



## Do Justice

*"Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8*

### A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the June edition of Do Justice as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

#### **Budget 2021 – transformational?**

On the day after the Budget, the New Zealand Herald's Business Section had a red headline with the words 'True Labour' which seemed to imply that the Labour Government had returned to the pre-Douglas days. And maybe they were right as, early in his Budget speech, Finance Minister Grant Robertson said the time had come to reverse Ruth Richardson's 1991 Budget that, amongst many things, cut benefits and introduced the Employment Contracts Act. The increase in benefits for 'job seekers' (the polite term for those unemployed and seeking work) and most other beneficiaries except the over 65s, is long overdue and, taking inflation into account, barely restores the levels to pre-Richardson amounts. In terms of addressing the exceeding high level of inequality in New Zealand, in both incomes and wealth, it will barely make a dent, but even a small dent is better than none at all.

Much of the rest of the Budget was as we have come to expect from Grant Robertson – measured and careful, with a promise of returning to a 'balanced budget' later in the decade.

In 2018, when the Government started to say that it wanted to focus on 'wellness' in budgeting there appeared to be the possibility of stopping using GDP as the main measure of the country's success or failure. Regrettably, GDP still seems to be the main measure despite the focus on wellness. Grant Robertson may have gone some way to correct the excesses of Rogernomics and the impact of the 1991 Richardson Budget but some of the neoliberal mindset still seems to be there.

Climate change and the climate crisis are still as acute as before COVID-19, but we will need to wait until Budget 2022 for any major Government initiatives. The reason for this, Robertson said, was that the Climate Commission Report would not be available to Government until the end of May this year. However, the Commission published a very detailed draft report early this year. The Social Justice Group made a detailed submission on this which is available on the diocesan website. It seems unlikely that the main thrust of the final report will call for less action than the draft and most of the main recommendations in the draft report appear to have wide support. Surely, it would have been possible

to start acting, at least in some areas. The actions related to climate change that were proposed in the Budget mainly involved the purchase of electric vehicles and much more spending on rail. Even the rail spending has some question marks: Will the spending on new locomotives be for electric-powered engines or diesel? What, if any, of the billion dollars earmarked for rail will be used to extend the electrification of the rail network? One of the biggest mistakes of Muldoon's 'think big' projects was to stop electrification of the main trunk line at Palmerston North and Hamilton. Surely, we do not need a Climate Commission Report to sort that out?

Another 'no-brainer' is promoting the use of domestic solar panels for electricity generation. Requiring local electricity companies to allow domestic solar panel electricity to feed back into the network at a fair price is something that should be initiated now, instead of waiting another year for the process to start. Solar energy is now the cheapest way to generate electricity<sup>1</sup> and although solar panels cannot work at night, they can save hydro generation for night-time use as a minimum. If we are to make a serious reduction in the carbon produced by transport, then we will need additional generating capacity. Solar and wind are the two cheapest and most carbon-friendly methods of generation.

Perhaps the most transformative proposal in the Budget was the announcement that the Government will discuss with employers and unions the possibility of an unemployment scheme based on the principles of ACC to provide incomes for workers when they lose their jobs. While this is not new, (unemployment insurance schemes are common overseas), it does raise some questions. In 1998 the National Government passed legislation to privatise ACC, only for the move to be reversed by the incoming Clark coalition Government.<sup>2</sup>

There has been some criticism of the Budget. For example Kirk Hope, CEO of BusinessNZ, said, *"Business was keen to see less burdensome regulation, policies to stimulate growth and development, and more certainty around business policies into the future."*<sup>3</sup> This is familiar cry from business every budget. Less regulation leads to more Pike Rivers without stringent enforcement. Policies to stimulate growth but what type of growth? Growth has got us into the climate crisis; is it really going to get us out?

<sup>1</sup> [Solar energy - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Our history \(acc.co.nz\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> 'Budget a missed opportunity for growth', BusinessNZ, <https://www.businessnz.org.nz/news-and-media/media-releases/2021/budget-a-missed-opportunity-for-growth>. Accessed 31 May 2021.

Transformative? – marginally. A Government with such a large majority can do much better.

