

Poverty Rally Speech, 16 September 2017

I want to start with 2 fundamental truths.

The first is that unemployment is not created by the unemployed. Currently we have a welfare system based on the lie that unemployed people choose to be unemployed. The lie that unemployed people are all drug users. The lie that there is plenty of work available and that work will get you out of poverty.

Unemployment is created by decisions made in business boardrooms and by decisions made by the government. Businesses choose to have jobs which offer low pay and no guaranteed hours. Businesses make big profits and choose to lay off workers.

The government chooses to let businesses do what they want. The government chooses to ignore poverty. Just as it continues to deny there is a housing crisis.

The second truth is that the accumulation of private wealth is the cause of poverty.

The 10 richest people in Aotearoa a year ago were worth a total of \$23 billion. In a year these 10 people have made another \$2billion. They are now worth \$25billion. On average, each of these people have made 2 hundred million dollars each. They haven't made that money by working harder than anyone else. They have made that money by stealing it from the rest of us. And the National and Labour Parties say there will be no tax increases for the rich.

Let's make no mistake, the rich profit from the poverty of others. Wages are kept low because of the desperation and fear of people receiving benefits. Because the government has encouraged the creation of a toxic culture within Work and Income offices where harassment, intimidation and punishment are the daily realities at every Work and Income office in the country. Many people will take any job just to avoid going into a Work and Income office. And these jobs will keep them in poverty, whilst the rich get richer.

Work and Income will stop your benefit if you don't accept a job. AAAP has had to occupy the offices of the Manpower recruitment company to stop them going into Work and Income offices, sitting next to a case manager who tells unemployed people to sign a contract which gives them no guaranteed rate of pay and no guaranteed hours.

The Warehouse has a dirty deal with Work and Income to get young unemployed people to work at the Warehouse stacking shelves for no pay. They call it work experience, we call it work exploitation. The only people who benefit from this are the owners of the Warehouse, their profits will increase. The rich will get richer and the poor will be exploited and ripped-off.

Every Friday AAAP advocates are at Clendon and Manurewa Work and Income offices we will support 130 people to access money for food and other immediate needs. People are queuing there at 5.00am because they know that without an advocate helping them they won't get what they need. This year we will support over 5000 people to access their rights from Work and Income. We will hear over 5000 stories of the effects of the toxic Work and Income culture. We know the reality of what is going on.

It is impossible to ignore who are the most affected by unemployment and poverty. It should not be possible to ignore the effects of capitalist colonisation of Aotearoa. The queues of people at Clendon and Manurewa on Fridays are mostly made up of Maori women. It should not be possible to ignore the links between poverty, racism and the on-going breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Sadly, there is only one political party which has listened to the reality of the toxic culture within Work and Income, to the reality of poverty. Sadly, only one politician has had the courage to speak her truth about the reality of being on a benefit. That political party is the Green Party and that politician is Metiria Turei. I want to be clear that the Green Party is the only party with a welfare policy which will stop the toxic culture within Work and Income and will increase benefit payments across the board.

Whilst the Green Party policies are positive steps forward there is more that is needed to be done. Our demands include:

- Provide liveable incomes for all so that people can live with dignity, have security whether they are working or unemployed.
- Work and Income's powers to punish people must end and unpaid work must be valued
- Build a culture at Work and Income based on respect and redistribution. This means stopping all sanctions, redefining relationships based on whanau, not finance so that people don't have to put up with Work and Income intruding into their personal lives. And actively change the culture of Work and Income to assist people to access their full legal entitlements.
- There needs to be a mass build of state housing to ensure security of tenure.
- We need to tax wealth. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer. This is not inevitable and is not permanent. Change is possible and change is necessary.

We should not be fooled into thinking that change will come by the outcome of the Election. Depending on the result change will be easier or harder to achieve. Real, meaningful and sustainable change will only come if we remain active. Participatory democracy isn't only about voting it is much more about what we do between Elections.

To end the War on the Poor we need to continue to STAND UP SPEAK OUT AND FIGHTBACK.

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