

Talking Cents

May 2015

Talking Cents is an ecumenical group charged by the Auckland Anglican Diocesan Council to promote an alternative to current economic and political thought, and to encourage debate within the Church. Ministry units are encouraged to distribute these articles. This article is contributed by Jean Brookes from the Auckland Anglican Social Justice Group.

Raise the roof!

In 2011, Housing New Zealand Corporation (HNZC) tenants experienced major changes in the organisation. These included needs assessments, waiting list and tenancy processes, and the closure of local HNZC offices to tenants, all dramatically increasing their sense of isolation from decision-making.

In 2013, further housing policy changes came with the Housing Accords and Special Housing Areas Act and the Social Housing Reform (Housing Restructuring and Tenancy Matters Amendment) Act. The negative experiences of 2011 were re-inforced by the new roles of the Ministry of Social Development.

The Auckland Community Providers Network includes Lifewise and Airedale Property Trust, both Methodist structures. It expressed major concerns about the Social Housing Reform Bill to the Social Services Select Committee, but with little impact.

On-going concerns include:

- the underlying political philosophy of major changes to the comparative roles of the state and the community service sector;
- the possible effects of contestability, especially concerning housing subsidises;
- changes to definitions of need;
- possible loss of community and protection of the vulnerable.

On 24 February 2014, the Social Welfare Anti-Poverty Committee of the Catholic Diocese of Auckland Justice & Peace Commission made a submission to the *Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan* (PAUP). Section two included a recommendation that 'the Council fund and operate housing for the elderly, disabled and

those on low incomes with adequate social support for residents'.

On 28 February 2014, a submission was also made to the PAUP by Community Housing Aotearoa & Te Matapihi (two national structures) and the Auckland Community Housing Providers Network (members include Catholic, Baptist and Methodist organisations). They emphasised the need to maintain cohesive community, and for 'well planned developments that meet identified need.' (pp10-11).

On Wednesday 6 August 2014 Major Campbell Roberts of the Salvation Army commented that the new government housing systems were not working well for two groups in particular: Community Housing Providers and homeless people (Native Affairs, Maori TV).

By late 2014, after the General Election, two areas of concern came together: some Local Authorities started to divest themselves of responsibility for pensioner housing, and the government proposed the sale of some state housing to community housing providers or developers. Is this privatisation by stealth?

The Rev Dr Susan Thompson (Methodist Waikato-Wairiki District Superintendent), Karen Morrison-Hume (Anglican Action Hamilton) and other church and community groups challenged the 2014 *Hamilton Council* proposal to sell its 344 pensioner houses. The proposal was modified to provide some protection of tenure.

On 4 February 2015, Susan reflected on their experience at the Housing Summit of the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services ([http://www.tuimotu.org./resources_March 2015](http://www.tuimotu.org./resources_March_2015) edition pp3-4). She commented on the role of

churches in state matters and challenged them to be '**a prophet at the gate**' rather than '**a chaplain to the nation**'.

On 21 March 2015, Cardinal John Dew joined the Justice & Development Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington at the parish of St Martin de Porres in Avalon. They moved to the boarded up HNZ Hampton Court properties facing demolition and expressed concern about growing urgent housing lists.

State Housing Action Network (SHAN) is a national network of state and private housing tenants and supporters. It was formed early in 2015 to save state housing and stop social housing providers and private organisations from buying state houses.

On Monday 6 April, SHAN wrote to Community Housing Providers (CHPs) listed by the Ministry of Social Development (<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1504/S00061/social-housing-providers-warned-against-buying-state-houses.htm>). The letter invited CHPs to follow the examples of the Salvation Army (23 March) and Methodist Mission Aotearoa (27 March) in turning down the opportunity to buy state houses. On Friday 10 April SHAN launched its nationwide petition opposing the sale of state houses and addressing related policy matters.

SHAN supports a re-vitalised people focused and adequately resourced HNZ structure, no longer paying dividends to the Crown (\$108 million in the 2013/14 financial year).

The Auckland Anglican Social Justice Group invites readers to positively consider the SHAN letter to CHPs, and its petition that we have attached to our May 'Do Justice' article (<http://www.auckanglican.org.nz/what-we-do/social-justice>).

Meanwhile, the Salvation Army is offering housing workshops to interested groups (<http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/research-media/social-policy-parliamentary-unit>).

On Wed 15 April, the Minister of Social Housing (Paula Bennett) released a large amount of

material about the Social Housing Purchasing Intentions. In all of this it seems necessary to ask, 'Who benefits?'

It has become increasingly important for people of faith to identify and unpack principles of social justice with which to critique social policy proposals. An example is the Open Letter from the House of Bishops to the People and Parishes of the Church of England concerning the 2015 General Election: **Who is my Neighbour?** (www.churchofengland.org/GeneralElection2015).

Place and subsidiarity were two principles the bishops explored.

'We see....day by day how important place is to all kinds of people. Policies which are careless of the attachment to place do not serve people well' (section 51, page 23).

Subsidiarity - ensuring decision making happens at the most appropriate level, so all those affected can contribute - 'is a good principle for challenging the accumulation of power in fewer and fewer hands' (Section 53, page 24).

These principles resonate with the cries of state housing tenants in New Zealand and Aboriginal communities in Australia.

New Zealand First and the Green Party opposed the 2013 Social Housing Reform Bill. Are they committed to principles such as place and subsidiarity as defined by those who are experiencing their loss? Are they committed to a preferential option for state and social housing tenants, & countless people experiencing various forms of homelessness?

'More than 30,000 New Zealanders lack a proper home, and live instead in cars, caravan parks, night shelters, boarding houses or on the street. It's one of the most striking symptoms of a country in which people lead increasingly precarious lives.' Max Rushbrook, April 2015 (<http://www.nzgeographic.co.nz/archives/issue-132/homeless>).

We need to raise the roof on housing!