

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 551#

JENNIFER BUCKINGHAM'S CALL FOR RICH FAMILIES TO PAY TO ATTEND

PUBLIC SCHOOLS : A DIVERSION :

EDUCATION FOR A PLUTOCRACY AND THEOCRACY:

NOT A DEMOCRACY.

Australia is bedevilled by 'think tanks', 'lobbyists' political apparachiks and ministerial advisers manufacturing 'issues' and media diversions in the service of plutocrats, theocrats and their political puppets.

No wonder Australians have lost confidence in their political representatives.

The latest diversionary attack on public education, the cornerstone of our once fiercely democratic country, has been launched on those middle class families who actually BELIEVE in public education. Jennifer Buckingham of the Centre for Independent Studies recommends that such parents should 'be forced to pay \$1000 for this 'Belief' Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/rich-families-should-have-to-pay-to-attend-public-schools-report-says-20140429-zr13z.html#ixzz30PqtHVzz> and Chris Bonnor's reply at : <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/public-education-slug-the-rich-and-starve-the-rest-20140430-zr1x3.html#ixzz30PgFmlY4> .

Do the right wing think tanks hope that they will leave the public system to spend their money – and gain their subsequent tax relief – at private sectarian schools. **WHY?** DOGS suggest a rather sneaky economic agenda. Middle class families have started to wake up that not only can they not afford the mortgage, food and private school fees. But the private school fees don't 'check out'. Enrolments in public schools are rising in affluent areas, and in the second wave of the GFC public schools will be the best option by far. The equation is simple.

CITIZENS PAY TAXES. IN A DEMOCRACY CITIZENS HAVE A RIGHT TO A FREE, SECULAR AND UNIVERSAL PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR THEIR CHILDREN. AND GOVERNMENTS HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO PROVIDE IT.

The following are excerpts from the *Sydney Morning Herald* articles.

Rich families should have to pay to attend public schools, report says

Date: April 29, 2014

Alexandra Smith

Education Editor

High-income families should pay to send their children to a public school, according to a new report that warns that continually increasing funding to schools over the past 25 years has done nothing to improve student achievement.

The Centre for Independent Studies report says charging \$1000 for each student at a public school who comes from a family with an income of more than \$130,000 would allow governments to reduce the amount they fund many schools.

"There would be little incentive for government schools to charge fees if it meant an equal transfer from public to private revenue, however if public funding were reduced as a proportion of private funding, it may be an attractive option," the report said.

But David Zyngier, a senior lecturer in education at Monash University, warned that charging middle class parents to send their children to public schools would drive more into the independent sector.

"This is just another ruse to force middle-class families out of the public school system," Dr Zyngier said.

The report's author, Jennifer Buckingham, said there was no immediate budget crisis but continually pouring more money into schools was not delivering obvious benefits and federal and state governments would need to rein in spending in the next decade.....

Dr Buckingham's report said government funding for schools had more than doubled in real terms over the past 25 years, while enrolments had grown by only 18 per cent and funding for schools as a proportion of GDP had grown from 2.6 per cent to 3.1 per cent over the same period.

Poll: Do you think parents who earn more than \$130,000 should pay to send their children to public schools?

Yes 28%

No 72%

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/rich-families-should-have-to-pay-to-attend-public-schools-report-says-20140429-zr13z.html#ixzz30PqtHVzz>

ANSWER BY CHRIS BONNOR

30 April 2014

The notion of parents romping up to their local school in middle class suburbia to be hit with a penalty created by where they live is quite bizarre.

Not for the first time a think tank has conjured up the idea of the wealthy paying more for the right to attend a public school. The idea is a little nod to some strange form of equity. Forgotten is the fact that the better-off already pay more, through what is left of our progressive tax system, which is about creating and sustaining communities and democracy. Years ago we similarly committed to the idea of public education open to all – or at least we did before we subsidised some to go elsewhere to private schools.

You know a community is under siege when we start conjuring up schemes to charge people twice for access to the public sphere – or create a new rationale to dismantle it altogether. How else can one read Jennifer Buckingham's report, *School Funding on a Budget*, issued by the Centre for Independent Studies?

It is all there, a partly recycled collection of the odd and the interesting in the latest assault on school education because – what a surprise – schools are really quite expensive. It is not that we should be sanguine about the cost of schooling, but the ideas suggested by the CIS do not add up.

