

August 2014



# Do Justice!!

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

## A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

### How do we decide how to vote in the coming General Election?

Possibly some of us have had a visit from one or more of the political parties. The Party representatives may ask what issues in society we are concerned about. However, this may remind us of exchanges that some religious groups invite us into so that we conclude that only their version of “God” can save us all from utter catastrophe. As Christians, our choice of political party may be a little less clear than that. Probably few, if any of us, agree with every policy of any given party, and even less likely with every little detail. But there are patterns in policies that we can discern and then decide whether they support or work against our understanding of the characteristics of the reign of the God.

Some of the Party representatives may be particularly interested in how we use our Party Vote. This may be because of a situation in our Electorate; perhaps a Party deal has been done. Christians might feel especially uncomfortable about tactical voting because we would like to have choices in life that are very clear cut. But we all know that there are times when we make uncomfortable choices that we believe have the best possible outcome in a particular moment, while looking forward to there being some better options in the future.

Whether we think of 'splitting' our vote or not, we still need to be clear what sort of a world view our votes will carry and whether they equate reasonably well with our understandings of the Gospel. Threads worth following include the work of focussed groups such as the Child Poverty Action Group ([www.cpag.org.nz](http://www.cpag.org.nz)) and the work on inequality of the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services

(<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1407/S00004/christians-called-to-close-inequality-gap>)  
[www.closetogether.org.nz](http://www.closetogether.org.nz).

There will be many opportunities to participate in pre-election question opportunities including:

**Sunday 3 August 5:00pm Pitt Street Methodist church in collaboration with St Matthews in the City.** Meet the candidates for the Auckland Central City

**Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> August 7:30pm. The Community of Saint Luke –“Inequality Matters”** at 130 Remuera Rd. Increasing social inequality is one of the major issues facing our country today and is a core focus of the 2014 elections. This public event includes a panel discussion that targets critical social issues for thoughtful voters. There will be presentations by Max Rushbrooke, Major Campbell Roberts, Professor Susan St John and Rod Oram followed by discussion convened by Rev Glynn Cardy.

**Tuesday 12 August 7:30pm Electoral Forum St Mary’s in Holy Trinity. Inequality and Climate Change the defining issues.** The Social Justice Group and the Cathedral have organised an Electoral Forum when representatives of all the political parties will be discuss these issues. The discussion will be moderated by Rod Oram.

**Tuesday 2 Sept: ELECTION FORUM: Find out what the Political Parties think about economic, social and environmental justice.** 7-9pm, St Columba Centre, 40 Vermont St, Ponsonby.

Welcome to the August edition of Do Justice for 2014. This newsletter prepared by Auckland Diocesan Social Justice Group looks at various Social Justice Issues.

### Do we need a new approach to Crime and Punishment?

Over at least the last two decades Crime and Punishment has become a political auction – which party can appear to be toughest on crime before each election. This year there are some signs that this may change but don’t hold your breath.

One of the real issues that does not appear to be adequately recognised is the impact of the media on public attitudes to crime and punishment.

Back in 2010 the Auckland Synod set up a small group to look at various crime and punishment issues, part of the group’s report back in 2011 was a review of approaches to crime and punishment in selected countries around the world. The Finnish experience was of particular interest and the report commented:

*In 1950 the Finns had an imprisonment rate of 187 per 100,000 of population (New Zealand’s was 58 per 100,000). The Finns were very concerned that their incarceration rate was far out of line with their Scandinavian neighbours who had low rates of imprisonment. This led to some major changes in penal policy which resulted in a drop of 3-4% per year. By 2001 the rate was down to 40 per 100,000 - an extraordinary reduction of 78% in prison population. This achievement did not go unnoticed in New Zealand. The Department of Corrections Report “About Time” described three key factors which contributed to Finland’s success:*

- *Widespread political agreement that a reduction in the prison population was necessary*
- *An understanding in government and the public service that policies had to be based on evidence and “expert” understanding*
- *Public support for measures to reduce the prison population and an agreement by the Finnish media not to sensationalise crime and to publish regular education pieces on justice and penal issues based on evidence and academic research. At the same time politicians agreed not to use violent crime or simplistic slogans to stir up the public to gain votes.*

*If we could achieve a similar reduction in imprisonment rate to Finland's, we could save over \$700 million a year in the cost of the Department of Corrections alone, plus other savings. These savings could be applied to the restorative needs of prisoners and victims alike.*<sup>1</sup>

On 11 May 2011 Finance Minister Bill English said at a Families Commission Forum that “prisons are a fiscal and moral failure”, he repeated this comment on TV One’s Q & A programme three days later. Since then there does appear to have been some changes in public attitudes to crime and punishment but the same old rhetoric of the past based on a “lock them up and through away the key” ideology still surfaces regularly.

