



A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the first edition of Do Justice for 2024 as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective in the tradition of Micah and St Francis.

Are we turning our back on climate change?

"We're going to bring rigour and common sense to the hysteria surrounding climate change. Climate change policies in New Zealand have been driven by a tiny minority with loud voices who have no conception as to the consequences of their narrow, shallow ideas on the day-to-day functioning of the economy. For those reasons, whatever work has been happening in the Ministry for the Environment—not unlike Thomas Beckett, the "meddlesome priest"—that is now stopped. The coalition agreement says that there'll be no more uncertainty as to the role of the emissions trading scheme (ETS) as the pivotal, paramount institution guiding us as we make the transition from our current emissions profile to a more sensible and defensible place—but not at the cost of those legacy industries that give us our wealth, our wellbeing, and jobs." Hon Shane Jones, Minister of Resources, in Parliament on 12 December 2023.¹

The above speech by Shane Jones makes it very clear that the economy is more important than the environment to the new government and anything that is in any way detrimental or thought to be detrimental to the economy will not be allowed by the new government.

Shane Jones is one of the most experienced members of the new Cabinet, having been a Labour party minister during the Clark Government and a NZ First minister in the Ardern coalition government of 2017-20. Hence his comments must be taken seriously. But what does *"rigour and common sense"* mean? He has also said *"We are not going to meet the 2030 dreamy fairytale aspirational figures that will be freeing ourselves of fossil fuels as generating energy."* It seems obvious that Shane Jones, speaking for the

new government, does not appear to believe that climate change and global warming is caused by burning fossil fuels or that this will ultimately be detrimental to human life on this planet. This despite the overwhelming scientific evidence to the contrary.

As far as the new government is concerned, gross domestic product (GDP) and the economy are the only things that are important, but it is not the long-term impact on the economy that Shane Jones and the new government appear to be worried about; their concern is the very short term impact on certain industries that are the major contributors to Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GGE) such as arable farming. They also have said they will repeal the ban on oil, gas and coal exploration despite having agreed to a transition away from fossil fuels at COP28.

If we turn our back on the short term, then we cannot expect to deal with the longer term. What is the "hysteria" that surrounds climate change? The fact that 2023 was the hottest year ever recorded and the average world temperature was 1.4°C higher than pre-industrialisation², just .1°C below the target increase by 2050 agreed in Paris in 2015. Is this hysteria? Surely the 71%³ who express concern about climate change are more than a "tiny minority with loud voices"?

This appears to be very much in line with the 100-day plan of action, although the prime minister keeps saying he is concerned about climate change. If Shane Jones's comments are really what we can expect from our new government as far as climate change is concerned, then we need to start praying fervently for our grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Doing it tough and the squeezed middle

Last year we heard almost continuously from nearly all politicians that we were "doing it tough" and in the days before the election concern for the "squeezed middle" became the main cry from the new prime

¹ [Here](#) is the Hansard transcript of the speech delivered by Hon Shane Jones, Minister for Oceans and Fisheries, on 12 Dec 2023

² [NASA confirms 2023 was the hottest year on record \(msn.com\)](#)

³ [Public attitudes and action on energy and climate change: March 2023 | EECA](#)

pinister. But who have been “doing it tough” and what is the “squeezed middle”?

The reason for all this negativity was the increase in the cost of living, caused primarily by the additional spending governments around the world, New Zealand included, had to do to address the Covid pandemic. Yes, the cost-of-living index did reach above 7% in early 2023, the highest for many years. But increases in wages for many people covered this increase. Both the minimum wage and the living wage had substantial increases, and the then government increased many benefits, including superannuation, in line with the cost-of-living increases. Mortgage interest rates have significantly increased, but since the 2008 global financial crisis the banks have been more careful in assessing applications for loans and there has been no marked reported increase in mortgage defaults. So, who was actually “doing it tough”? To some extent those with large increases in their mortgage interest rates, but it would seem that most have been able to put food on the table, pay the electricity bill, and buy most of the essential items; maybe they may not have been able to have the overseas holidays that they had in the past. No, the people who have been having it really tough are the people who always have it tough: those on benefits, those earning the minimum wage, those on super who do not own their home and have to rent. These are the people that are having it tough, not the squeezed middle. But then this is the part of our population that always have it tough. What is the new government going to do for this group? Very little if the 100 days’ action plan is anything to go by and they can expect very little, if anything, from the proposed income tax cuts.

Maybe it is time to have a further look at a universal basic income that would allow all New Zealanders to live in dignity. We probably have enough multi-millionaires in the country to help pay for it.

History repeats itself

The not unexpected announcement by the new government that the proposed Auckland Light Rail project was to be cancelled was made in mid-January. Nearly 50 years ago, another new National government with Aucklander Rob Muldoon in charge, made a similar announcement when they canned Mayor Robbie’s [Sir Dove-Myer Robinson’s] Auckland Rapid Transit Scheme. If the scheme had been allowed to go ahead, we would have by now have as good a mass transit system as London or New York,

less clogged up motorways and far fewer cars on the roads. Plus, the amount of carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere would be significantly less. But Rob Muldoon knew better and within some six years we had carless days as the country could not afford to import petrol for all the cars and trucks around.

If anyone would like to see what was proposed back then have a look at [1975 Auckland Rapid Transit video - Greater Auckland](#).

Transport Minister Simeon Brown has indicated that the new government will spend more on roads, reverse the move towards lower speed limits that help to reduce accidents, restrict mass transit to busways to the main parts of Auckland. The idea of special busways is a good one, and both the Northern busway and the Panmure to Pakuranga busway are making a difference, but why not go the whole way and have electric powered buses on these busways? But this may cost more than diesel buses. Why not find out by going out to tender for say 10,000 electric buses? That could well bring the cost down. We have some 28,400 passenger buses in New Zealand⁴ and only very few are electric. Replacing nearly half the buses with electric buses and getting rid of the old, inefficient, and noisy buses would be a win win! It is difficult to find out the capital cost of new buses in NZ but assuming around \$500,000 each, the cost of 10,000 would be about \$5 billion. This seems a lot of money, but compared to new motorways?

But this is not the only example of history repeating itself. After the 1975 election, Muldoon also stopped the NZ Superannuation Scheme introduced by the previous Labour government, a scheme which would now be self-funding, saving millions on superannuation costs the government now has to fund from taxation. The Luxon coalition government is cancelling the Three Waters reforms, just as the cost of updating our water reticulation schemes around the country will cost ratepayers billions of dollars. Every week we seem to hear of yet another local authority having water issues – Queenstown, Wellington... . Expensive history being repeated.

Sorry if much of the above seems to be all doom and gloom. Most of us have much to be thankful for, but for too many a decent standard to living is still a dream that appears to be getting further away rather than closer. Lets hope that 2024 proves us wrong!

⁴ [Number of passenger buses in NZ - Search \(bing.com\)](#)