### **Palestine and Israel – this must end**

The following article was written on 17 May 2021 by Dr Yasser Abu Jamei Director General of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme.<sup>4</sup>

*I am writing this letter looking at my terrified 6-year old son, who keeps putting his hands over his ears trying block the sounds of Israel's bombardment, my two daughters, aged 13 and 10 and my wife. These faces show the anxiety of not knowing where they can be safe now. My two older sons, 16 and 15, sit stunned and silent and I know they are reliving the memories of the previous three offensives on Gaza Strip and the family members we lost. These are the feelings that every family in the Gaza strip are living through.*

*We Palestinians have lived decades of humiliation, injustices, and maltreatment. In 1948, we were expelled from our land; over 600 villages were fully destroyed; hundreds of thousands of us were killed or uprooted. Nearly eight hundred thousand ended up living as refugees in different places around the globe.*

*This happened under the eyes of the International Community, who have promised us a sovereign State over about one fifth of our original homeland. That decision was only accepted in the 1990s by Palestinians believing in a two-state solution.*

*Twenty-six years later, we look at the conditions in the promised State of Palestine and we see a West Bank divided and occupied by hundreds of thousands of settlers living in settlements built on the rubble of Palestinian homes, and who are making the lives of the Palestinian people living hell.*

*We see the Gaza Strip under blockade for more than 14 years, leaving us deprived of basic living conditions. Not only that, but having suffered three large offensives in this small area which killed, destroyed and traumatized thousands of our people.*

*And we see East Jerusalem, with its holiest sites for Muslims and Christians alike continuing to be under constant threat as settlers take over Palestinian homes and neighbourhoods.*

*A week ago, Israeli settlers started to attack Sheikh Jarrah trying to seize more homes of Palestinian families. Everyone saw it. No one intervened.*

*In one of the holiest Ramadan evenings, Israel decided to evict tens of thousands of worshipers who were just praying at Al-Aqsa. These were mostly Palestinians who live in Palestine '48 – now Israel. Everyone saw the brutal use of military power by Israel. No one intervened.*

*The violent scenes in Sheikh Jarrah and the Al-Aqsa compound have lit a fire in Palestinian hearts not only in historic Palestine, but also everywhere in the world.*

*While we demonstrated in Akka, Jafa, Nazareth and the West Bank, rockets were fired from Gaza demanding an end to the atrocities in Jerusalem.*

*The Israeli army response was to attack Gaza with even more violence than in the terrible days of previous offensives. This time causing the deaths of more than 80 people including 17 children and 7 women. Bombardments hit tower blocks, apartments, governmental and police buildings and even whole streets. Everyone is seeing it. No one intervenes.*

*How long will the world just sit idly by while we here in Gaza suffer like this? The people of Gaza need more than just statements and resolutions, while Israel receives the arms which are killing and terrorizing us.*

*I am a father first and a psychiatrist second. My dream for my children to live, to grow, to learn, in safety. This is the same dream as that of every one of the clients I see. There will be more of them today, and tomorrow. It is my job to give hope. I will tell them what I tell my children and my wife. "Because this injustice for Palestinians has gone on for seven decades, that does not make it normal. The world is increasingly full of people who do not accept it is normal. There will be change."*

*Concrete political action is needed NOW to end not only the current deadly bombing raids, but also this illegal occupation and siege of Gaza by Israel, immediately.*

*Our current living conditions under the siege are an affront to human dignity. I tell my children and my clients, "We Palestinians have the right to live as any other people in the world: to live in peace, in dignity and to enjoy our rights. It will come."*

*The International Community MUST NOW fulfil its promise of a sovereign Palestinian state. Respect for international law demands every civilized country must recognize the State of Palestine now.*

*After more than seven decades now of occupation and misery, we remain resilient and will never give up. But there is no father who can bear to see his children live like this.*

Since this article was written, the death toll in Gaza has steadily risen and has now reached 254 including 66 children – far too many.<sup>5</sup> How can we help make this cruelty end? How can the Holy Land become holy again? A ceasefire was agreed on 21 May 2021 and the US Secretary of State has had the customary visit after such a crisis to sort out the problem and has promised much-

needed help to the people in Gaza. But the USA appears unwilling to pressure Israel into meaningful talks about sorting out the problems once and for all. We must not forget that Israel is the occupying power in the West Bank and effectively isolates the Gaza strip. The Holy Land is where the three Abrahamic religions come together, all with holy sites. it must be a land of peace and justice, not hate and war.

<sup>4</sup> [This Must End - CounterPunch.org](https://www.counterpunch.org)

<sup>5</sup> [Gaza death toll from Israeli attacks rises to 254, including 66 children \(aa.com.tr\)](https://www.aa.com.tr)