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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

RALLY THE TRUTH SEEKERS!

EDITORIAL

As we predicted prior to the release of the 'razor gang' audit, the 'big end' of town has come off unscathed, while the real creators of wealth, working people, are under siege. *Beacon* previously printed the 'wish list' of the corporates and their mates because we anticipated their so-called independent audit was simply instructions to the Abbott government to ensure their gross plunder continued unhindered.

Their ravages know no national boundaries as attacks on workers' wages and conditions are duplicated around the world ... healthcare, education, pensions, housing, jobs ... such services for the mass of the population are of little interest to these parasites. Their only concern is their profit and their ability to use their media collaborators to mislead the people they are exploiting.

Let us look at some examples of how this is achieved by the Murdoch-controlled and monopolised media.

'WELFARE CHEATS'

There are never any statistics provided on how many cheat the system. A report from the Australian Institute of Criminology puts the number at 0.04%. The Murdoch press nevertheless prepares fertile ground for an attack on those on welfare by lurid and often inaccurate articles and stories on 'welfare cheats', which allows the government to cut back social welfare without too much protest from the wider community.

'LAZY' YOUTH

Similarly with youth unemployment ... with no evidence to support change, they claim that the young don't want to work and the razor gang suggests they be relocated away from family to where jobs are (if they exist) or lose their measly benefits. There is no discussion about the impact of separating young people from their vital support networks or whether there is affordable accommodation where such jobs exist.

CORRUPT TRADE UNIONS

The Murdoch media shares the government's contempt for the trade union movement. It is simple to print lurid articles about a tiny section of the trade union leadership under investigation, thus facilitating the myth in readers' perception that the whole trade union movement is corrupt. *Beacon* editors strongly argue that the majority of union leaders are hardworking and dedicated to safeguarding the wages and conditions of their members.

The Murdoch media and the government conveniently ignore the fact that historically, every decent working condition was won by the trade union movement.

STATISTICS AND LIES

You only have to look at the false premises the government's audit is based on that try to justify the black hole in the budget, Labor as poor economic managers, seniors becoming too big a burden on taxpayers, people abusing the health system, private is more efficient than public, asylum seekers are criminals, greedy workers want penalty rates and are therefore destroying our economy. These are just a few of the myths generated by the media and the government.

JINGOSTIC PATRIOTISM

Jingostic patriotism is flaunted to prepare the community, and particularly young people, for future wars that will result from our lack of independent foreign policy and a fawning attachment to the war-mongering policies of the USA.

It is vitally important to this government and big business that the community accepts their lies in order for them to implement their program of austerity for the masses while protecting the wealthy and powerful. That is why it is essential to them to restrict the ABC and destroy the trade union movement: the two main obstacles to their lies and two important weapons we use to defend our quality of life.

On the other hand, the Melbourne Unitarian Church-commissioned audit produced by the Australia Institute, which you will have received by mail, reveals the truth about the economic situation. *Beacon* readers now have a huge responsibility and will need to find ways to make this document widely available to all those with whom they can contact. This may be via electronic media, local media, daily press, work places, unions, clubs and churches. We don't have control of the mass media but we have networks and we are resourceful. **Expose the lies! Expose the corruption! Rally the truth seekers!** ■

Tony Shepherd's numbers on health don't add up

BY JENNA PRICE

Columnist for *The Canberra Times*

Tony Shepherd is the man in charge of the National Commission of Audit and is using inaccurate numbers to push an ideological ordinary-Australian-hating line.

He's making proposals based on numbers he can't – or won't – interpret accurately. He's trying to encourage the government to introduce a sickness tax. That's the same government who told us, before the election, that there would be no new taxes.

Here are some of the misinterpretations in the Commission of Audit.

Shepherd said Australians go to the doctor 11 times a year. Once a month (with a month off for holidays when we are clearly too happy to be sick). He uses the furphy that 82 per cent of our visits are bulk-billed. Here are the facts gleaned from the *Report on Government Services 2014*. There were 5767.6 GP-type services per 1000 people in 2012–13 and that's an average of just under six services per person.

Shepherd conflates item numbers with visits. That means that for those of you who have several item numbers all in one hit, that's counted as individual visits.

For instance, I hate going to see the adorable Dr Pandora so much that I wait until I have a few things to see her about. It takes a while to do my vault smear and the various other goodies. She might also slice off the weird growthy thing on the back of my head.

Then I'll get charged for a consultation as well as at least one other procedure. It's those individual items that are being counted by Shepherd and not individual visits.

As well, the prospect of a co-payment is not in the future for many of us. Those services that are not bulk-billed attract, on average, a co-payment of nearly \$30.

But if you don't believe my analysis of the *Report on Government Services*, let me introduce you to Joan Henderson, senior research fellow and deputy director of the Centre for Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health (BEACH). This is an independent research centre of a university, which surveys thousands of patient visits to GPs every year.

Here's Dr Henderson's measured but personal response when I asked her about the Shepherd figure of 11 visits per Australian.

'We scratched our heads when we saw it ... we regularly make this calculation for a lot of our analyses and we know that if you divide the claims to Medicare by the population, you get around 5.59 visits per person,' she said. BEACH publishes those figures each year.

And what does this paragon of patience say about the concept of co-payments?

Not a good idea. Why?

'It disadvantages poorer people, it puts them off going to the doctor and in the long run, it is more costly because people are sicker when they go to the doctor.'

I asked Alison Verhoeven, chief executive officer of the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association, about the figures from the Commission of Audit.

She replied: 'I am unable to replicate Tony Shepherd's claim of 11 visits average per person to a GP.'

Verhoeven is also anxious about the prospect of co-payments: 'Timely access to healthcare services is important to people's health and wellbeing ... deferring or not visiting a GP can result in poorer health.'

'Nationally, in 2012–13, 5.8 per cent of respondents reported that they delayed or did not visit a GP in the previous 12 months because of cost.'

For Indigenous people, that figure was more than 12 per cent.

Tim Senior, an adviser to the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners on Indigenous health, thinks a co-payment will have a tremendous impact.

'Those who have the worst health have the least ability to pay,' he says. No wonder Senior wants to start writing about the social determinants of health right now, while we are all still paying attention. Cutely, he's called it Wonky Health.

What of the cost if we defer the visit to the doctor? I'm in the top 17 per cent of income earners these days but when my kids were little, I was right down the bottom. Would I have looked in my wallet to see if I had the co-payment before I took my daughter to the doctor in the middle of the night to discover she had meningitis?

As Richard Denniss, the director of the Australia Institute says: 'The Commission of Audit is silent on the likely increase in treatment costs from later detection.'

And silent on the emotional costs to parents of young children. Shepherd was too busy cutting costs to think about the social and emotional impacts of the proposals.

I cast around looking for someone with the kind of non-ideological purity I thought might cut through all this bullshit and happened upon a Nobel Laureate, Professor Peter Doherty, on Twitter.

'The Commission of Audit was a narrow bunch of people with a particular ideological viewpoint to play bad cop to the government's good cop when it comes to bringing down the budget ... there is no secret about that.'

He describes the prospect of no Medicare access for high-income earners who already pay the Medicare levy as A Big New Tax.

And he says: 'Nobody expects politicians to be anything other than disgusting but these are particularly appalling. They may do immense damage to this country.'

Yes – and all based on the wrong numbers. ■

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To Whom It May Concern

Please accept the following as submission to the proposed amendments to the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*.

As an eleven-year-old, I arrived in this country from Germany as a migrant with my parents in 1954.

Initially we were billeted at Brooklyn Migrant Hostel (Victoria) for two years after which we moved into our new home at Newport, Victoria. From my recollection it was not long after our arrival that I had my first experiences of racism i.e. being called Hun, Nazi, Wog, square head, etc., and being told by parents of other children, 'Don't play with my children', as if I had some sort of infectious disease! As an eleven-year-old child – naïve and innocent – it was just accepted and I moved on. What options did I have?

Experiences of racism and bullying by peers and a number of school teachers – who I believe were bigoted – continued throughout my school years up to Year 9 when I was a student at Footscray High School. Fortunately my mother was very supportive. I have a distinct memory that on one occasion she accompanied me to school to seek assistance from the school principal who took steps to 'enlighten' the students in my class. Looking back at that time I guess I suffered from depression although as a child I did not know what depression was. I did not want to get out of my bed or go to school for fear of what the day would hold. On reflection, I believe that if the principal had not taken action that resulted in a decrease in the racist bullying at the age of fifteen, *suicide* may have turned out to be an option to stop the trauma and pain. My negative school experiences were the sole reason for seeking employment at sixteen years of age in order to escape the school and its racist/bullying environment.

During my employment, which included service in the Australian Regular Army, various public services and educational institutions, only snippets of racism were directed at me. Now as a grandfather of three beautiful children I am dearly grateful for the life I have lived but the racism and bullying, particularly during my school days, has had a lasting effect and at times I still experience periods of anxiety and depression.

