

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT
SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 808
ALP SELLS PUBLIC EDUCATION OUT
TO RELIGIOUS INTERESTS –
AGAIN**

Since 1972, the Australian Labor Party has taken the pragmatic rather than principled stand on the State Aid issue and run after the Catholic vote like a love-sick loon. They have done this even though the Catholic vote, like the church itself, is inherently a deeply conservative one. The Catholic church, with the complicity of their Protestant brethren, not to mention other religious groups jumping on for the ride, have led most of our Australian politicians a merry race to the public Treasury. In the last half century, their hierarchy and bureaucrats have succeeded in undermining our democratic institutions in general, and public education in particular.

They are now turning Australian society into a corrupt, deeply unequal and discriminatory society.

All this - aside from the lid lifted off the sexual abuse scandals and the Cardinal Pell case. Yet, with perhaps the exception of the Greens and a few independents, Australian politicians wobble at the knees and bow down before the churchmen. Money - public money no object.

Thanks to Prime Minister Gillard and the MYSCHOOL website, as well as Trevor Cobbold, Chris Bonner and others from the Save Our Schools organisations, the numbers are there for all to see. Private religious schools in Australia have used and abused the ‘disadvantaged’, even those of their own persuasion, to gain privileges for the children of the wealthy and powerful. [Many now receive more public money than the local public schools](#). If we want an explanation for Australian education falling behind the rest of the world, while more money is poured into it, here is the explanation.

Taxpayers money is going into duplicating the major public system with uneconomic private schools. The private system is a parasitic one. For State Aid to private schools undermines and deprives the major system of money.

If any politician questions religious leaders of their power to ‘choose’ children and teachers of their choice or their outrageous lack of accountability for public money they threaten politicians, and ‘move them on.’ [There is plenty of evidence for religious bullying tactics](#).

Most recently, just before the May 2019 election, Coalition Education Minister Birmingham was pushed sideways when he stood up to Catholic Education

Commission bureaucrats, demanding a modicum of accountability. Dan Tehan, one of their very own, took over the State Aid auction.

Before the election the Labor Party stood firm against the most outrageous financial carrots held out to the private sector and promised to restore funding to the public sector. They opposed the Coalition's 'choice and affordability' fund for private schools as a 'slush' fund. They were right, for once.

But now, licking their post election wounds, , the Labor Party have given in. Like the Coalition, they have no real backbone and wobble around like jelly in the education funding bowl. The shadow Minister for Education, Tanya Plibersek, 'one of their own', is now running scared. She wants a two bob each way bet in the education funding stakes. Like all Labor politicians in the last half century, she lacks the intestinal fortitude to confront the Catholic and other religious groups with their quite outrageous moral and financial turpitude.

What is the evidence for Plibersek's caving in to religious pressure?

Labor has ridden to the defence of the Coalition's \$1.2bn Catholic and independent school package it formerly labelled a "slush fund" after the Greens revealed a plan to shut it down.

Labor has been engaged in a robust internal conversation about its appeal with religious voters, with members such as MP Chris Hayes and senator Deborah O'Neill [suggesting it was a factor in the surprise May election loss](#).

We are informed by the [Guardian of 10 September 2019](#) that Labor will not support the Greens' move to disallow the "choice and affordability" fund, with the shadow education minister, Tanya Plibersek, instead welcoming the fact the Morrison government has restored funding for Catholic and independent schools.

The Greens education spokeswoman, Mehreen Faruqi, blasted Labor for joining the government in "setting up a private school slush fund that has no justification, no accountability and no guarantee the cash won't go to subsidising fees for wealthy private schools".

Paul Karp from The Guardian reminds public school supporters of the funding history of the last few months:

Weeks after becoming prime minister in September 2018, [Scott Morrison announced](#) a 10-year \$4.6bn [funding package](#) to settle a bitter dispute with the Catholic school sector, including the \$1.2bn fund which was not on the table before Dan Tehan took over from Simon Birmingham as education minister.

Labor and several states – including the Coalition government in New South Wales – were highly critical of the choice and affordability fund, which [Plibersek said "looks very much" like a \\$1.2bn "slush fund"](#) for non-government schools.

Before the 2019 election Labor promised an [additional \\$14bn over 10 years to public schools](#) and that [Catholic schools would be \\$250m better off](#) over the first two years under Labor, but [questioned the model of the choice and affordability fund](#).

On Monday the Greens lodged a disallowance motion, providing the Senate an opportunity next week to vote down [the regulation](#) setting up the choice and affordability fund – a move now doomed to failure given Labor’s opposition.

Plibersek said: “Scott Morrison’s highest priority should be restoring the billions of dollars he’s robbed from public schools.

“The Liberals have restored the funding they ripped from Catholic and independent schools, and we welcome that. But they should now do the same for public schools.”

Faruqi said the choice and affordability fund is “a perfect symbol of educational inequality in Australia”. “All of this money should be going to underfunded public schools, not private schools.

“This slush fund will only serve to widen the already extreme gap between public and private schools in Australia, fuelling inequities introduced by Labor and Liberal governments in one special deal after another.

“It’s thoroughly disappointing, though not surprising, to see Labor reject this opportunity to stand with the students, teachers and parents struggling in public schools around the country.

“We are committed to reversing the grubby Labor and Liberal deals that keep private schools overfunded at the expense of public schools.”

The Greens went to the 2019 election calling for public schools to receive 25% of the schools resource standard – up from the 20% provided by the federal government under the Coalition’s Gonski 2.0 package – at a cost of \$20.5bn over a decade.

Given their latest surrender to the religious lobby, public school supporters, who were responsible for the Labor Party victory in Victoria, and the near miss result of the federal election, may do better to take their votes elsewhere. After all, public school voters represent two thirds of Australian children, and neither mortgages nor private school fees are decreasing any time soon.

After their latest capitulation, the Labor Party should not take the public school vote for granted.

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