



# SPC News

JULY 2016

SPC News articles can be read in full at [socialpolicyconnections.com.au](http://socialpolicyconnections.com.au)

## Election disarray: concerns about fairness & inequality

Peter Whiting

The long election campaign is over. The promises are all tabled, but the new government for the next three years is yet to be decided. Whichever party forms government notwithstanding, this election has been an opportunity lost.

Neither of the major parties has addressed key structural issues which are impacting Australian society. What we have been offered is essentially a 'continue as-is' approach.

Events in Australia and elsewhere in the Western world indicate that clear political leadership is needed, encompassing increased recognition of societal outcomes over economic outcomes.

The reasons behind the 'Brexit' referendum vote are still being debated, but the outcome would appear to indicate that certain other Western countries have issues in common. Signs of populist revolts against established political approaches are evident in the Donald Trump presidential candidacy in the US, and far-right political parties are on the rise in France and the Netherlands.

In Australia, indications are much more muted, but disenchantment with the major parties and the rise of Independents are arguably of the same ilk. Reasons are myriad, but what lies at the heart of each of these developments is the conviction that the economic system is serving the elites and not the people.

Australia's level of income inequality is above the OECD average but below countries like the UK and United States. More problematically than this, we are moving in the wrong direction. Those at the bottom of the income distribution are drawn from a diverse demographic and likely to be aged over 65 – single parents, those from non-English speaking countries, indigenous people, and those reliant on Government

transfer payments. Effectively addressing this inequality requires a number of focused policies.

Despite over two decades of mainly bi-partisan commitment to so-called 'trickle-down economics', there is growing income disparity in Australia. An IMF paper in June 2015 addressed this question at an international level, concluding that when the income share of the top 20% of income earners increases, then GDP growth actually declines. The paper also argued that social policies focused on the poor and middle class can mitigate inequality.



Labor, Liberal, & Greens posters - Polling day in Fawkner #Wills2016 #Ausvotes, Takver, flickr cc.

So what should clear political leadership' look like in Australia, if we were to embrace as a national goal an inclusive prosperity? Policy development, implementation, and the subsequent evaluation of its effectiveness would be based on whether policies had served the dignity of people, particularly the marginalised, and whether they had served to enhance the common good.

Applying such a litmus test would undoubtedly need to reform the current approach to diverse areas of policy, including worker's rights, taxation, poverty alleviation, environmental protection, indigenous affairs, foreign aid, and refugees and asylum seekers. This list is by no means exhaustive. It would challenge the existing economic paradigm – focused as it is on markets and investment – in favour of improved people outcomes.

Doubtless, the coming weeks of political uncertainty will give rise to much commentary and scapegoating. What would serve us all best is a real dialogue about the Australian society we want to be, the values underpinning such a vision, and the policy mix that will get us there. This would be a meaningful and purposeful dialogue which simply addresses how to manage the economy!



Labor, Liberal, & Greens pos

ters - polling day in Fawkner  
#Wills2016 #Ausvotes. Takver. flickr

## Hear the voters: growing inequality matters

Across the western world, people are revolting against political and economic systems which are demonstrably unfair and are polarising rich and poor. **Bruce**

**Duncan** looks at growing inequality in the United States and elsewhere, and how this neoliberal philosophy has influenced the 2016 election in Australia.



Porter's Lodge - Portsmouth Historic Dockyard - Counter Terrorism Response Level: Heightened. Elliott Brown. flickr cc.

## Counter-terrorism or counter-rights?

**Tony French** expresses concern about creeping anti-terrorism legislation in Australia, and how this is encroaching on civil liberties we have taken for granted. He asks why Australians have so passively surrendered rights, and cautions that

rights have had to be earned, but can easily be lost.



Gloria Sadje. hodag. flickr cc

## Microcredit: creating a thriving socio-ecological rural community in Batangas, Philippines

In developing countries, great numbers of people have been flooding from rural areas into major cities, and it has become important that living standards in rural areas increase to hold people there. **Augustine Doronila** reports on microcredit schemes promoted by the Economy of Communion, which aims to increase people's control over their economic and social circumstances.



Buka boy. Looks like Antman. flickr cc

## It's time to draw the line: justice in the Timor Sea

Despite Australia's assistance to East Timor in 1999, the Timor Gap Treaty in 2006 was greatly to Australia's

benefit. East Timor has sought to have the treaty renegotiated on fair terms, but the Australian government has declined to do this. **Sr Susan Connelly** outlines how East Timor has appealed to the United Nations for a compulsory conciliation to secure fair maritime boundaries, particularly as they affect oil revenues.



Middelgruden Offshore Wind Farm in Denmark. United Nations Photo. flickr cc.

## How scared or hopeful should we be in a warming world?

Climate specialist Professor **Clive Hamilton** considers the implications of global warming on current trajectories, reiterating warnings of dire consequences if we do not urgently reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. He reviews global

responses so far, although these are only beginning to address the looming threat. He looks at the positive results from the Paris conference in 2015, noting that China and other developing countries had come on board, and that investments in coal are declining as renewables decrease in price. He took heart that major non-state institutions are moving to clean energy, and that financial institutions are favouring green energy for investments. He sees signs of hope in all this, but recognises that we are only beginning this planetary task.



Manna gums at Plenty Gorge. Geoff Lacey.

## Ecological conversion & discovering the land

Environmental engineer **Geoff Lacey** invites us to re-order our relationship

with our natural world, and shows how we can be involved actively in our local communities at a practical level. This means exploring the wonders of nature close by, in our gardens, bush areas, trees, plants, birds, soil, and animals. It means seeing our world with new eyes, and doing what we can to restore or preserve a life-giving environment.

## Subscriptions & donations

Thanks to all who have renewed their SPC membership for 2016-17, or sent a donation. We rely on your support for what we do.

If you have not renewed already, we would invite you to do so. And if you are new to Social Policy Connections, we would also invite you to join.

Details are on our website.

Check out our lively Facebook page, too, for postings of valuable articles from other sources, as well as from SPC's own writers.