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If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

EDITORIAL Two dopey ideas

In response to a question from the Greens co-leader Metiria Turei in Parliament, the Prime Minister labelled the proposal for a universal child payment 'a dopey idea'. The basis of the argument against such payment was because it 'would give the rich even more for their kids'. The child payment is one of many suggestions in the August 2012 report from the Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group on Solutions for Child Poverty, and would be for children under six years of age.

The comments being made against universal payments for children stands in sharp contrast to New Zealand's taxpayer funded superannuation scheme, a universal payment that's given regardless of income. NZ Super costs taxpayers $10 billion a year, and is set to rise by around $500 million each year for the next decade or so.

The impact which the New Zealand Superannuation scheme has had on reducing poverty amongst older New Zealanders is unequivocal and this scheme accounts for New Zealand having one of the lowest poverty rates for the elderly in the OECD. There is, however, clear evidence that not everyone receiving the New Zealand Superannuation benefit actually needs it, and over 100,000 people receiving this benefit are still working. Suggesting that the New Zealand Superannuation payment is a benefit and pointing out that people are working and being paid a benefit usually draws the ire of older people who seem to carry either a sense of entitlement or a mistaken belief that by paying taxes they have contributed to the fund which is now paying for their retirement incomes.

The fact is that these retirement incomes are being paid for by today's workers, just as they have been since 1975 when Robert Muldoon dismantled the compulsory contributory superannuation scheme established by Norman Kirk's Labour government.

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

There is of course nothing wrong with paying a universal benefit to older New Zealanders to support them in their old age and retirement—just as there is nothing wrong with paying a universal benefit to the parents and caregivers of children for the support of these children. While some people may see the idea of universal payments to the well off and to poor alike as being a 'dopey idea' there are at least three sound arguments for such an approach.

Firstly, having payments to individuals based on fairly simple and stable criteria like age makes it quite easy to administer. Such an approach avoids repeated assessments of eligibility, such as with income or means tests, and so is far cheaper to administer.

Secondly, the problem with income and means tests such as those applied to benefits (such as unemployment and the DPB) is the way entitlements abate quickly as people earn a little bit of income from employment. For any targeted payment there is a disincentive for people to work a bit harder and this disincentive creates a poverty trap—as people just stay where they are.

Thirdly, a universal payment made to certain groups within a society is a mark of the esteem in which that society holds these groups. Clearly this is the case with older people in New Zealand—in paying the universal superannuation we not only acknowledge their needs and dependence but also the contribution they have made. We do not ask them to account individually for this contribution—we respect them as a generation.

It is difficult to see how children might be seen as less deserving of the same respect. Sure, they have not made a contribution, although we certainly expect them to when they are working, and it is sometimes the anticipation of this contribution which provides the economic justification

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for addressing child poverty. With this line of thinking it is important to ensure that we have a better educated and more productive workforce who as good subjects will grow up and pay taxes. This of course is a fairly instrumental and somewhat amoral way of seeing children. Our children and grandchildren are of course much more than this to us, and collectively we should acknowledge this through the respect we show them.

Universal payments to support our young and old citizens alike are two sides of the same coin. Either such payments are two dopey ideas or they are an acknowledgement of an important social value—that of our citizenship.

Alan Johnson, Senior Policy Advisor

UNIT NEWS

Engaging and Connecting

Last month the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit hosted international speaker Landa Cope from Youth With A Mission who talked to us about better ways to influence society. It was a thought-provoking time and a number of representatives from organisations with similar goals to our own were able to attend.

The University of Otago have begun their review of the Unit, looking at what we're doing well and what we can do better. If you would like to share your views on the Unit please contact review co-ordinator Andrew Bradstock at andrew.bradstock@otago.ac.nz

The Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty is preparing its final report and will present this to the Children's Commissioner by the end of the year, with recommendations on what can be done about reducing child poverty in New Zealand. Major Campbell Roberts is a member of the Group.

The Unit also made a submission to the Expert Advisory Group's discussion paper and to help us with it, we invited a group of clients from the The Salvation Army's Manukau Community Ministries. The feedback provided was erudite, incisive and also heartbreaking at times. It can be so easy to assume what people need or want. Consultation like this workshop turned up surprising results and we were provided with some quite insightful ideas which will be highly valuable for a range of issues the Unit is working

STOP THE TRAFFIK

Anti-trafficking network STOP THE TRAFFIK AOTEAROA co-ordinator Chris Frazer has just returned from the United Kingdom where she was able to meet with the the team at the international headquarters of STOP THE TRAFFIK. This included meeting one of their key partners in Great Britain, the head of Scotland Yard's anti-trafficking division.

Mrs Frazer says she can see valuable ideas for the efforts here to reduce exploitation of migrant workers.

Trafficking in Persons Conference

The Salvation Army is partnering with the American Embassy and ECPAT Child Alert (child sex exploitation campaigners) to hold the next 'Trafficking In Persons' conference on 11–12 April 2013. Chris Frazer is involved in planning this conference on behalf of The Salvation Army.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment has already offered to support the event. It's encouraging to see support towards halting exploitative labour conditions.

PUBLICATIONS

Submissions

The Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit is responding to a range of legislation currently passing through Parliament. Our two most recent submissions to the Government are on the **Prohibition of Gang Insignia in Government Premises Bill** (Gang Insignia Bill), and the **Social Security (Benefit Categories and Work Focus) Amendment Bill** (Benefit Categories Bill).

We understand the intent of the Gang Insignia Bill, but we think the extension of Police powers under this Bill is unreasonable. We don't support the majority of the Benefit Categories Bill, particularly the potential use of sanctions or cuts to a person's benefits if some of the obligations are not met, epecially the adverse flow-on effects this could have on the well-being of a beneficiary's dependent children.

Both of the submissions are available to view on our website. We will make public oral submissions on both Bills. If you would like to provide any feedback or thoughts please email ronji_tanielu@nzf.salvationarmy.org.

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