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The notion of parents romping up to their local school in middle class suburbia to be hit with a penalty created by where they live is quite bizarre. I can imagine principals can't wait to stand at the gateway to exclude the non-payers. Let's leave that one to the private schooling sphere.

Then there are all the other CIS money-savers. They want to review the federal government funding model, presumably because creating greater equity is all just too hard. But they also want to abolish the federal department of education, the very body that distributes largesse disproportionately to non-government schools.

This might pile additional work on the states, but they also want to reduce the state education bureaucracies. I visited the head office of the NSW Department of Education and Communities recently; the few remaining people just rattle around in this empty sandstone edifice. Sorry, there is almost nothing left to cut.

And of course they want to increase class sizes. Now I agree that lower class sizes are not always accompanied by the changes needed in teaching and learning. But I just wish that the geniuses who want to pile more work onto teachers could spend a teensy time among the ankle biters as they start school and the inspirational teachers in our disadvantaged schools. Then, and only then, come up with your penny-saving panaceas.

Those railing against the high cost of schooling should start joining a few dots. The cost increases have come alongside the expansion of private schooling to provide choice for the wealthier, through a wasteful oversupply of schools. It provides a duplicated entitlement to

some families, alas at the expense of others. Questioning entitlement is becoming quite fashionable – it would be a nice place for the CIS to wield its fiscal axe.

Schooling has also become more expensive at the same time we have been piling our struggling kids into equally struggling schools, more than other similiar countries. We saw a way through this nightmare when the Gonski review produced its welcome and widely applauded recommendations. Finally we saw a vision of funding as an investment for the future; we pay now or we pay more later.

It would be hard to find a more contrasting set of ideas than in *School Funding on a Budget*. It makes 31 references to costs and just one reference to investment. Says it all, really.

Chris Bonnor is co-author with Jane Caro of What makes a good school (New South 2012).

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/public-education-slug-the-rich-and-starve-the-rest-20140430-zr1x3.html#ixzz30PYyF5Bn>

The following was a comment on the articles submitted by the DOGS

Jennifer Buckingham says that we should look at the way school funding is being spent and ask if it is being spent productively.

Absolutely correct. In the nineteenth century sensible people looked at the ridiculous duplication of facilities and realised that the majority were suffering so that the minority could be filled with peculiar sectarian tenets. Since we started once again to fund schools that select chidlren on the basis of religion and ability to pay in the 1960s we are marching back into a divided society with what in the UK they are starting to call 'silos of segregation'.

And once again we have ridiculous duplication of facilities in education so that insecure parents can have 'choice' while the majority, particularly the disadvantaged in public schools suffer. Remember Gonski? In the developing areas of Melbourne and some country areas we do not even have the 'choice' of a public secondary school. Meanwhile, our wealthy schools can only outdo each other with luxurious facilities while public school graduates are the quiet achievers.

If we had one well funded public system open to all causing offence to none- i.e. free, secular and universal - owned, controlled and well funded and accountable by the State which funds it with our taxes - and a genuinely independent system, we could lead the world - for much less money. This is an investment and a system for a democracy. But we are well on the way to a plutocracy backed up by a theocracy. Buckingham is just the mouthpiece. Our politicians merely puppets.

And by the way, we are already substantially paying for children in sectarian schools, so it would cost so much less if we did it in fewer schools. It is State school parents that are paying double taxes, not the other way around.

Another comment was:

Gormless CIS carefully avoided the "state aid" pachyderm-in-the-parlour. And don't expect this creature to do any heavy lifting in Mr Hockey's budget speech or Mr Shorten's reply.

What began timidly 50 years ago as "state aid" had by 2013-14 grown into the \$8.9 billion slush fund of "non government schools - national support". It was the ninth-biggest program in the federal budget, eclipsing higher education and just shy of the dole. About 30 per cent of all our federal-state education kitty goes no-strings-attached to private (in other words, religious) schools, a situation unparalleled in the major OECD nations.

Now watch Mr Shorten squib it, as the federal government and the Group of Eight gear up for the same neo-liberal "choice" solution in higher education - uncapped fees and state aid. Coming soon to an lofty inner-city platform near you - the Pell University

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/public-education-slug-the-rich-and-starve-the-rest-20140430-zr1x3.html#ixzz30PgFmlY4>

This comment was then labelled – 'bigotted'- apparently because of the mention of the "Pell" University.

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