

## Submission to the Productivity Commission on 'A Fair Chance for All'

I read the overview, and couldn't quite face the full report. Not that I actually disagree with anything it says. It recognises social inequalities and the importance of policy settings/government actions in creating and maintaining those inequalities. Power imbalances; ongoing colonisation and discrimination; incoherent and ineffectual government and policies; short-termism and sticking plaster on the status quo? Well, yes indeed.

But the 'barriers' and necessary 'system shifts' identified are all at a level that are entirely too abstract to be useful. **Where are the practical policy proposals to radically change the frameworks that hold economic and social inequality and poverty in place?**

The report says disadvantage is not 'simply' about being poor. There speaks someone on a good salary. Money is surely at the heart of social inequality in this country. Lack of access to it, and the opportunities it affords, structural discrimination in employment, substandard or unaffordable housing, the stigma attached to some neighbourhoods – it's all about money. Economic policies adopted by government have increased inequality and poverty over the last 40 years.

For a fair chance for all, we need to start by changing important current policies that frame and limit people's access to money. (The supporting educative or organisational or nice woolly detail can come later.)

### **My picks for immediate government action are:**

**Access to earnings.** Chuck out the Employment Relations Act and start again. Write legislation that actively and strongly supports collective wage bargaining, union representation and pay fair agreements that will work across the *whole* labour force, not just the state sector. Penalise casualised employment in all its forms.

**Access to employment.** Stop this economic policy nonsense of regarding 3-5% as 'full employment'. It's not. Right now, the labour market is only 'tight' because so many people are sick or dropped out of employment because of covid – it's not real. Government should create more jobs (providing infrastructure and social services), not sanction people for being unable to find non-existent jobs, or force them into taking inadequately paid or highly casualised jobs.

**Access to adequate income support.** We can measure poverty. We can measure what the Living Wage needs to be. Now it is time to set income support benefits at Living Wage level (as with the Minimum Wage). To get our children *and their parents* out of poverty. And to rebalance the labour market. How can employees successfully bargain for sufficient wage rates and sufficient hours of work when they are constantly under-cut by governments setting benefits below the poverty line. Deliberately so, as part of the low wage economic strategy of the 1990s that has failed us all. Next step: a universal Basic Income policy should be developed and adopted, to support wage bargaining and to help us all face our very uncertain future.

**Access to revenue to provide quality health, education and social services.** We need a tax system that taxes *all* sources of income *equally*, including capital gains, company tax, and profits or

'royalties' shifted offshore. The Prime Minister should listen to her Tax Working Group of experts, not to landlords and focus groups.

**Te Tiriti o Waitangi.** The Treaty is the starting point for addressing the 'persistent disadvantage' experienced by Māori, and also Pasifika people. That disadvantage dates back to land losses, but continues as other discriminatory barriers to equal earnings and opportunities. As witness the Mana Wāhine and Mana Tāne claims now before the Waitangi Tribunal, that the Crown has not protected Māori nor ensured the same rights and privileges as other citizens (Article 3).

And in the longer term...

Te Tiriti should also be the starting point – not an add-on – for any constitutional change, or truly independent foreign policy. Bring the Matike Mai conversation into government and the mainstream.

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