Do Justice!!

August 2025

"Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly With Your God"

Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues from the Social Justice Group, Anglican Diocese of Auckland

Welcome to the August 2025 edition of Do Justice as the Social Justice Group continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective in the tradition of Micah and St Francis.

Are we seeing a repeat of the 1980s but with a different agenda?

For those of us who can remember the 1980s there are occasionally things about the 2020s that seem familiar. In the 1980s, after a period of Muldoonism with wage freezes, carless days and Think Big, there followed in 1984 perhaps the most radical changes in how we operated as a country in our history – the Douglas years with extreme neoliberalism. And for many of us we did not see what was happening to our country. We did know that Muldoon had got things wrong and change was necessary Aotearoa New Zealand had developed a reasonable fair society with no enormously rich and the poor generally looked after. The main failure was the relationship between the Indigenous Māori and British colonisers which was slowly changing for the better.

What we got from Rogernomics is a society that is market driven with a small but very rich peak and wide and poor bottom. And we did not know we were getting it. It certainly was not part of the Lange Labour manifesto for the 1984 election and although the changes where becoming more apparent by the 1989 election, a substantial number of traditional National supporters appeared to like the Douglas changes and voted Labour perhaps for the only time in their lives. We still have the inequality as a result of the Regernomics years as a recent article by Prof. Anne Salmond says "that 1% of the population own 23% of the wealth"[1].

So far in the 2020s we have had the Ardern Government which had to deal with the worst epidemic in the nation's history and two other major disasters and had to take measures that would never be taken in other circumstances. In 2024 we failed to elect a majority government and have a coalition that incorporates the extreme right with two "centrist" parties. And after 18 months of this coalition, one has to wonder if we are seeing a repeat of the 1984 Douglas approach but with a different agenda?

There is certainly much more emphasis on the "market", not that previous governments, including the Ardern Government, have not been basically neoliberal. The forty years of slow but steady progress in repairing Māori/Pākehā relationships have been dramatically reversed, mainly because of leverage applied by the right-wing Act Party. And most of the initiatives that the previous government took have been repelled, seemingly for ideological reasons rather that practical reasons. This is the most radical National-led government we have had in Aotearoa.

MMP was introduced because, as a country we became more and more concerned that the voice of relatively small minorities was not being heard in parliament. Now it appears that one of the smallest voices is not only being heard but is effectively leading the policy choices of our government. What we appear increasingly to have in Aotearoa now is a Trump-like approach to government without Trump.

But, as in the 1980s, a return to the previous governmental approach – a small-scale neoliberalism – is not feasible, nor desirable. We will need radical change but change that helps everyone in Aotearoa including the poor and the sick. Radical policies like a Universal Basic Income (UBI) will need to be explored. Capital and wealth taxes will also need to be introduced and the argument that the rich will leave Aotearoa clearly countered; capital and wealth taxes are common overseas.

The steady privatization of health delivery will need to be reversed including the deliberate limiting of some specialities, and the training of more general practitioners; the possibility of GPs being included in the national health system should be investigated – it has worked in the UK for some 70 years; similarly with dentists.

The introduction of UBI for all over 18 or 20 years old is a concept that appears be too expensive, but the

[1] Salmond, A. (2025, July 15). Anne Salmond: Freedom, for whom? Newsroom.

government would no longer have to pay any social security benefits or superannuation if the income benefit was set at the Living Wage. And there would be a reduction in the public service far greater than that strived for by the present government because the complex application of benefits would no longer be required.

The reversal of much of the climate change initiatives of previous governments need to be addressed. Aotearoa should be 100% renewable energy by now – we have more hydroelectricity that nearly every other country – and that energy should be used when solar and wind power is not available. Solar cells should be required on all new buildings and encouraged on all existing buildings by ensuring the gentaliers[2] pay a similar amount for each kilowatt hour as they pay for hydro and other power sources. In such an arrangement no coal or gas would be required for electricity generation even in a "dry" year.

The complete electrification of the railway network should be a priority. With regular and frequent electric passenger trains between all cities and towns with a population of say more than 20,000 people. Buses and trucks should all be electric and petrol/diesel cars should be phased out over say 10-15 years with government incentives if necessary.

Probably the biggest challenge, as far as climate change is concerned in Aotearoa, is farming, and livestock in particular. Crop farming can be very low in carbon emissions – electric farm machinery is available – and the amount of crop farming could be significantly increased with more employment opportunities. However, there are large amounts of farmland that is not suitable for crop farming but is good for cattle and sheep. There is some progress in reducing methane emissions by genetic changes, but it appears unlikely that all methane emissions could be eliminated in a reasonable time frame. However, if, as a country, we can come close to eliminating all CO^2 emissions then the relatively small amount of methane may not be a great problem.

As far as climate change is concerned the climate change minister must be the second most important member of the government ahead of the finance minister. We will also need to understand that "growth" is no longer a priority. We live on a finite world and continuous growth has to stop before we use up all the world's resources. It is also worth asking "who benefits from growth?". The traditional answer has been everyone as growth leads to more jobs – and more profit. But with a basic income how important is more and more jobs? So, the only beneficiaries of growth are the already rich who own the factories and companies. Hence the role of the finance minister should no longer be to promote growth but to ensure we have a fair and equitable financial system.

Education is the other major national expenditure and must be a priority for any government. The return to "free" tertiary education (one of the losses from Rogernomics) should be considered, some of the cost could come from no longer subsidising "private" schools used mainly by the "rich".

That leaves our relations with other countries and defence. For the foreseeable future we will need to be able to continue to trade with other countries – to sell our dairy products, meat and fruit and vegetables to the world. There may come a time in the very distant future when all we will need to do is to feed ourselves. But in the meantime, we must trade with the world and that means being on friendly terms with all countries that want our products and those countries that can provide products that we need. If a country wants to trade with us, then we should not worry about how they govern themselves - that is their concern not ours. However, we are part of the world and have a responsibility to speak out when necessary. Our relative silence on the genocide in Gaza is of real concern and appears to be based on not wanting to upset Donald Trump.

Defence is an interesting area for Aotearoa. For a country of our size and wealth we are the furthest away from any neighbour in the world. And we have the largest moat of any country surrounding us. Aotearoa is not an easy place to invade. The only way the British were able to get a foot in was not by invading but by diplomacy – and Te Tiriti was the outcome. But we will need a Navy and an Air Force although how much of an Army we will need is an open question. It is difficult to see what China would gain from invading New Zealand, or any of the other "large" powers. Australia having a "Trump" like administration is a possibility and that could present a major defence problem for Aotearoa.

But what does all this mean as far as Jesus' teaching is concerned? Jesus would almost certainly approve and support the concept of the common basic income as a way to reduce and probably eliminate poverty. After all, one of Jesus' key teachings was to "love your neighbour" and he made it very clear that our neighbour was not restricted in any way. We also

[2] Refers to the four big companies which dominate New Zealand's electricity market

believe that Jesus would support all and any policy on climate change. Jesus regularly criticised the rich but only supported the poor, the sick and the disabled.

Some claim we are a “Christian Nation” but are we yet?