

Newman Weekly

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The New Zealand Centre for Political Debate

Exposing the Real Culprit

As the country struggles to come to terms with the extent of New Zealand's child abuse problem and what can be done about it, the real culprits have remained hidden. This week Newman Weekly looks at who is to blame, while the guest comment - from the Otago Daily Times - investigates the growth of "hatred, envy, rage, self-loathing, poverty, ignorance, dehumanisation, nihilistic parenting, and the seeds of racial confrontation" in our youth.

The worst child abusers in the country are the government. Successive governments have put in place social policies that have created the very conditions in which child abuse flourishes: whole communities in which the two-parent family has vanished, where work is rare or non-existent, and where multiple generations have grown up relying on welfare. This disintegration of family and values has resulted in severe social pathologies, deprivation, squalor, crime and violence.

Just this week, South Auckland social service agencies working at the coalface of the child abuse crisis spoke openly of benefit money being spent on alcohol and drugs instead of food and clothing for children; of parents deciding to separate to get more welfare; of the system discouraging fathers from taking responsibility for their children; of young mothers having to lock their bedroom doors at night to keep themselves and their babies safe - from their brothers who are their baby's fathers - but who are afraid to report serious illegal activities in the home for fear the police will involve CYFs and their babies will be taken off them...

Other governments in other countries have had the courage to admit that their social policies have created a dysfunctional underclass where children are no longer safe. As a result they have changed the policies that caused the problem.

But even though our problems are bigger than most, our Government remains defiant, turning a blind eye

to their own culpability.

Meanwhile, the State continues to pay girls and women with little education, few prospects, and without stable partners, to have and raise children on their own, even though the evidence is overwhelming that child abuse most often occurs in single parent families on welfare. The State then ensures that the fathers - the traditional protectors of children - don't stick around, by threatening to stop the mother's welfare payments and to prosecute her if the dad gets too involved in her family.

Further, even though marriage is well proven to be the best guarantee that children have of growing up safely and well, the State mercilessly undermines it. It makes welfare payments so generous that marriage has become unaffordable for most low-income parents who can now make far more money by being on welfare. Just recently we saw how the families of the murdered twins Chris and Cru Kahui reportedly had upwards of two thousand dollars of benefit money coming into the homes each week.

Labour has also undermined marriage legally by introducing laws, which give cohabiting partners the same legal privileges as a married couple. The result is that more and more young people are now saying, "why bother getting married?" (An excellent article on this subject has just been written by Melanie Philips; "Why Labour Despises the Family" see www.nzcpd.com).

To further create an environment in which child abuse flourishes, the State herds struggling solo mothers into state housing areas where fatherhood scarcely exists, where there are few role models of anyone who works for a living, and where children view truancy, delinquency and crime as commonplace.

Worse, with its ideological rejection of school vouchers - a scholarship system which enables children to be better educated - the State denies these illiterate and dysfunctional youngsters access to educators who can turn

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their lives around. Instead, they are forced into the nearest State school to fail. The end result is something that we should all fear, as this week's NZCPD guest commentary "The Crime Within" - a recent Otago Daily Times editorial explains (see www.nzcpd.com).

But rather than despair about the human misery caused by Government policies, we should demand they take action to turn the situation around. The solutions are clear: throughout the world, Governments that really care about children are reforming welfare. Just this week in the Economist, an article entitled "Tough Love Works" (see www.nzcpd.com) reflects on the outstanding success of American reforms that ended sole parent welfare entitlements:

"A decade ago, Americans began a bold social experiment. In August 1996, Bill Clinton signed into law the bill that introduced "welfare to work". From that point, poor families could no longer claim welfare indefinitely as an entitlement. Instead, parents had to find a job.

"Ten years on... America's welfare rolls have fallen by over half as existing claimants have found work and fewer people have gone on benefit in the first place. Furthermore, there has been no upsurge in the poverty rate; in fact, it has fallen over the period.

Welfare reform was once regarded as a harsh, right-wing, America-only idea. But an unexpected lesson of the past ten years is that it enjoys much wider political appeal. Within America, its success has silenced the former fierce opposition of left-wing Democrats, which Mr Clinton had overruled. For the

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Labour government in Britain and for social democrats in Europe, reform offers a way to reintegrate people who would otherwise live in a welfare apartheid. Furthermore, it is a way to defend generous support for the poor - as long as they find work. Another attraction for developed countries as their populations age is that it mobilises more employment to maintain living standards and help pay for the old. And, best of all, it works".

The reforms were based on the principle that families are better off if parents work, so open-ended sole parent benefits were replaced with support and services that lead to jobs. In order to encourage teenagers to postpone parenting and complete their education, cash payments and housing assistance to teenage parents were stopped, although schooling, life skills training, career guidance, and child-care are all readily available to help young parents prepare for an independent future.

In public policy, you get what you pay for. If our Government did its job and changed the incentives in the welfare system to reinforce work, family, and independence, the record levels of child abuse and neglect that each year breaks our hearts, would finally – and thankfully - begin to be a thing of the past.

The poll this week: *Do you support the concept of removing cash payments and housing assistance to teenage parents, while ensuring that they receive support services to prepare them for an independent future - including having access to adult-supervised accommodation if their homes are unsafe?*

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