



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 in the tradition of Micah and St Francis. Apologies for the lack of a May edition but the editor's computer crashed just as the draft was finished and it was lost. It took more than two weeks to get the computer back up working correctly!

Democracy and co-governance

First let's deal with one of the major misunderstandings about democracy. It is not cast in stone but a continually evolving concept. Even the concept of one person/one vote evolves as in New Zealand we have one person/two votes – a party vote and a candidate vote.

When parliamentary democracy was introduced into New Zealand by the British colonisers in 1854, there were restrictions on who could vote and who could not vote. Women were completely excluded and there were property requirements that roughly followed the requirements in Britain at the time. Māori were not specially excluded, but the property requirements were an issue as most Māori land was held in common. Despite this, about 100 Māori men were qualified to vote. Change was reasonably quick – the right to vote was extended to all Māori men in 1867 and to all European men in 1879. Possibly one of the things that New Zealanders are most proud of is that in 1893 New Zealand led the world by giving women the right to vote. Four decades on from its first election, New Zealand was probably the most democratic country in the world.¹ But it was still a system of governance that failed to recognise the promise made in Article 3 of Te Tiriti that, *"The Queen promised to care for 'nga tāngata māori katoa o Nu Tirani' (all the Indigenous inhabitants of New Zealand) and to give to them 'nga tikanga rite tahi' (tikanga exactly equal to) those of her subjects, 'nga tāngata o Ingarani' (the inhabitants of England)."*² Dame Anne Salmond explains this clearly in her series 'The Treaty of Waitangi and Democracy' on Newsroom.

Overall, our governance system has also evolved. New Zealand became a 'dominion' in 1907. No longer a 'colony' but still subject to imperial oversight. When World War I broke out New Zealand followed the 'mother country' and joined in the fighting. But we relied on the UK to represent us at the meetings that lead to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.³

The Governor-General, effectively the 'sovereign' of New Zealand, was not a New Zealander until 1967 when Sir Arthur Porritt was appointed. He was born in New Zealand although had lived in the United Kingdom for 31 years before his appointment.⁴

Possibly the most significant step to 'independence' was in 1945 when the United Nations was formed following World War II. New Zealand was a founding member in its own right and has been active in the organisation ever since.

In 1951 New Zealand abolished the upper house of Parliament, moving away from the Westminster model. And in 1996 we had our first MMP election, another major departure from the Westminster model.

Despite all the changes over the last 175 years, the promises made in 1840 in Te Tiriti are still not fully met. It is only in recent years that the significance of tāngata whenua (people of the land – Māori) and tāngata Tiriti (people of the treaty – the settlers) has been explored. Each group has equal involvement and responsibility in the governance of Aotearoa. It is from an increasing understanding of the significance of this that co-governance has evolved. It is a concept that is not anti-democracy but rather recognises the understandings of the Tiriti and their belated working out.

Co-governance is nothing to fear; it is just another step in the process of the development of a truly equal democracy.

Climate change and budgets

On 15 May 22, the Government announced how it was going to achieve the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions that it had published a few days earlier. On 19 May we had the 2022/3 Budget. In many ways this was a week of numbers, many very big numbers. But it should also be a week that we will look back on in the years ahead and be able to say, "That was when we really started to deal with climate change." But will we?

The reaction to both the emissions announcements and the Budget were interesting. Not surprisingly, there are two schools of reaction – the Government could go further, and the Government has gone too far. This would normally mean

¹ First voting rights, 1852 – Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand

² <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/ideasroom/te-tiriti-and-democracy-part-5>

³ Treaty of Versailles | Definition, Summary, Terms, & Facts | Britannica

⁴ First NZ born Governor-General of NZ - Search (bing.com)

that the Government has got it about right! Alternatively, it could be concluded that the Government has done just enough, particularly on climate, to appear to be doing something without upsetting specific groups such as farmers.