Even in my twilight years I am constantly vigilant and aware of acts of racism and hate being inflicted on my fellow human beings – especially to those who are part of minority groups e.g. Original Nations people, Muslim people, African people and asylum seekers of many backgrounds. Such acts cause me immense personal anguish, pain and suffering.

Whilst most 'Australians' are well meaning, accepting and generous, there are pockets of mean-spirited, ignorant and nasty people in our communities. I believe that the Racial Discrimination Act, as it currently stands, has worked well since its introduction and should definitely NOT be altered in any way to diminish its efficacy. I have a firm belief that change could result in a green light being given for groups such as The National Front and bigots to come out of the woodwork.

Statistics inform us that the rate of suicide is on the rise, particularly youth suicide, including our Original Nations youth. The likelihood of allowing further racism, etc., to occur by tampering with the Racial Discrimination Act and its likely effect on youth suicide rates **MUST NOT** be discounted.

Attorney-General George Brandis' media statement informed Australians that they have a right to be bigots. It appears that Mr Brandis has never been at the receiving end of bigot/racist comments especially whilst in a vulnerable situation. It's not unusual that a statement such as:

'No one can make you feel inferior without your consent' comes from, I believe, people who hold power and privilege or are individuals who are fortunate enough to have never experienced bullying, racism, racist jokes and being put down, etc. What sort of society do we want to pass on to the next generation? I would ask if the proposed amendments to the RDA are implemented, how would an incident similar to that experienced by Australian of the Year, AFL footballer Adam Goodes during an AFL match with Collingwood in May 2013 (13-year-old girl called him an ape) be treated?

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/george-brandis-racial-discrimination-act-changes-allow-hate-to-fester-20140403-zqq4v.html#ixzz2yTOxEPAq>

We need to learn from recent history that it does not take long to destroy the delicate balance of tolerance within society.

I believe the current *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)* as it stands protects those that are vulnerable to abuse and does not constrain free speech contrary to *Herald Sun* columnist Mr A Bolt's statement after the Federal Court's judgment on 28 Sept 2011. Mr Bolt's articles in the *Herald Sun* newspaper and on the paper's online site **were not factual** apart from contravening the RDA 1975. Personally, I would rather have sticks and stones thrown at me than be at the receiving end of a racism/bullying bout.

K Kaulfuss, VIC

It was a US-instigated Ukrainian coup

Spot-on analysis from the United States Peace Council

By **NICK WRIGHT** 25 April 2014 Information Clearing House (ICH)



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We know that neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt were caught in a phone conversation plotting the coup.

Once again the US establishment is promoting another violent coup d'état as a democratic uprising. Troops are moving, planes are flying, ships are advancing, war threats are being thrown. The governments of NATO and their media point fingers at Russia, but the provocation is fully hidden. Peace activists who should know better are buying this propaganda and spreading it.

Peace activists must urgently act to illuminate the travesty of justice that is taking place. We spoke together to support negotiations with Iran. We must raise our voices now.

Ukraine's democratically elected president has been violently and forcibly removed with the financial and political support of the United States and European Union. The State Department did not just hand out cookies to a few protesters. It did not just select the replacement government. The US spent \$5 billion to instill Koch brothers' democracy in Ukraine. The House has approved an additional \$1 billion. What else? There are now two governments in Ukraine and the US/EU supported one is filled with neo-Nazis.

We must not forget how anti-government protests in foreign countries have historically been instigated and/

or used by the CIA for nefarious purposes. The CIA playbook has been repeated so many times – from Iran in 1953 to Chile in 1973 to Haiti 1991 and 2004, Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Honduras in 2009, Libya, Egypt and Syria, Venezuela, among many others. Government overthrows result. How can we forget the devastation these coups bring? Sometimes the government being deposed is democratically elected, sometimes not, but in either case a government is targeted because it shows independence from US foreign policy demands.

The CIA instigates 'democratic' uprisings, pays thugs to carry out violence. The State Department, assisted by the corporate media, demonises a government, its leaders and anyone who supports them. US-controlled financial institutions decimate the country's economy to encourage even more disruption and violence. Then thugs attack government entities, private property, and threaten, intimidate and attack at will. False flag snipers, video and news distortions weaken any sense of honesty. Six corporations own 90% of our US media. They flood news communications with propaganda here and abroad that the 'democratic' opponents just want to get rid of corrupt government, install democracy and save their economy. They claim the issue is sovereignty of the country, that it is the right of the people of that country to determine

their own destiny without imperialist intervention. They pretend not to be advocating for any government. How can we accept such lies?

What the US and Europe are doing to Ukraine is only very slowly being exposed. The peace movement must not be silent!

We know that neocon Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt were caught in a phone conversation plotting the coup.

