

Bishop George Browning

gandmbrowning@bigpond.com

The Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

19 May 2014

My Dear Prime Minister

May Budget

I simply do not know where to begin. You do indeed have a mandate to balance the budget, but you have absolutely no mandate to increase inequity in Australia. Globally, inequity is already at a dangerous and unsustainable level (the wealth of 70 individuals is equal to the wealth of the poorest half of the world's population). It is a growing phenomenon in Australia. Inequity is an existential threat to the harmony and balance of civil society.

I am shocked, confused and I am afraid very angry. The budget appears to have only one motive, maximise profit for those who have already accumulated capital. There appears to be no awareness of the need to invest in social infrastructure, no awareness of the need to care for the poor and marginalised, no awareness of what it is like to be an average Australian who is young, an average Australian who has been made redundant, or an average Australian who is now retired. There appears to be no awareness either that we are part of a global community with a moral obligation to contribute to the lives of vulnerable humanity, wherever they are. You do not want refugees to arrive here by boat, but apparently you do not want to address the reasons why they need to leave in the first place.

Of course we need to live within our means, but why is the burden being disproportionately placed upon the poor and vulnerable. It appears that those with wealth have unequal lobbying access and are reaping a bonanza.

It is fair to ask critics of your budget what strategies could be implemented to make structural change and balance the budget. I submit that the following would balance the budget, reduce inequity and fairly build a prosperous Australia. Why have they not been considered?

- Ensure that companies like *Google* and *Apple* and other international companies that do business in Australia pay their fair share of tax.
- Reduce tax concessions to wealthy superannuation schemes.
- Put an end to negative gearing

- Examine the legitimacy of Family Trusts and other tax avoiding/tax reducing measures
- Maintain a super wealth tax on mining
- Legislate for a price on carbon
- Examine the legitimacy of wealth procured without production. The market and the value of the dollar is significantly influenced by those who make money buying and selling shares or currency, not with the motive of investment, but with the motive of betting on a variation in price. This activity contributed significantly to the global financial collapse of 2008. It adds nothing to ‘common wealth’.
- Drop your paid parental leave scheme and invest in child minding facilities.
- Encourage volunteering as a major way of contributing to Australia’s well being. The newly retired, instead of having their incomes reduced could be encouraged to volunteer. Goals could be set in the reduction of public expenditure through volunteering
- Encourage philanthropy. (Britain maintains its social infrastructure though taxation, America tries to achieve its through philanthropy, in Australia we appear not to be in favour of either).
- Begin a debate about 21st century federation. I understand a federation white paper is being produced next year. Clearly ‘waste’ is primarily in governmental duplication. I do not believe we can any longer afford the second tier of government in Australia – the states.
- Increase investment in scientific research and escalate transference from energy sourced from fossil fuels to energy sourced from renewables.
- Invest in 21st century infrastructure not 20th century infrastructure – I refer to your commitment to roads. Clearly we need good roads. But in the 21st century we need facilities that build community and we need 21st century public transport.

You were trained by the Jesuits. What bemuses me is that you seem to have no concept of ‘common good’ which I understand lies at the heart of their moral code, indeed is at the heart of a Christian world view.

This budget is taking us down the wrong path; it is trying to stretch 20th century capitalist ideology into a 21st century context where it does not fit. The challenge of capitalism in the 21st century is not its capacity to generate wealth, it can and will do that, but can it build a balanced, fair and just society? The answer is no, it will not do that, unless government regulation directs it in this path. Your government’s responsibility is not to give capitalism its head, but to legislate for the right use of investment and profit. This century the world’s finite resources need to be equitably shared. The young must be nurtured in a spirit of altruism and hope. This budget appears to take them in the opposite direction.

Yours sincerely,

Bishop George Browning

