



INFORM-ACTION

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Divide, But Not Conquer

Vision for Testing Time¹ was one headline in the paper the morning after the 2003 Federal Budget was brought down. This headline stirs many images and raises questions about what and whose vision is being talked about and who is being tested. The list of budget priorities highlights the vision the Federal Government has for this nation at this time – a vision that is set to further divide by having two-tiered health and education systems! It does not take long to once again realise that some core values underpinning this vision are in stark contrast to those of the gospel and Catholic Social Teaching.

The Treasurer told the nation in his Budget speech that “*We have been tested. But we are resilient.*” While our national security *may* have been tested, the ones most tested and most resilient in our society are those most disadvantaged. The best lessons to be learnt about being tested and resilient are from these people – the unemployed, the lowest income earners, indigenous people, refugees, the homeless, the mentally ill who cannot access adequate services and those who care for them, people on waiting lists for housing and people on waiting lists for a hospital bed etc. People who won’t be conquered but whose struggle to survive grows more critical - whose resilience is strongest. The very people who, once again, come last in the budget priorities!

While education and health are critical issues as regards disadvantage, housing and increasing homelessness did not rate a mention in the Budget speech. So many other needs can begin to be met if people have safe, secure and affordable housing. Do the 100,000+ individuals who experience homelessness matter – are they part of the vision? Obviously not, but Defence and National Security are, with \$2.1 billion alone (over five years) on *new spending* for Defence. There is a crisis in this country with not enough *affordable housing*. Housing is said to be affordable if it takes up less than 30% of one’s income. Even taking out 30% of a pension or benefit leaves people extremely vulnerable. Successive Federal and State governments have cut back funding for public housing

and put in other measures such as rent assistance, but that does not address the real problem. There is not enough public housing stock and private rentals do not fall within the affordability range of those on low incomes.

As we all know both the Declaration of Human Rights² and Catholic Social Teaching stress, among other essential needs, the primary need for housing. It is not hard to imagine the social, health, economic, employment, emotional and educational impacts on people who do not have safe, accessible housing. People have a right to participate in society but without housing this can almost be impossible.

So where do we stand? As Christians we have a clear vision that has certainly been tested in recent months and will continue to be if we remain true to core gospel values, if we in our everyday living live in solidarity with those most disadvantaged and challenge the vision and attitudes of our politicians and policy makers. The Prime Minister articulated something of his vision on radio the morning after the budget: “...we want a community that cares for the low-income battlers, but also a community that encourages people to achieve and gives people incentive and you’ve got to mix. You’ve got to respond to a mix of values when you frame a budget. Yes, care for the underprivileged, but also try and reward the people who are having a go.”³ The homeless, those on endless waiting lists, are they not having a go? Do they not deserve a go? No doubt *resilience* is truly needed by these people and by all who strive to live the gospel. It is good to remember these words as we journey on: “*The most important task on the face of the earth is the struggle for the rights of others, and of those others who are God’s privileged persons and peoples, the poor of the world. When this is the struggle that it wages, then the church will really have a contribution to make with its teaching on human rights... then the struggle for human rights and the defence of the life of the poor will be transformed into a here-and-now, efficacious sacrament of salvation.*”⁴



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MEDICARE - A Fair Go, Fair Share ??????

Fair Go, Fair Share was the theme of the SAO campaign in the lead-up to the last Federal Election and it is shaping up to be the same for upcoming elections. The proposed changes to Medicare and its funding arrangements ring very high-pitched and loud alarm bells in relation to a fair go for all Australians.

Medicare currently is a universal public health system which provides access to care, based on health needs rather than the ability to pay. What will result from the proposed changes to Medicare will result in the establishment of a two-tiered system similar to that of the USA. NATSEM Research (*The Courier-Mail* 11 January 2001) we quoted during the *Fair Go, Fair Share* Campaign highlighted the fact that the “health gap” between the rich and poor in Australia had widened in the last two decades. Those at the bottom of the income scale, on \$27,500 a year or less (40% of Australians), tend to have poorer health compared with higher-income groups. This impacted significantly on children of low-income families who were more likely to suffer from illnesses such as asthma, deafness and bronchitis. The research identified the “working poor”, the unemployed and others reliant on social security incomes as the most vulnerable. The changes to Medicare will no doubt widen this gap and make these people far, far more vulnerable.

What can we do? Firstly we need to reflect on the situation in light of the gospel and Catholic Social Teaching, and then take some action. Government in Australia today is seriously abdicating many responsibilities and we need to remind them of their responsibilities. The following are just two quotations that can assist our reflection:

The function of the rulers of the State, moreover, is to watch over the community and its parts; but in protecting private individuals in their rights, chief consideration ought to be given to the weak and the poor.