Despite denials by US representatives of the fascist character of the protesters, Ukrainian Chabad Chief Rabbi Reuven Azman has recommended that Jews leave the city and perhaps the country. In addition, Israel has been asked to protect Ukraine's Jewish population.

An atomised Ukraine is more susceptible to corporate exploitation, austerity and impoverishment of the population imposed from outside. NATO continues to move further east, rapidly enveloping Russia with bases and 'anti-missile' batteries, another step on the way to confronting Russia. Former national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski has called for breaking up Russia, even as Ukraine is being divided.

Capitalist Russia's main export commodity is natural gas. Halliburton is leading the effort to frack natural gas in Ukraine. In addition, the US has now become the largest producer of natural gas, which the State Department is arranging to sell abroad. When the US Government engineers a friendly government in Ukraine, the US fossil fuel industry is being subsidised to undercut Russia's export market.

The Dulles brothers, John Foster as Secretary of State and Allen heading the CIA, began using extensive government resources starting in the 1950s to destroy democracies such as Iran, Guatemala and Congo and generated the attacks on Cuba and assassination attempts on Fidel Castro. Furthermore, disasters, natural and human-made, are exploited to benefit the 1% at the expense of the majority and of democracy, from Chile to Moscow to New Orleans.

We should by now recognise the goal of the corporate monopolies. First to steal Ukraine's sovereignty, then its resources and industry, then privatisation and destruction of unions and civil society. Then on to Russia's vast resources. Divide and conquer. A long-term policy of the US, Britain and other imperial states.

These events exacerbate the danger of an explosive war, a conflagration that could envelope the planet. The Peace Movement is commemorating the tragedy of WWI. Today's events are reminiscent of the capitalist and imperialist competitions that led to it. What can we do? Generate local demonstrations. Confront our government and media. Let our elected officials know that we see through the fog. Expose the hypocrisy, lies and war mongering.

Then we must demand that Congress investigate another US-instigated coup to determine which laws, national or international, were violated.

The people of the US stopped Obama's bombing of Syria. We must demand that the US back away from more war, violent regime change and the imposition of austerity.

We must mobilise! ■

DID YOU KNOW...

Overthrowing other people's governments: The Master List

By **William Blum** – Published February 2013

Instances of the United States overthrowing, or attempting to overthrow, a foreign government since the Second World War. (*indicates successful ousting of a government)

China 1949 to early 1960s	Angola 1975, 1980s
Albania 1949–53	Zaire 1975
East Germany 1950s	Portugal 1974–76*
Iran 1953*	Jamaica 1976–80*
Guatemala 1954*	Seychelles 1979–81
Costa Rica mid-1950s	Chad 1981–82*
Syria 1956–7	Grenada 1983*
Egypt 1957	South Yemen 1982–84
Indonesia 1957–8	Suriname 1982–84
British Guiana 1953–64*	Fiji 1987*
Iraq 1963*	Libya 1980s
North Vietnam 1945–73	Nicaragua 1981–90*
Cambodia 1955–70*	Panama 1989*
Laos 1958*, 1959*, 1960*	Bulgaria 1990*
Ecuador 1960–63*	Albania 1991*
Congo 1960*	Iraq 1991
France 1965	Afghanistan 1980s*
Brazil 1962–64*	Somalia 1993
Dominican Republic 1963*	Yugoslavia 1999–2000*
Cuba 1959 to present	Ecuador 2000*
Bolivia 1964*	Afghanistan 2001*
Indonesia 1965*	Venezuela 2002*
Ghana 1966*	Iraq 2003*
Chile 1964–73*	Haiti 2004*
Greece 1967*	Somalia 2007 to present
Costa Rica 1970–71	Libya 201*
Bolivia 1971*	Syria 2012
Australia 1973–75*	

*Free Market
Public Schools*

SCHOOL CHOICE – A FREE MARKET THEOLOGY

BY ROBERT ELY



I am a teacher and educational researcher. I have taught and consulted in over 80 public, Catholic and independent schools in Victoria, NSW and the UK over a period of 18 years. I am also a graduate of the Melbourne Business School, having studied management, economics and marketing. I am here as a public education advocate and have been a member of and broadcaster for the Defence of Government Schools organisation (DOGS) since 2006. I introduce myself and describe my background in this way to let you know that the ideas put forward in this talk are derived from an arguably informed perspective.

Mr Pyne announced the federal government would spend \$70 million to help up to 1500 public schools become independent by 2017. This amounts to about \$40,000 per school, in other words, small change. Pyne, and the government he represents, are doing this because:

One day (he says) I'd like to see every public school having a level of autonomy and independence that means that student outcomes are student-first priority.

