

Newman Weekly

By Dr. Muriel Newman
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The New Zealand Centre for Political Debate

The Failure of Welfare

The murder of the two Kahui babies has rocked the nation. Everyone is trying to come to grips, not only with how on earth the family can get away with colluding to hide the killer, but why this and other such dreadful tragedies continue to happen.

The fingers of blame have been pointed not only at Maori culture, which Alan Duff in this week's NZCPD guest opinion piece describes as a "Stone Age societal model" (see www.nzcpd.com to view), but fairly and squarely at the welfare system itself.

It has now been revealed that members of the families of the murdered babies were some of the many beneficiaries who are able to get away with milking the welfare system: able-bodied men and women who choose to sponge off the taxpayer instead of working for a living.

They are tragic symbol of a debilitating dependency culture that has been accelerating since Labour became the government.

Peter Saunders, the Social Research Director at the Centre for Independent Studies, in his book *Australia's Welfare Habit*, describes the "learned helplessness" that erodes the self-reliance of beneficiaries and their wider families who are permitted to stay on welfare in the long term:

"Unwise and unsustainable lifestyle choices dropping out of school early, having a child without a committed partner to help, spending money on immediate gratification rather than saving, developing a drug habit that renders one almost unemployable become viable once the welfare state steps in to pick up the pieces. The dire warnings of impending calamity that used to be issued by earlier generations of parents or teachers sound empty when there is plenty of evidence from the local neighborhood that it is quite possible to get by without having to work, save or even

exercise much self control".

Labour's introduction of open-ended welfare has transformed taxpayer-funded income support into an entitlement gravy train. This entitlement mentality pre-supposes that social welfare is an unconditional right, with no time limits, only voluntary obligations and extremely weak sanctions.

What is worse is that Labour has now expanded this dependency culture to ensnare working families through the Working for Families package, giving all of their 'customers' a "certificate of entitlement".

Most New Zealanders are more than willing to support those people who genuinely can't provide for themselves due to disability or sickness. But when it comes to supporting people who are capable of working, different expectations apply. They believe that assistance to the able-bodied should be temporary and designed in such a way that it leads to employment and independence from the state.

The problem that we must now face up to however, is that there are many able-bodied people on welfare who have failed to find employment, not because there are no jobs, but because they have no intention of working. They have built comfortable lifestyles by pooling benefits - as appears to be the case in the Kahui and King families where weekly household incomes have been estimated to be in the thousands of dollars and through illegal activities.

Maori are now over-represented in this welfare underclass, which is only able to exist because the government has failed to make the receipt of benefits contingent on work, and has failed to strictly enforce this requirement. The consequence, with the tendency for welfare dependency to be transmitted across generations, is that children growing up in these

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dysfunctional and violent households will face a bleak future of limited opportunity as their life chances are destroyed through the failure of their government to prevent welfare dysfunction.

Historian and author Keith Windschuttle, in an article entitled "Manhood Whitewashed" (see www.nzcpd.com to view), examines the effects of welfare on men. In particular he looks at the appalling situation where indigenous Australian men commit horrific acts of violence and abuse against women and children:

"The root cause is that white Australia has deprived Aboriginal men in remote communities of their manhood. The instrument we used was social welfare: giving handouts that did not require them to work. The social policy of the last thirty years is the principal culprit.

"The human male is a creature biologically programmed, communally socialised and psychologically motivated to be a provider for women and children. In outback communities, however, that role has been usurped by the state.

"The social consequences of this should have been entirely predictable. No matter what their race or where they live, men who do not work have no social status, no sense of self-worth and little meaning in their lives. Others think badly of them and they think badly of themselves.

"Sociological studies have long shown that in all cultures many men respond to unemployment

with alcoholism and domestic violence, one problem feeding the other.

"The loss of manhood has direct consequences for Aboriginal boys. They have no incentive to go to school. When they reach adolescence, their most attractive and adventurous options are the subcultures of crime and substance abuse. Some consume vast quantities of pornography."

His insight into the crippling and corrupting effects of welfare strike a chord. Few long-term beneficiaries are immune from the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that accompany life on welfare, and while most put on a brave face, the loss of self worth is

debilitating to the core.

While many New Zealanders wring their hands over our dependency quagmire and its disastrous outcomes, it is important to recognize, that it is entirely within the hands of government to turn it all around. Making the receipt of benefits contingent on work and strictly enforcing this requirement is the answer - but that is the subject of a future column!

The poll this week: It has been suggested that unemployment benefits should be limited to a period of six months, after which people would be expected to participate full time in a "Work for the Dole" scheme until they find a job. Do you think this is a very good idea, a good idea or disagree with the idea?

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