

Budget Week – Bluff, bluster and bulldust!

It's an election year and we should all know that the only important thing is the cost of everything. We know we now all live in an 'economy'. The stupid idea of a 'society' made up of communities of people who cared for each other and felt an obligation to help those worse off than themselves appears long gone. And Budget Week 2010 in Federal Parliament has proved that yet again.

For some, Budget Week is one of the most important political times of the year. Well last week shattered that view.

Budget Week is now clearly about two 'egos' disregarding common sense and any sort of reasonable or rational arguments, even those supported by clear and irrefutable evidence, and engaging in simplistic political manoeuvring to show who has the biggest one (ego of course). It has become a week of bluff, bluster and bulldust while each of these two egos try to convince us that they will make the least worst Prime Minister.

For weeks leading up to the Budget, Mr Rudd has argued the need for a massive reform of the health system and even produced another 'historic agreement' with the States. And this Budget was going to provide the final details and highlights to solve all the nation's health issues.

There is total agreement from all sources, even the politicians themselves, that:

- about 15% of the Australian population suffers from mental illness at any one time
- the incidence of mental illnesses are increasing (eg. 20% of the population are now expected to suffer depression at some stage in their life)
- the 'baby boomers' are aging and the demands on aged and health care services will become critical over the next two decades
- with the increasing age of the population, the incidence of disabilities and the consequent need for services will also increase.

The 2010 Budget delivered **no increases in funding for Mental Health** despite the promises of the previous weeks. Further, the Budget again **froze funding for Supported Employment** for people with disabilities. It even **removed from the human services sector funding through Medicare for the provision of counselling and support services** by Social Workers and Occupational Therapists. At least that funding has provided some basic, minimal support to some aged and disadvantaged people with mental health problems. And as the details of the fine print are further examined, we will certainly find even more 'unintended consequences' of a non-caring Government.

Then on Thursday night we listen to 'Mr Negative', Tony Abbott. Even though he hasn't uttered a single positive statement about anything since Christmas, his argument is just so simple.

- The Rudd Government have spent too much money.
- We have a huge debt which must be reduced at all costs.
- We won't increase taxes because the major cause of all our problems is that Rudd has introduced so many 'great, big, new taxes'.
- Now we can't possibly charge the high performers (mining companies, banks) anything extra to reduce that debt because that will weaken our economy even more

Even 'Blind Freddie' can see that Mr Abbott's only remaining source of funds is to reduce spending across the board. He has already promised to reduce the number of public servants and a few weeks ago suggested that the 'dole bludgers' should have their benefits 'geographically challenged'.

So at the end of Budget Week, what have we achieved? We have two political parties who agree that the economic burdens of Australia must be principally borne by a continuing reduction in the health and welfare of its citizens. Once again, it will be the mentally ill, the disabled, the aged, the homeless and all other disadvantaged groups who must bare the lion's share of the impact.

Which of the parties is the most 'economically conservative'? Which of the parties is the 'best financial manager'?

Frankly, I don't give a damn. We, the ordinary people, are starting to realise that there is something seriously wrong with our 'economy' but more so with both major political parties. Perhaps more importantly, we are starting to realise that the suffering and even death of many members of our own disability community could be prevented by the sensible expenditure of a few more dollars.

The politicians, the 'market economists', the 'economic rationalists' and the 'new managerialists' who control our governments have failed to realise that in over 200 years, **capitalism has proved itself unable to provide a workable system of meeting human needs**. Welfare systems exist only because our current system of government fails to provide for the needs of the majority of our population.

Let's cancel Budget Week next year. It produces little and they don't even tell us what 'the core promises' are anymore.

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