Similarly, the Budget and the proposal for cash handouts in August for all those earning less than \$70,000 per year and not getting a winter heating allowance, could be seen as trying to address the so-called 'squeezed middle'. This is an interesting concept which we have heard about with monotonous regularity for the last few months. If there is a 'squeezed middle' (and there probably is) what about the bottom? Inflation will surely be squeezing them, only harder. That only leaves the top who are wealthy enough and/or earn enough, not to be squeezed, at least not to be 'hurt'.

Coming back to climate change: It is a pity that our Government did not follow some other governments we like to measure ourselves against and ban the import of all petrol and diesel fuelled cars from 2035. Similarly, coal mining could be phased out over the next 10 years in parallel with the removal of coal-fired boilers in various industrial operations.

One of the more interesting things that emerged during the debate on the emissions proposals was that the farming industry was developing their own 'emissions trading scheme' and it would be announced 'shortly'. It will be interesting to see what they propose.

It is good to see that the Government is putting emphasis on public transport to reduce the use of both fossil fuelled and electric cars, and the budget proposal to make public transport free for all Community Card holders is a step in the right direction. But what was missing from both the emissions announcements and the Budget was any firm proposals to fully electrify our current rail system and for any extensions of the system. A fully functional electrified rail system would make a very substantial reduction in emissions. The technology is already available.

Similarly, conversion of the bus fleet to electric buses over the next 10 years or so would also make a significant contribution to reducing emissions.

Whenever such radical suggestions are made to address at least some of the challenges of climate change, the critics immediately ask, "Where is all the electricity going to come from?" There are several answers to this question. Solar panels could be installed on nearly every roof at a reasonable cost, but the power companies would have to be told to take any daytime surplus power at a reasonable price. If solar panels were widely used, then we could restrict the use of hydro power stations to nighttime only. More wind farms would also supply fossil fuel free electricity. The cheapest form of electricity generation now is solar panels and windfarms, so the costs would not be great. And then there is the smelter than presently uses a very significant amount of our generating capacity. Do we really need to subsidise a foreign-owned multinational corporation? Let Rio Tinto look after itself.

The Government appears to have lost a good opportunity to really address climate change. Maybe in three years' time, when the next emissions 'budget' is due, the Government will be more ambitious.

One of the other arguments against making radical change, particularly as far as climate change is concerned, is the perceived need to achieve some form of consensus across the political parties so that major policies are not reversed with a change of government. There is some validity in this approach and much effort was made to get consensus for the Zero Carbon Act. However, if a government really believes what it is doing is essential for the wellbeing of the country, then it should do it even if the opposition opposes it. If they cannot sell the policy to the electorate then they only have themselves to blame.

One thing that is often overlooked in all the debate, particularly in the media, is that the development of a national budget is an enormously complex affair. Work on a national budget starts at least six months before it is announced. What were the issues we were concerned about in late November/early December last year when this year's budget process was started? In the December Do Justice we wrote about the COP26 and New Zealand's contribution or lack of it to the discussions, and the challenge of Covid vaccination passports.

The issues raised around climate and COP26 are still very much with us today and although we may not agree with everything in the Budget concerning climate, at least there was some attempt to address some of the climate issues. Covid vaccinations and passports are no longer an issue and there was no mention in the Budget. Conversely, it is useful to identify issues that were not even in the public eye when budget work started, and inflation is probably the most significant. It has only been in the last few months that inflation has become a significant public issue.

One of the issues that does not seem to get into the media debate about inflation is the impact of some six of seven years of 'quantitative easing' to mitigate possible deflation. Quantitative easing is a monetary policy whereby a central bank purchases predetermined amounts of government bonds or other financial assets (e.g., municipal bonds, corporate bonds, stocks) in order to inject money into the economy to expand economic activity.⁵ In other words – printing money. All the major central banks including New Zealand's have been following this policy, resulting in many trillions of dollars being injected into the world's economy, much of which contributed to the great increases in share prices around the world.

Now those trillions of dollars are chasing limited amounts of energy, food, and minerals and, surprise, surprise, the price goes up and global inflation sets in.

⁵ [Qualitative easing - Search \(bing.com\)](#)