



## **A Taxing Debate**

No doubt, many of you have seen or heard media reports over the latest political kerfuffle involving the federal government's decision to restructure the "stage three" tax cuts.

For those of you who don't remember, the "stage three" tax cuts were part of a tax cut regime which the present government inherited from the previous government. The first two stages were implemented prior to the last federal election and the change of government. These involved tax cuts that impacted largely on low and middle income earners. The last tranche, or "stage three" cuts were scheduled to be implemented in 2024, at the beginning of the new financial year.

These "stage three" tax cuts were always controversial, not least because they would only benefit the top income earners in the country. Moreover, many economists argued that, given the changes in economic circumstances that have come about largely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruption of the global economy, implementing tax cuts for high income earners while low and middle income earners were grappling with the impacts of inflation was not good policy.

Nonetheless, the ALP while in opposition repeatedly stated that it would adhere to the "stage three" tax cuts - and continued to repeat this position after it won

office at the last federal election. Last week, however, the government announced that while the tax cuts would be proceeding, they will be restructured so that a smaller cut will go to high income earners, while additional cuts in tax will go to middle and low income earners.

Naturally, this has immediately sparked a political furore. The Coalition Opposition - along with certain sections of the media - have immediately accused the ALP of breaking its promises and lying to the Australian people. Indeed, the Opposition are already bandying about the slogan "There's a liar in the Lodge". Some commentators have suggested that this is a pragmatic - albeit slightly cynical - attempt by the government to recover voter popularity after the disastrous Voice referendum result. For its part, the government has said that the changes were necessary to reflect the changed economic circumstances, and that it is delivering on its promise to implement the "stage three" cuts - albeit in a different form to that legislated by the Coalition when they were in government.

I am not going to get into the "politics" of the current debate. Anyone who has any grasp of political history in this country, and whose memory of political events goes back more than five minutes, will know that both sides of politics have said one thing before an election and then done something after winning office. Paul Keating said tax cuts would be "L.A.W law". John Howard said he would "never, ever" introduce a GST. Both the ALP and the Coalition can be equally accused of lying in Opposition and dishonesty in government.

Instead, what I want to focus on is the fact that what the current controversy and its attendant claims and counter-claims points to is the sickness of our political culture. And I believe that sickness reveals itself in two ways.

One is the nature of Opposition. Under the Westminster system, the Opposition exist to hold the government of the day accountable - but also to support good

policy through bipartisanship. This is a tricky balancing act. On the one hand, the Opposition wants to ensure good governance by highlighting situations in which the government has behaved incompetently or corruptly. On the other hand, it also wants to ensure the national good by supporting the government when it implements good policy and manages government business in a competent manner. The problem is that bipartisanship rarely wins votes and almost never results in positive publicity in the media - so the temptation is to lean toward attacking the government whenever the opportunity arises.

Unfortunately, it now appears that being in Opposition has devolved into a process of total commitment to negativity, to undermining the government electorally by blocking, stalling, criticising and even manufacturing controversy at every possible opportunity. Gone is the sense of bipartisanship that supports good policy irrespective of its origins. Being in Opposition is now about doing "whatever it takes" to get into government.

I have my own views about why this toxic culture of opposition at all costs has emerged - which I won't bore you with now. But it points to the second problem which I believe plagues our political culture: we now have a system and a culture in which politicians and governments are not allowed to change their minds, or be persuaded to a different point of view. A promise, once made, has to be adhered to at all costs, no matter how changed circumstances might be, and no matter what new information has emerged to influence decision-making. Politicians either stick to their promises no matter the surrounding facts - or else they are "liars". No-one is allowed to come to a different view, no-one is permitted to suggest a change in policy.

This "you either do what you said you would or you are a liar" culture is clearly detrimental to good government. Think of the number of times you have changed your mind on an issue, or been persuaded to a different point of view because new information came to your attention. It seems like we have

reached the ridiculous - and destructive - point that, whereas changing your position is allowed in everyday life, it is now prohibited in the world of politics.

This grim reality in our political culture is contrasted by Jesus' own public ministry. His opposition to the religious leaders of his time was not predicated on his own advancement to a position of power, nor was he interested in proving they were "wrong" or "liars" and he was "right". And although Jesus at times utilised strong language against the temple leadership, ultimately what he wanted them to do was change their mind, to change their course and the way they were conducting themselves. In other words, he wanted them to repent - because the word "repent" means "to turn back". Jesus wanted the leaders to remember why they were leaders, and to turn back to a relationship with God that was likewise reflected in a just and life-affirming relationship with the people.

Given the sad state of our political culture at present, and given the principled contrast to the current oppositionalism at all costs mentality which Jesus embodied, let us pray - and agitate - for two things: firstly, for a political culture that supports good governance, no matter its origins; and, secondly, a political culture that allows people to change their minds as times change and new information emerges.

### **Pikelet Day**

The early Easter date means that Shrove Tuesday will be on 13th February this year. Consequently, there will be a Pikelet Community Time on Sunday 11th February to conclude the Coffee Cup Challenge which has been running since November last year. Sorry it's not pancakes but there is a lot of work that goes into the preparation and cooking and cleaning up with pancakes. There will be a charge of \$5 on Pikelet Day which is essentially the average cost of a cup of coffee. Thank you to those who have regularly given during this time or have

donated directly through the Uniting VicTas website, your donations at Church will be included with the money raised on Sunday 11th February. The money raised will be used to provide help for those who are less fortunate than ourselves so dig deep and join the pikelet party.

- Glenis McDonald

## 4U News

Now in its 65th year, 4U is kicking off again in 2024. The first meeting will take place in the Fellowship Room at HUC on **Monday February 12th at 2pm**. For full details [click this link](#).

Blessings,

Brendan



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