The Fortieth Year (#25)

and

Individuals and groups within a society have an obligation to pursue not only their own interests but the good of all. The governing and administrative bodies of a society are obliged to safeguard and promote the common good, as well as the good of the society's component parts. (p.13)

Common Wealth for the Common Good (1992)

Continued from page 1

Nourishing resilience within is critical as the journey is long! While the budget is grossly inadequate in addressing human and social needs, the critical environmental issues are way down the line as well. As Don Henry, Australian Conservation Foundation Director said, “the budget is as dry as a dead river bed for the Murray-Darling”⁵.

ACTION: On 15 May 2003 the Senate agreed that a Select Committee, to be known as the *Select Committee on Medicare*, be appointed to inquire into the changes. This Committee will report to the Senate by 12 August 2003. The Committee is receiving submissions, so you may wish to present a submission. ***Submissions do not have to be long and only need focus on one aspect of the whole debate.*** You could write a letter to the Committee addressing the critical issues. Guidelines on how to make a submission can be found at this site:



http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/wit_sub/index.htm (or phone the SAO for them).

Some identified critical issues are:

- quality health care for all Australians is a basic human right that must be ensured and is a major responsibility of government to ensure this right is protected;
- proposed changes undermine the integrity, universality and ongoing viability of Medicare;
- bulk billing for all Australians must remain a fundamental cornerstone of our health system;
- those most disadvantaged in our society will be far more drastically disadvantaged and the struggling “working poor” will be further stressed.

Currently different lobby groups are preparing petitions and other lobbying materials. Please stay tuned to the SAO website for more details.

Written submissions should be sent to:

The Secretary
Select Committee on Medicare
Suite S1 30
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Closing date for the receipt of submissions is 18 June 2003.

The Committee prefers to receive submissions electronically as an attached document - email medicare.sen@aph.gov.au For further details, contact the Committee Secretary: phone (02) 6277 3527, fax (02) 6277 3830, or email medicare.sen@aph.gov.au

¹ *The Courier Mail* 14/03/05 p.8 of Budget Insert

² Article 25

³ John Howard – ABC Radio 14/05/03 - AM Program - Transcript

⁴ Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation* p.114

⁵ *The Courier Mail* 15/05/03 p.8

Living Sustainably - WATER

While we have enormous problems to face and work with in Australia regarding the environment and in particular water management, salinity and land clearing, it is important that during the International Year of FreshWater (IYFW) we honour our international responsibilities. With the war in Iraq fresh in our minds it is important to remember the close connection between inequality and conflict. The Australian contribution to overseas aid, particularly the Government's contribution, is critical. The amount given to water and sanitation, to improving standards of living, impacts on levels of inequality and thus conflict. Do we ever stop to think of this relationship when we see figures like this in the 2003 Federal Budget:

National Security: \$52 million extra for new spies and spy equipment, \$20 million extra for SIO, \$69 million over two years for handgun buyback

As you know, **WATER MATTERS** is an international campaign in this International Year of FreshWater and the **POSTCARD CAMPAIGN** calls on the Prime Minister, John Howard, to raise our spending on water and sanitation in line with our commitment to the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. The campaign will continue throughout the year. A postcard will be sent with the *next* issue of **INFORM-ACTION**. You can order your own postcards from TEAR Australia – email tearaust@tear.org.au, phone 1800 244 986 or visit the website <http://www.watermattersaustralia.org/>

Three actions that reflect the global significance of water have taken place recently:

1 The Third World Water Forum (Kyoto, 16-23 March 2003)

Even though the World Water Forum (3WWF) that took place in Kyoto two months ago is not part of IYFW, it does have a particular significance in the context of the IYFW.

By any standard, it was a 'big' event with 24,000 participants. The central question was how to bring safe water and sanitation to the entire world. Many critical issues were analysed including water wars, and the question of peace raised particular concerns. To achieve a sound management of the resource, most countries will require effective governance, capacity-building, popular participation and adequate financing infrastructures.

What are the outcomes of the 3WWF?

The *Final Statement* was expected for 15 May, in time to provide input to the next G-8 meeting in June. On the final

day, the Ministers and Heads of delegations issued a common *Ministerial Declaration*. Additionally, 100 new commitments, that reflect the diversity of themes treated, were made by the delegates at the close of the Forum. These commitments involve international organisations such as the United Nations, World Bank, national governments and regional institutions. Some commitments have a global scope, others focus on regional or local issues.

Details are available at <http://www.world.water-forum3.com/>

2 An alternative forum: *Water, a common good for all living beings*

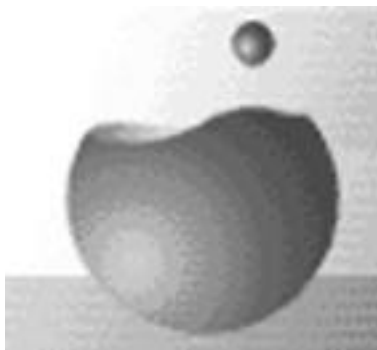
As is for other world summits, the 3WWF was subjected to criticism by the proponents of an alternative globalisation. According to them, the 3WWF is the expression of a new global water oligarchy, dominated by private transnational water corporations backed by the World Bank and the IMF. The critics of the 3WWF claim that the privatisation model promoted by these corporations is nothing less than an effective tool to seize control of the world's water resources. A parallel event was organised in Florence (Italy), the First People's World Water Forum (21-22 March 2003). This Forum centred its debates on the access to drinking water for all the world's citizens and the recognition of water as a common good.