Nested in this seemingly nonsensical statement is a belief in free market fundamentalism or, as I term it, free market theology.

What is free market theology?

I am not describing the term as a positive economic theory of the behaviour of supernatural beings or deities but as an unquestionable belief that free markets provide the greatest possible equity and prosperity, and that any interference with the market process decreases social wellbeing. In Australia, this can be summed up in a simple belief:

Private is good, public is bad.

This translates into the practical world of education funding as 'Private schools are good, public schools are bad – so let's make public schools act like private schools.'

John F Kennedy once said that 'The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie ... but the myth' because belief in myths allows 'the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought' [Kennedy 1962]. Both the Coalition Government and the Labor Opposition are enjoying the comfort of the myth that school autonomy in budgeting and staffing leads to better student outcomes while ignoring the discomfort of mounting evidence against. There is evidence that school autonomy has no relationship with student outcomes, while leading to both increasing corruption and higher levels of social, cultural and racial segregation. Mr Pyne's ideas are an example

of pure free market theology overlayed on an education system.

For an education system to be effective it must be accountable, effective and efficient – in that order.

In Australia, we don't have an education system – we have three school systems. I wish to look at each of these three to determine if they are accountable, effective and efficient. Efficiency is a first-order value in the world of free market theology and believers state that efficiency leads to effectiveness. Accountability is more often expressed as 'more red tape' and dismissed as an irrelevant irritant that wastes resources and time ...

1. The state school system. Takes all comers. Free (sort of), secular (sort of), and compulsory. It is taxpayer-funded and encourages/demands small parental contributions. The state system educates the vast majority of kids, including the vast majority of disadvantaged, disabled, the brightest and the Indigenous. This system still educates a bit over 60% of the population. On the whole, accountable, effective and efficient. Government schools have a weakened central bureaucracy in many states, but remain accountable at all levels and efficient due to low levels of government support. Pyne's reforms will weaken state-based educational institutions and create an even weaker school political voice in Canberra, and state ministers (especially in Victoria) do not actively advocate for their state education systems. That is left to parent groups, the teacher unions and activist groups like the DOGS.
2. The Catholic system. Taxpayer funded. Parental contributions. Exempt from all antidiscrimination laws, enrol whom they choose, sometimes the poor and needy, but as a matter of 'charity' rather than from inclusive values. The Gonski review highlighted this as a statistical reality. The Catholic system unaccountable to taxpayers (average time between audits for Catholic schools approximately 50 years). A large, effective, centralised Catholic bureaucracy opaquely transfers government funding from school to school. Historically ineffective at educating all, and not interested anyway. Sectarian. Inefficient (and as their 'existence' is a result of religious belief, they are by and large tax exempt, and lower levels of direct government funding are supplemented by tax exemptions). Also, there is a duplication of school places leading to system-wide waste. There is NO suggestion by Mr Pyne that any Catholic school should be 'autonomous' or 'independent' and it is noted that Catholic education representatives only signed up to the Gonski reforms under the condition that both their administrative processes and funding levels remained untouched! They are politically very powerful and their lobby groups are well resourced – in part with taxpayer's money.
3. The (in)dependent system. Taxpayer funded. Parental contributions. Functionally unaccountable, the wealthiest of these schools often possess vast undeclared capital assets procured over time. No financial data has been available since 2011 on the Myschool website. The least wealthy of these schools

are funded at the same level as the state schools down the road, are dependent on government funding and would cease to exist without it. Many low fee (in)dependent schools are religious in nature (Exclusive Brethren, Scientology, Shia, Sunni, Jewish and various forms of proselytising Christian) and are deeply resistant to curriculum that questions their belief systems. They are ineffective and inefficient (see Catholic schools above). Added to this, they are not only exempt from anti-discrimination legislation but the wealthy (in)dependent schools are attractive to the aspirational middle class and also actively discriminate by parental income and are in what has been described as an 'arms race' of facilities building, which generates further inefficiencies. They are politically very powerful and their lobby groups are well resourced – in part with taxpayers' money.

So, if we go back to the free market idea that 'Private is good and public is bad', we can see Mr Pyne's path to improvement of the public education system is making public schools like the (in)dependent schools by breaking them up, cutting them loose from support and making them compete with each other for pupils to 'better serve the needs of their communities'. He believes that competition between state schools will raise the tide of achievement and all schools will do better.

The trouble is that his free market ideas are false: demonstrably and dangerously false.

