



Te Ope Whakaora

Public Sphere

FOLLOW US



News & Updates from The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit | August 2013

During times of universal deceit telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act. George Orwell

EDITORIAL

The latest raft of welfare reforms were floated in on 15 July amidst a fanfare of moral righteousness from those supporting the changes and moral indignation from those opposing them. Such righteousness and indignation is the stuff of politics.

The Minister of Social Development provided an example of not only what individuals can achieve when provided with the right support from the State, but also of how facts are not allowed to get in the way of a good argument. Minister Bennett's opinion piece in the Sunday Star Times on 14 July is a good example of how anecdote and private opinion can now form the basis for public policy. In this case the public policy is drug testing welfare recipients who previously received an unemployment benefit and who now, due the 15 July changes, receive a Job Seekers payment.

Minister Bennett's opinion piece starts with a universal statement that she believes 'most young people are incredibly hard-working who will go far in life.' 'However,' Ms Bennett goes on to argue, 'I meet a lot of employers on my visits around the country, and I hear the same thing from them time and time again, they are all want to hire young workers, but are so often frustrated by applicants failing drug tests, or refusing outright to take one.'

These comments from the dozens of employers whom Ms Bennett meets are both the justification for making benefit recipients take drug tests and for the subtle way people receiving such payments are labelled as druggies who are not really interested in working.

Few people would argue that drug abuse is not a widespread social problem and one which not only creates major health problems, but also causes crime and saps people's motivation. Alcohol is of course one of these drugs, but somehow almost always misses politicians' attention when talking about the social costs of drugs.

Public Sphere is an e-newsletter from The Salvation Army's Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit.

The extent of the drug abuse problem amongst the young people whom Ms Bennett has such admiration for is only roughly known from research like the Ministry of Health's Drug Use in New Zealand surveys. However it's unclear the extent to which drug abuse is the cause of the high rates of unemployment amongst young people: rates which now stand at 30% for those aged 15 to 19 and 12% for those aged 20 to 24.

Ms Bennett's conversations with some employers are not the same as systematic, empirical research. But a lack of solid evidence is not the point if your motivation is to use anecdote and opinion to drive public policy and to shape public debate. The point of such tactics may be to divide, to create an 'other': a group of people who don't deserve sympathy and empathy perhaps because of who they are, what they do, where they live or what they think. Such a claim may sound far-fetched when all the Minister of Social Development is trying to do is ensure that young people are drug free so that they can get and keep a job.

But why is such a concern for what people do an important policy issue when it comes to young people who receive a welfare benefit, but not for the rest of us?

The simply and most obvious answer is that these people receive a benefit. Such an answer implies either that these people have an obligation back to society in exchange for this benefit, or that they somehow otherwise deserve to be treated differently.

The big problem with the 'obligation' argument is that in order to avoid accusations of discrimination or scapegoating, it should be applied to everyone receiving some form of beneficial treatment from the State.

There are probably over two million beneficiaries of the State in New Zealand—people who regularly receive a cash payment from the state which is intended to support their living costs. There are over 600,000 people receiving

[Click here to subscribe](#) (Public Sphere does not necessarily represent the official views of The Salvation Army)

We welcome your feedback → **Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit** | New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory | **Auckland Office:** PO Box 76249, Manukau City e: social_policy@nzf.salvationarmy.org, p: (09) 261 0883, m: 027 450 6944, f: (09) 262 4103 | **Wellington Office:** p: (04) 802 6269

www.salvationarmy.org.nz/socialpolicy



FOLLOW US



News & Updates from The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit | August 2013

New Zealand Superannuation, around 400,000 families getting Working for Families payments, and of course the 300,000 working age adults on welfare benefits.

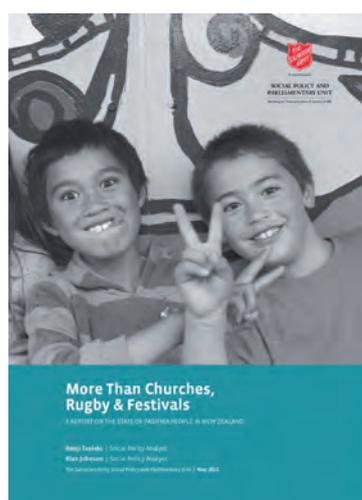
Why doesn't Minister Bennett frame the 'obligations' debate—which is at the core of her Government's welfare reform agenda—more broadly to include all beneficiaries? For example, why isn't the eligibility for additional Working for Families payments linked to not having more children, as it is for welfare benefits? Will the State suspend New Zealand Superannuation and Working for Families payments where there is an outstanding arrest warrant for the recipient—or even where there is an unpaid fine? Why not extend mandatory drug testing to all public servants because surely they are beneficiaries of the State as well?

To apply such a single standard of citizenship would be political suicide and all politicians know this. Yet as citizens we are happy to sit by and allow a more conditional standard of citizenship to be applied to a relatively small and increasing marginalised group of people.

Perhaps the only remaining question is: who's next?

Alan Johnston, SPPU Social Policy Analyst

PUBLICATIONS



Pasifika Report

'More than Churches, Rugby and Festivals'

There will be an informal workshop to discuss the Pasifika Report in Porirua, Wellington on Wednesday 14 August. 10am-12pm.

We also welcome feedback and we are willing to meet about the report and offer presentations on the report if necessary.

We have some hard copies available and the Report can be read or downloaded in full [here](#).

If you are interested in a hard copy, email ronji_tanielu@nzf.salvationarmy.org.

[Click here to subscribe](#) (Public Sphere does not necessarily represent the official views of The Salvation Army)

We welcome your feedback → Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit | New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory | **Auckland Office:** PO Box 76249, Manukau City e: social_policy@nzf.salvationarmy.org, p: (09) 261 0883, m: 027 450 6944, f: (09) 262 4103 | **Wellington Office:** p: (04) 802 6269

www.salvationarmy.org.nz/socialpolicy

UNIT NEWS

Submissions

SPPU staff have recently completed a submission to the Ministry of Justice on the Regulations that will be giving effect to the new alcohol laws under the Sale and Supply of Liquor Act 2012, which recently came into force.

In the next month the Unit will also be submitting on the New Zealand International Convention Centre Bill, more commonly known as the 'SkyCity Bill'. The Unit will be opposing the Bill and pushing for more Gambling harm minimisation measures.

Past submissions and publications from the Unit can be viewed on our [website](#).

Just Action Conference



18-19 September 2013
Vodafone Events Centre,
Manukau, New Zealand

Rebuilding Justice Together
Conference | 18-19 September
VODAFONE EVENTS CENTRE, MANUKAU

As well as top international speakers the conference will feature two panels: a local issues panel focusing on New Zealand based challenges, and a global issues panel looking at 'building a more just world'. We're excited to confirm the global issues panel will include: Chris Clarke, World Vision CEO; Matt Friedman, international human trafficking and slavery expert; Dr Christina Stringer, Auckland University researcher into worker exploitation on fishing vessels; Major Vyvyenne Noakes, overseas missions expert; Sophie Voon, ethical fashion designer; and Shashi Ali, the Shakti Trust's International Development Coordinator.

To add to this high-powered mix we also have one of New Zealand's leading social justice voices, former Green Party co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons joining us as one of our headline speakers, speaking to us about environmental justice.

If you are interested in advertising this event to your church, community group or youth group please contact justin_latif@nzf.salvationarmy.org.nz. Generous group and student discounts are currently available. Register now at www.salvationarmy.org.nz/justaction. For more information on the conference and on our headline speakers visit our event [Facebook page](#).