For information, visit <http://www.cipsi.it/contrattoacqua/forum-acqua/index.htm>

3 The Vatican speaks out as well: *Water, an essential element for life – a note prepared by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*

This document was presented in Kyoto by Msgr R. Martino as the Holy See's contribution to the 3WWF. The Note shares similar concerns with the People's Forum organisers, in the light of the Catholic Social Teaching. The document is divided into six parts.

This document is a preparatory Note. In the light of the conclusions of the Forum, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is preparing a more developed document. The full text of the Note is available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents.



DATE CLAIMER

Exploring a *Culture of Peace* Tuesday 10 June at 5.00pm at Justice Place, Woolloongabba



After considering the complexities of the current global climate of terror, fear and violence, the SAO planning group in February 2003 decided to take **Creating a Culture of Peace** as a strategic priority for 2003. We reminded ourselves that we are in the **Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World** (2001-2010) and decided that we will maximise opportunities to truly enter processes that provide for a conversion of heart. It was decided to focus on education around this issue and therefore we are hosting an evening to begin exploring this theme more fully and working out a way forward.

Come and be part of this exploration – enjoy and partake of the shared wisdom of others as well as hot soup and bread!

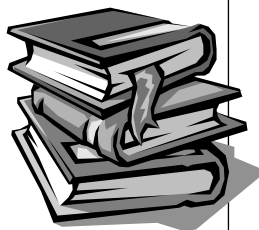
Please RSVP (for catering purposes) by Friday 9 June.

Come and Share the SAO Resources

The Social Action Office has a small but very good library that is available to all partners. Jim D'Arcy cfc and Dolores Creevy rsm are currently establishing a workable database and arrangement of books so that people can easily find what is here and borrow books. In the near future we would hope to have this database on our website so that SAO partners outside Brisbane could borrow books. The cost of postage would be covered by the person borrowing.

The SAO receives several excellent journals, newsletters and publications. These are not available for loan but people can come in and read any time they like. Some titles include:

- *New Internationalist*
- *The Tablet*
- *The Guardian Weekly*
- *Australian Geographic*
- *Parity*
- *Habitat*



ALSO: If you do not have access to the internet and would like to do some exploring, the SAO can offer access through one computer – you just need to arrange a time with the office.

For Your Calendar



2003 - International Year of FreshWater

MAY

- 27 1967 Referendum allows Federal Government to grant citizenship rights to Aboriginal people
- 27 National Reconciliation Week begins
- 28 Amnesty International founded 1962
- 31 15th Annual Banksia Environmental Foundation Awards, Gold Coast

JUNE

- 1 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins
- 3 Mabo decision 1992
- 4 International Day for Children who are victims of aggression
- 4 Tiananaman Square Massacre 1989
- 5 World Environment Day
- 10 Myall Creek Massacre 1838
- 10 *Exploring a Culture of Peace* (see Date Claimer)
- 11 Date of assent for Racial Discrimination Act, Australia 1975
- 11 Neville Bonner becomes the first Aboriginal Australian to hold a seat in Federal Parliament
- 12 Aboriginal flag first flown, Adelaide 1971
- 12 Barunga Statement presented to PM Bob Hawke by Aboriginal leaders 1988
- 17 World Day to combat desertification and drought
- 17-20 International Workshop on High Seas Biodiversity, Cairns
- 19 SOPHIA CIRCLE - *World Refugee Day* - 12 noon at Justice Place (RSVP to SAO 3891 5866)
- 21 UN World Refugee Day
- 26 International Day in support of victims of torture

JULY

- 2 Voluntary Native Title agreement signed between the Gunggari People and the Cowley family
- 7 Aboriginal Sunday
- 11 World Population Day
- 13 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Week begins
- 17 Iraq National Day
- 17 SOPHIA CIRCLE - *Winter Times* - 5.00pm at Justice Place (RSVP to SAO 3891 5866)
- 18 Nelson Mandela born 1918
- 27 National Tree Day

Prayer for Reconciliation

God of life,
in the midst of conflict and division,
we know it is you who turns our minds to thoughts of peace.
Your Spirit changes our hearts:
Enemies begin to speak to one another,
those who were estranged join hands in friendship,
and nations seek the way of peace together.
Let your Spirit be at work in us.
Give us understanding and put an end to strife,
fill us with mercy and overcome our denial,
grant us wisdom
and teach us to learn from the people of the land.
Call us to justice.

(from ACSJC Prayer Card)