Free market theology has already been applied to education systems in various countries around the world and it has not demonstrated any benefit. To quote from Trevor Cobold, a former member of the productivity committee and member of the Save Our Schools organisation:

Pyne has made grandiose claims about the research evidence on school autonomy. For example, he has said that "all the studies indicate that the more autonomous a school, the better the outcomes for students".

At the launch of the Coalition's plan, he released a document containing a series of quotes from several studies which he said supported school autonomy. It cites a range of sources, including the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, the Productivity Commission, the Grattan Institute, the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, and the Gonski report. The Federal Department of Education has also cited World Bank research.

BUT, the evidence presented by the Minister is highly selective and misleading.

The evidence from the 2012 PISA study contradicts Mr Pyne and is unequivocal and compelling:

PISA shows that school systems that grant more autonomy to schools to define and elaborate their curricula and assessments tend to perform better than systems that don't grant such autonomy ... In contrast, greater responsibility in managing resources appears to be unrelated to a school system's overall performance.

The report found no statistically significant effect of greater principal autonomy over budgeting and staffing.

Pyne also selectively and misleadingly cites several Australian reports. He cites a finding of an evaluation of IPS in Western Australia by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education [2013] that while some principals support the program, and believe it will lead to increased student outcomes, there has, in fact, been NO improvement in student outcomes.

Mr Pyne also deliberately misquotes the Gonski review and recent World Bank research to support his arguments. Each of these studies found that school autonomy had no significant effect on student outcomes. There is not one example cited by minister Pyne that supports his argument. Mr Pyne is demonstrably wrong.

While federal ministers misquoting research to further political and ideological agendas is nothing new, there is a more dangerous aspect to Christopher Pyne's school autonomy agenda.

In the UK there is mounting evidence of 'independent' government schools being hijacked by religious and cultural groups to further their own ends.

In the UK, 'independent' government schools are called 'charter' schools, being self-governing and locally autonomous. Unlike Australia, the UK still has centralised accountability mechanisms and schools are regularly inspected by an organisation called OFSTED to determine school effectiveness. Recently, twenty-five schools in Birmingham were inspected by OFSTED and six of these schools were 'failed' and put in special measures as evidence was discovered that particular religious teachings were pervading the curriculum and there was gender segregation in classes. It was found that a religious group had populated these six charter school boards and administrations with its adherents. Following the 'failing' of these six schools, there is now much debate about religious intolerance and racism, but the problem would not have arisen in the first place if these schools had been as directly accountable as their non-charter school neighbours.

Similarly, in the US, there is a re-segregation of races in many US states. The rise of the charter school movement in New York State as a leader in creating 'independent' state schools has led to 'apartheid schooling'.

UCLA's Civil Rights Project has been tracking national trends. Surprisingly, it found that "New York has the most segregated schools in the country. ... Heavily impacting these state rankings is New York City, home to the largest and one of the most segregated public school systems in the nation." The UCLA report repeatedly uses a term that is now common in academic circles studying resegregation: "apartheid schools" ... those schools with less than 1 per cent white student enrolment. The report continues, "Across New

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In Australia, we don't have an education system – we have three school systems.

York City, 73 per cent of charters were considered apartheid schools and 90 per cent were intensely segregated (less than 10 per cent white enrolment) schools in 2010".

While Australia is not either the UK or the USA, and our government funded (in)dependent system already caters for and funds religious and cultural groups to set up segregated and 'apartheid' schooling, the trend to extend this process to 'independent' state

schools has implications for Australia's religious cultural tolerance into the future.

The most effective way to foster and promote social, religious and cultural tolerance is to educate children from diverse religious, SES and cultural backgrounds together, not to separate them out at a young age based upon their parents' religion, income or background. Children separated out in this way are less likely to gain an understanding of 'other' children whom they never come into contact with in the course of their educational lives. Creating 'independent' state schools accelerates the progression of educational apartheid in the only school sector that, up to now, has the mandate to educate all children in a free, secular environment.

Finally, autonomous state schools will be forced to compete and not cooperate with each other in the marketplace for 'good quality' students, or the market place jargon 'input quality management'. In the educational free market that Mr Pyne envisages, enrolling and teaching academically poor students in autonomous state schools will become an exercise in 'risk management and/or harm minimisation'. The pattern of schools supporting and encouraging the diagnosis of behavioural disorders in academically poor students to attract the funding that such disorders bring will necessarily accelerate.

Over the last ten years, Australia has progressively 'marketised' and privatised school education and, at the same time, our education system is falling behind the rest of the world. While correlation is not causation, in the end, education is a cooperative, not competitive activity, and the free market principles should have no part in the education of children.

