the opening of the first State House in 1937.<sup>3</sup> The need for Government involvement in housing for the poor goes back even further to the Workers Dwelling Act of 1905 when the then Prime Minister Richard Seddon said that he thought that “New Zealanders could enjoy a higher standard of living if the state took over from ‘greedy’ city landlords”<sup>4</sup>

But times have changed and maybe there is no longer a need for the Government to be involved in providing affordable rental housing. The private sector and specialist NGOs can provide all the rental housing needed. But can they and should they?

The Government continues to acknowledge that those on low incomes need financial assistance through the accommodation supplement which is a part of the welfare safety net. The supplement was introduced when HNZ rents were increased to reflect the “market”.

So has the need for affordable accommodation now been satisfied? A recent survey by the NZ Council of Christian Social Services estimated that there are “34,000 people homeless or in insecure housing. It is more serious for women and children, in particular, because of the limited and unsafe options vulnerable women have when urgent housing solutions are needed.”<sup>5</sup>

So how will the new housing policy of the Government provide adequate and affordable accommodation for these 34,000 and the many thousands more in inadequate accommodations?

The provision of adequate housing is a basic human right under the UN Convention on Human Rights. Housing is a

<sup>1</sup> NZ Listener 22 November 2014 page14

<sup>2</sup> NZ Herald 17 Oct 2014.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/we-call-it-home/first-state-house>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hnzc.co.nz/about-us/history-of-state-housing>

<sup>5</sup> Kete Kupu Issue 34. NZCCSS.March 2015

Social justice issue that needs to be addressed urgently. One other factor that we must not forget is that the existing tenants of HNZ houses live in a community and the cost of breaking up a community cannot be underestimated.

The recent withdrawal of the Salvation Army as a possible purchaser of State Houses and the comments from the Finance Minister that private developers and property owners could possibly purchase these houses appears to take us back to Richard Seddon's fears in 1905.

### **A bridge for us too?**

Jim Wallis, Leader of Sojourners and author of the blog God's Politics writes about his experience of attending the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma Alabama. This was when Black Americans marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge demanding the right to vote and were brutally attacked and beaten by the local police force.

One of these present in 1965 was Congressman Richard Lewis who said introducing the President of the USA "*If someone had told me, when we were crossing this bridge, that one day I would be back here introducing the first African-American president, I would have said you're crazy.*"

Change can happen and Jim Wallis goes on to reflect:

*The next bridge is America's transition from a majority white nation to a majority of minorities. That historic demographic shift will occur in the next few decades, and the very prospect of it is what now lies beneath the current racial tensions in America — the racial divisions over policing issues that have so visibly erupted, the opposition to immigration reform, and even the personal animosity to President Obama, who represents this enormous demographic transition.*<sup>6</sup>

We, in New Zealand, are already well down the track to becoming a nation with a majority of minorities and although the racial tensions Wallis refers to are not as visible as in the US they are there nonetheless. The challenge of crossing the bridge of transition from a pakeha dominated nation to a nation of a majority of minorities alongside the indigenous peoples of this land is as much a challenge for New Zealand as it is for the USA.

### **Living Wage now \$19.25.**

The Living Wage for 2015 was recently announced in Wellington, at the same time the Anglican Diocese of Wellington became an accredited Living Wage Employer, the first diocese in New Zealand to be accredited.

A Living Wage is *The income necessary to provide workers and their families with the basic necessities of life. A living wage will enable workers to live with dignity and to participate as active citizens in society.*

The Auckland Diocesan Synod has passed a number of motions over the last 3 years supporting the Living Wage and there are some units in the Diocese that are members of the Living Wage Movement Aotearoa New Zealand. We

understand that the Auckland Diocese is in the process of applying for accreditation as a Living Wage Employer. Are there other units in the Diocese willing to commit to paying staff Living Wage and become Living Wage Employers?

### **Ministers and MPs pay.**

After some years of criticising the Remuneration Authority for the increases they granted Ministers and MPs the Prime Minister has finally decided to do something about it. The penny has suddenly dropped, the reason why MP and Ministerial salaries have increased so much over the last few years is that the Remuneration Authority is required by legislation to benchmark MP and Ministerial salaries against positions with similar responsibilities and complexity in the public service<sup>7</sup>. Public Service Higher Salaries are linked to similar positions in the Private Sector.

Senior Executive private sector salaries are generally set in accordance with various salary surveys that over the years have raked up executive salaries to the point where million dollar plus salaries are not uncommon. The Government is going to introduce new legislation to link MP and Minister Salary increases to the average public service increase. Because increases for the vast majority of public service workers – teachers, police, prison staff etc. has been significantly lower than the senior managers in the Public Service this should result in much lower increases for MPs and Ministers. The questions this raises include why has it taken 6 years for the Prime Minister to finally take action and when will action be taken to restrict the excessive salaries paid to many Public Service managers?

### **Up Coming Events.**

**Writers for Justice and Peace Workshop.** 22 - 23 May

Napier Cathedral led by Rev Erice Fairbrother.

More information:

[www.ohcnz.org.nz/Spirituality-Centre/Writers-for-Justice](http://www.ohcnz.org.nz/Spirituality-Centre/Writers-for-Justice)

**The St Paul's institute** in London organises a number of seminars on important political topics that are video streamed over their website:<sup>8</sup> The next event is:

**Climate Change and the Common Good: The Cultural Challenge 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2015**

Organised in partnership with the Diocese of London, this event will explore the organisational changes needed to mitigate climate change and the role that culture can play in overcoming this challenge, alongside a display of cultural expressions in the crypt focusing on the issue. Speakers:

**The Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam**, Bishop of Salisbury (keynote)

**Stephen Howard**, Chief Executive of Business in the Community

**Laurence Brahm**, Author and Social Entrepreneur

**Bryony Worthington**, Baroness Worthington and Founder of Sandbag

**Chaired by** the Revd Canon Prof. Richard Burridge, Dean of Kings College London.

