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"A Different Light"

A Different Light – 2nd March 2024 – “Attacking the most vulnerable seems both ineffectual and mean-spirited”

‘Cost of living gets so high, rich and poor they start to cry, now the weak must get strong they say, oh what a tribulation!’. It is a verse from Bob Marley’s song; ‘Them belly full (But We Hungry)’. This is a relevant sentiment for us at this point in time in Aotearoa New Zealand. Well, perhaps I exaggerate, because I am one of the lucky well fed, despite the \$3.99 demanded for a puny broccoli- and as for Cauliflower- don’t even go there - it's a luxury we dispensed with a couple of years ago!

Yes, times are tough - time to tighten the belt, for most, but for some the three headed monster in Government is demanding, More - from Less!

If you are on the optimistically named Job seeker’s Benefit - look out - the roaring taniwha is after you. Prove you went to that interview! Explain why you didn’t get the job! Take your punishment! No more money for your household. Never mind that the ‘punishments’ have always been there to mete out, mediated by the understanding and empathy of the MSD staff- this Government wants make a statement and look like a tough guy. Real tough guys, making children go hungry.

The responsibility for the world-wide economic downturn does not however sit with some of our struggling Job Seekers. Taking a global view, there are clearly major tensions in the capacity of most of the world’s nations to cope with the inflationary pressure that has been growing on us, fuelled by the post pandemic environment . As Peter Hawkins, global thought leader said in 2020:

‘ Economic forecasts on population growth and world consumption predict that by 2050 we will have a world that will annually run at 500-700 per cent of

capacity... Our wealth and prosperity fundamentally come from the world we live in and we are massively overdrawn and eroding the base capital.'

So, really - attacking the most vulnerable by doing such things as linking disability benefits to inflation rather than wage indexes seem both ineffectual and mean spirited.

Add into this mix of pressures of Climate Change, with more frequent onslaught of drought, cyclone, fire and brimstone and it seems that we need to be looking for bigger answers to bigger questions. Questions like- How do we build resilience among those who have to face these issues personally and head on. How do we help the helpers maintain their resilience and hope? Our firefighters, our teachers, our medical professionals- how do we keep them strong?

Hmmm... let's look to some of the nations and organisations that are creating strength among our population when we need it the most. A great news story out this week was the London Marathon. The London Marathon has become the first major marathon event to offer equal prize money for able-bodied and wheelchair athletes at the 2024 race! And why shouldn't they? If it was gender or ethnic division we were talking about people would be appalled if there was any difference. This is good big picture thinking - setting the stakes in the ground for future resilience- inclusive of all and fairer for all- now is not the time to be punitive, let's reach for aspirational New Zealand.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation