



## **The Wages of Ignorance**

As everyone is no doubt aware, the date for the ballot to determine the referendum question on the proposed Voice to Parliament has now been set.

Normally, I would refrain from commenting on the election process and the politics surrounding it. In part, that's because there's already more than enough commentary filling the airwaves and the internet; but also it's because I am very careful not to do or say anything that might be misconstrued as telling people how to vote.

Now, however, I find myself in the position of feeling compelled to discuss with you an aspect of the present referendum campaign. Not, I assure you, because I am going to break my own policy; rather, because this issue, it seems to me, touches on even greater matters.

The aspect I want to talk about concerns the slogan being adopted by some – though by no means all – sections of the “No” campaign. This slogan declares: *If you don't know, vote no.*

I don't know if the people promoting and using this slogan are aware of it or not, but this slogan frankly holds some disturbingly anti-democratic and totalitarian potentials. It, after all, encourages people to cast their ballot in the forthcoming referendum on the basis of ignorance. It, in effect, says: if you aren't aware of the facts, or the issues under discussion, don't worry – just vote the way we tell

you.

This is not good for the health of any democracy. Surely all members of the political class, irrespective of their own persuasion, ought to be encouraging the electorate to inform themselves of the facts of the matter being debated, and to vote in accordance with whether or not they find those facts persuasive. Surely those seeking to persuade public opinion on any matter of social policy ought to be encouraging people to educate themselves before they vote, so that the result can reflect, as far as possible, an informed decision by the people.

That any member of the political class would publicly endorse and repeat a slogan like *If you don't know, vote no* is, to my mind, a damning indictment of the levels to which our national political culture has sunk. That any sector of the Australian public might find such a slogan persuasive is, I fear, an equally damning indictment of the preparedness of the electorate to connive at its own disenfranchisement.

An uninformed electorate that is prepared to remain uninformed at the promptings of its political class is the recipe for corrupt and unaccountable government. No-one pretends that our present system works perfectly, or that there isn't corruption in our political life; but the very fact that scandals do occur and corruption is uncovered is testament to the fact that, however imperfectly, our present system's checks and balances do have some positive effect. But any society or political system in which ignorance is encouraged as the basis for participation in political life is a society and a system in which effective democracy will cease to exist.

Jesus was strongly critical of the religious (and, by extension, political) leadership of his time, not least because they encouraged people to engage in practices which only benefitted their self-interest as leaders (Matthew 15: 1-9). Moreover, this encouragement came on the back of their presumed

righteousness and sanctity, and the assumed conviction that simply because they belonged to the leadership class they were fit and proper leaders for the people. Indeed, Jesus condemned them as bandits and thieves who subjected the people to oppression while lauding their own moral superiority and “right” to condemn others. (John 10, Matthew 23).

It seems to me that a similar process is contained within the slogan *if you don't know, vote no*. It is an encouragement to stop thinking, to stop engaging, to stop reflecting, and simply assume that those who are bandying about this slogan actually know what they are talking about. It is an encouragement to abandon your responsibility to vote on the basis of informed discernment; and that has wider implications for the whole of our democracy, not just for the issue of this referendum.

Jesus strongly criticised the leadership of his time, their presumption to power and blandishments to the people that amounted to an invitation to collude in their own oppression. And while, as stated, by no means all parts of the “No” campaign are adopting this disturbing slogan, those that are doing so are effectively inviting us to electoral blindness and ignorance.

And, as Jesus put it: “If one blind person guides another, then both shall fall into the ditch.” (Matthew 15:14)

### **Four U Notice**

The next meeting of the Four U group will be **Monday 11th September** in the Fellowship Room at HUC **starting at 2pm**.

.Full details can be found by [clicking this link](#).

### **A Pleasant Sunday Afternoon**

Boronia Road Uniting Church will be presenting a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon with the Evans Family singing group on **Sunday 10th September at 1.30**. Entry is \$20 per person.

### **CPP Theatre News**

CPP Theatre Productions will be presenting their Annual Musical Show in October with performance dates **from October 6th to 14th** at the Mahon Theatre, Aquinas College, 46 Great Ryrie Street, Ringwood,

Bringing Charles Dickens' beloved novel to life, Lionel Bart's Oliver! will take you on a wild adventure through Victorian England, capturing your heart as well as your handkerchief. More details from their website, [cppcommunitytheatre.com.au](http://cppcommunitytheatre.com.au).

Blessings,

Brendan



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