Rethinking Crime and Punishment (RECAP) has recently published “Setting the Scene: Towards a Criminal Justice strategy”, Sharron Cole, the Chair of the Robson Hanan Trust comments in the introduction to issue one:

*When our system restores and empowers victims it is being **Smart on Crime**. When it protects the rights of accused it is being **Smart on Crime**. When its policies and penalties effectively deter crime and punish offenders, it is being **Smart on Crime**. When only 5 per cent of respondents in a national survey on ‘Public Attitudes to Crime’ agreed that prisons deterred people from committing crime, and the same number advocated for harsher treatment, the 95 per cent that disagreed were being **Smart on Crime**. In all the examples referred to, those positions were well supported by evidence. The public taste for thoughtless and excessive punishment is waning.*

*New Zealanders of all political stripes, particularly professionals with experience in every aspect of the criminal justice system, recognise that the criminal justice system is failing too many, costing too much, and helping too few. To effectively tackle these challenges, we must abandon heated rhetoric and explore policies based not on ideology, but on evidence. We must come together to forge a system that works for everyone. For this reason, Smart on Crime incorporates cost-effective, evidence-based solutions to address the worst problems in our system.*<sup>2</sup>

As the General Election Campaign unfolds it may be helpful to keep in mind these comments and the experience of Finland and the agreement of the media not to sensationalise crime.

### **The Language of Capitalism.**

One of the challenges of the ongoing debate about Capitalism and Inequality is that the language used by the various participants in the debate are widely different. This is, of course, not an unusual situation when such issues, that so dramatically divide, are being debated. But if we are going to reach some form of consensus then we must develop some form of common language and understanding, the alternative could well be violent reaction.

Let’s start with two words that are often used “profit” and “fairness”. From a Capitalism perspective the system cannot work without profit, and within the confines of our existing society, they are probably right. Only governments can make investments for the Common Good that do not produce cash profit. But do we need some word or words that describe the benefits that society gets from “non-profitable” investments made for the Common Good.

From an Inequality perspective profit is the key issue that drives capitalism and increases inequality by concentrating more and more wealth in fewer and fewer hands. It is the excessive

gross profit that many corporations are able to make that drives the excessive salaries paid to senior managers in the private sector that then are used as justification for excessive salaries within not for profit organisations including government. And “fairness” is used to justify these payments. For example it is the salaries paid to the CEOs of “for profit” utility organisations that are used to justify the salary paid to the CEO of Watercare Services in Auckland, a Auckland Council Controlled Organisation. This is being fair.

But interestingly when we come to the reverse situation the argument seems to break down. Take workers in the Aged Care sector. Aged Care Workers working for district Health Boards are paid generally a Living Wage (#18.80) or better but workers doing exactly the same work for corporations, and not for profit organisations dependant on government funding, are barely paid the Minimum Wage (\$14.25). How “fair” is this? And how is this equated with the requirement for the private corporations in the Aged Care sector to make a profit?

Robert Gordon, the Manager of the St Pauls Institute of London in a recent blog commented: *Can we acknowledge the need for sacrifice? That the financial sector cannot adequately implement true reform without also accepting that it will negatively impact the bottom line. This is not about profitable change. This is about reigning in a set of business practices that are environmentally unsustainable and inherently anti-social, and to do so will mean a commitment to lower (but perhaps less volatile) financial returns in order to shift cultures and restore trust. It also means, on an individual level, the willingness to forgo many of the excesses of modern consumer society and recognise the extent to which we might ourselves be complicit in facilitating resistance to systemic change.*<sup>3</sup>

This brings us to a third word often used in the capitalism/Inequality debate – justice. For the capitalist a justice system that is consistent and fair is essential for the capitalist system to work. This means that contracts can be enforced and intellectual property protected. But when it comes to a justice system that enforces fair wages for fair work, has sensible accident and safety requirements that are enforced and the environment we live in protected, it is a different matter.

If we could just agree a common understanding of what “Profit” “Fairness” and “Justice” means than maybe we will have a common language to debate the real issues.

### **The Common Good**

The General Synod of the Church of England meeting in York on 12 July 2014 passed the following motion:

*That this Synod*

- (a) affirm the theological imperative of serving the **common good**;*
- (b) commend the practical activities which serve the common good, exemplified by our parishes, dioceses, and the NCIs, and encourage their future development, and*
- (c) call on churches at a local level, along with diocesan and national Church bodies, to ensure by word and action that the political parties are challenged to promote the **common good** when drawing up their manifestos for the 2015 General Election.”*

Something that we could well follow in New Zealand in the coming weeks!

<sup>1</sup> Report to Auckland Synod 2011

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.rethinking.org.nz/assets/Publications/RTC-Monograph-Issue-1\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.rethinking.org.nz/assets/Publications/RTC-Monograph-Issue-1_WEB.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.stpaulsinstitute.org.uk/dialogue/robert-gordon/opinion/2014/jun/23/the-language-of-reformed-capitalism>