In education, public is good and private is bad.

The fight that public education advocates are involved in now is not just a fight for resources but a war of ideas. It is a battle between enlightened self-interest and financial self-interest. Well-resourced public schooling that is free, secular and open to all is enlightened self-interest in action. Free market theologians and believers see no role for enlightened self-interest, only the financial self-interest of parents forced to compete with each other to 'do the best thing for their child' in a totally unaccountable, deregulated education market that has both winners and losers. While free market advocates now have the ascendancy, there are indications that the parents of Australia are starting to wake up to problems inherent in Mr Pyne's radical free market theology. ■

Tony Abbott's budget emergency: what are the facts?

Not one of the prime minister's claims about the 'budget emergency' stacks up against a simple fact check – and here's the evidence.

CLAIM: Australia has a budget emergency

Nations with budget emergencies don't receive AAA ratings with a stable outlook from all three credit rating agencies, as Australia did under Labor.

Australia is one of only 10 economies in the world with AAA ratings from all three agencies – in the company of other countries with strong public finances like Germany, Canada, Sweden, Singapore and Switzerland. This status shows our finances are considered to be stronger than those of the vast majority of advanced economies – including the US, the UK, Japan, France and New Zealand.

CLAIM: Debt levels are unsustainable

The Australian government has low levels of debt by world standards.

The latest budget update shows net government debt for 2013–14 of \$191.5bn, or 12.1% of Australia's GDP. By contrast, net government debt in advanced economies around the world averages 74.7%, according to the International Monetary Fund.

CLAIM: Labor's deficits were too high

Governments typically run budget surpluses when the economy is strong and deficits when the economy is weak.

Labor allowed the budget to go into deficit in 2008–09 because the global financial crisis was threatening to plunge our economy into recession. Our action stimulated the economy, kept Australia out of recession and supported hundreds of thousands of jobs.

The deficit peaked at \$54.5bn, or 4.2% of GDP, in 2009–10 – less than half the advanced country average. Then, as the private sector started recovering, Labor started reducing the deficit. In our last full year in office, 2012–13, the federal deficit was \$18.8bn or 1.2% of GDP, compared to an advanced economy average of 4.9%.

CLAIM: Spending was out of control

In the four years from 2009–10 to 2012–13 Labor met its fiscal rule of keeping real average spending growth to less than 2% a year. In fact, this was the lowest four-year period of real spending growth in 23 years.

The Abbott government arrives at a higher figure for political purposes by including the 2008–09 stimulus – an economic program the Nobel laureate, economist Joseph Stiglitz, has described as one of the 'best designed' stimulus packages of any advanced economy.

CLAIM: Labor increased taxes

Labor was a low-taxing government. During our time in office, federal government receipts averaged 22.5% of GDP. By contrast, under the Howard government, receipts averaged 25% of GDP.

CLAIM: Debt will reach \$667bn by the end of the decade

The budget's debt and deficit figures have been inflated by Joe Hockey through a combination of spending decisions and changes to economic assumptions, such as unemployment projections. These changes doubled projected budget deficits by \$68bn and have also blown out debt figures. These political changes in Budget assumptions were confirmed by Treasury at Senate estimates hearings earlier this year.

By contrast, the independent pre-election economic and fiscal outlook's medium term projections, using long-standing methodology, show that on Labor's policy settings the budget surplus grows to 1% of GDP in 2020–21 and net debt returns to zero in 2023–24.

CLAIM: Labor's school and disability reforms are not funded

In the 2013–14, budget Labor took the unprecedented step of releasing 10 year figures for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Gonski school reforms, demonstrating how they were funded over the long term.

The Coalition has reversed a number of these savings measures and now claims these reforms represent a fiscal 'time bomb' – this is an obvious attempt to justify breaking Abbott's election promises on schools and disability.

The result: Labor v the Coalition

It is the case that structural improvements in the budget are needed to ensure key spending is sustainable. That's why Labor made targeted savings worth more than \$180bn over the six Budgets since 2008–09.

Savings like means testing the private health insurance rebate, removing the baby bonus and reforming the pharmaceutical benefits scheme, rather than hiking income tax and cutting benefits to low and middle income families. Treasury analysis shows that the long-term savings made by Labor mean the budget is cumulatively more than \$300bn better off by 2020–21.

Political deceit may have provided Abbott with an expedient path to office, but it represents a shaky foundation for responsible economic and Budget management. ■

from our readers



The Editor

Beacon

When Australia commemorated Anzac Day on April 25 we honoured the thousands of Diggers who gave their lives fighting heroically under the banner of God, King and Country in a tragic and inept campaign in far away, Gallipoli, 99 years ago, when Australia was part of the British Commonwealth.

However, by widely proclaiming that our nation was born at this time (instead of in 1901), the fact that a majority of Australians expressed their opposition to this imperial war by voting no in two referendums calling for the conscription of Australian soldiers to fight overseas, is ignored.

Over the years, and especially in recent times, there has been extensive publicity proclaiming that our national identity and character was forged at Gallipoli and, as such, it is at the pinnacle in our collective memory.

Without distracting from the courageous effects of the Anzacs, some balance must be restored to our collective memory of key events in our nation's life. In this regard, the Eureka Stockade and the battles by Australian soldiers fighting the Japanese in World War 2 must be at the forefront of our reflections on the Australian character.

Moreover, our country's achievements at times of peace, such as leading the world in the eight-hour working day in 1888 and the basic wage for workers, ten years before Gallipoli, should remain high in our proud, collective memory along with our distinctive national character of mateship in all its many forms and a fair go for all.

We must not let the controllers of the mass media, along with politicians expressing patriotic zeal, distort the true meaning of Gallipoli in our nation's history.

Keith McEwan, ACT

Dear Editor

The edition devoted to refugees was excellent and timely. The article by Julian Burnside (what a hero) was put to great use by me in my involvement with the Refugee Action Collective in Brisbane. I ran off copies and distributed them at the rally in Brisbane as part of national Palm Sunday weekend rallies for refugees.

I attach payment for renewed subscriptions that include that for my brother at Tweed Heads (Hi, Jim). This time I also include a new subscription for my brother Ray (Hi, Ray – just so you know why this magazine has turned up in your mail box).

F Waddington, Qld

Dear Beacon Editorial Board

Apologies for late payment for renewal of subscription and thank you for dispatching the *Beacon* beyond the due date. The *Beacon* is a must publication, especially so in these times when we the public are being treated like mushrooms (kept in the dark and fed on bull**it) by those that are elected who are supposed to make our society a fairer and caring one.

I have enclosed a copy of my submission to the Federal Human Rights Policy Branch, Attorney General's Department, in relation to the proposed changes to the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. I give permission for the publication of my submission within the *Beacon* if you desire; an electronic copy is also available if required.

Yours sincerely

K Kaulfuss, Vic

Editor's Note: See page 3 of the *Beacon* for this submission.

Dear People

I would like to subscribe to the *Beacon*. Enclosed is my cheque for \$10 concession for one year.

An excellent newsletter.

Thank you and kind regards

Z Dobson, NSW

PAY BY DIRECT DEPOSIT

If *Beacon* readers would like to pay their subs via a bank, details are below. (You will need to go to an ANZ bank if you do not want to incur fees.)

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from our readers



COMMISSION OF AUDIT RESPONSES:

Dear Ms Harper

I have read of the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church only recently. To be honest, I did not know you existed. However, your People's Commission of Audit totally captured my attention.

I am one of the many Australians who feel very anxious about the future of our country. I believe we are being hijacked by a government whose ideology has nothing in common with what I always felt were the basic values of Australia. Despite our many faults we have been broadly egalitarian and working towards better outcomes for all. This government has no mandate to fundamentally change Australia but, somehow, it seems to believe it has some sort of divine right to do so.

I am an older Australian with a grandson not quite 12-months-old. Seeing my grandson certainly makes me focus on what is important and what sort of

future he will have. I am particularly concerned about climate change and our government's inability to take any responsible action. Obviously profits are more important.

I am wondering what will become of your audit? I saw some comments from it in the *Canberra Times* but am hoping it will reach many people. Can one acquire a copy?

I think your church has been amazing to do this audit. I believe we all need to act constructively – and quickly – if we are to have any chance to head off the disasters awaiting us and the rest of the world. Knowing just what to do that is effective is another thing.

I would be very interested in hearing what your church is planning and how other communities may be involved.

Yours sincerely

L Farrand, ACT

Thanks, Donna.

Have printed a number of copies of 'Auditing the auditors'. I will also give one to the Trades Hall Council.

Yours in solidarity

Tom Curphey

MUA Veterans

Dear Donna

Thank you for the impressive 'Auditing the auditors'. We shall do our best to distribute it widely.

Warm wishes

R Camilleri

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Tony Shepherd’s numbers on health don’t add up

To whom it may concern

It was a US-instigated Ukrainian coup

School choice – A free market theology

Tony Abbott’s budget emergency: what are the facts?

Beacon Editorial Board

Peter Abrehart

Marion Harper

Donna Sensi

Julie Stafford

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