

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT  
SCHOOLS  
PRESS RELEASE 855  
WHAT HAPPENS TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS  
IN  
A FAILING MARKET ECONOMY?**

**'History only Moves the way it is Pushed'**

In the 1970s, at the very best time in Australian history for levels of equality, the denominational, Irish Catholic system inherited from the nineteenth century was in trouble. The public system was also under-resourced. But the Catholic system depended upon the unpaid labour of nuns and brothers. Their numbers dwindled after Vatican 2, and unqualified teachers in their schools reverted to the eighteenth century monitorial system of teaching in overcrowded classrooms.

The wealthy, well- resourced religious schools, the 'schools with the pools', were, and always have been, and always will be – just fine. Before any public funds trickle down to the disadvantaged in Australian schools however, they demand their proper privileged share.

For the first time in Australian history, with the Whitlam government and the Karmel Report in 1973 there was a chance to take over the sectarian system and place all the nation's children in well-resourced public schools like those we see in Finland and other countries that now lead the world in educational equality. There was a chance to refrain from entanglement of religion with the State But our political representatives and their policy advisers failed to bite the bullet.

Instead, a failing system designed for an unequal eighteenth century society was resuscitated. This denominational system has now, with preferential taxpayer funding, expanded to the point where taxpayers are expected to pay almost completely for ridiculously expensive sectarian schools which duplicate public facilities.

How did this happen?

In the period 1973 to 2020, social democrats, members of the Brahmin left in Australia have lacked intestinal fortitude. They lusted after that 'Catholic vote' in the same way people like Joel Fitzgibbon from the Hunter region are now lusting after the 'coal miners' vote.

They ran scared of being called 'sectarian' for opposing a 'sectarian system'. The wealthy have always had to be paid off before any resources trickled down to the poor and abandoned classes. And it is to be expected that their cause be

espoused by the conservative side of politics. But, because of the ‘facing both ways’ policies of what Thomas Piketty calls the Brahmin left, levels of inequality in both the educational and broader society have increased.

The majority of disadvantaged children have always been and still are – 85% of them - in public schools. Their champions are the dedicated teachers who work under sometimes appalling circumstances,. They are blamed for ‘outcomes’ of educational testing.

**But we are in times of plague and the times, they are a-changing.**

We refer our readers to Walter Scheidel’s 2017 book, *The Great Levelling*

In this scholarly and ambitious book, Scheidel argues that economic inequalities are usually narrowed most effectively as a result of cataclysmic events: war, revolution, the collapse of states and natural disasters.

Be careful what you wish for, he writes: the suppression of inequality was, on the historical evidence, “only ever brought forth in sorrow”. Scheidel dubs these the “four horsemen” and explores the causal relationships between them and the emergence of mechanisms that significantly redistribute wealth – not just in the societies we think we know, such as western European modernity, but those we rarely consider, such as the pre-conquest Americas, or the dark ages in Europe.

So DOGS wait with interest to see how the Denominational system, which still depends upon the ability to select students on the basis of their parent’s income, will fare in the time of pandemic and depression. [Paul O’Shannassy in the Fairfax media, can sense problems.](#)

Private schools depend upon a healthy market economy and its ideological underpinnings. And as the market economy collapses, how are they going to treat what O’Shannassey calls their clients and customers?

As those same clients and customers – real people otherwise known as parents and children, look around them and contemplate denuded bank accounts, they will find – a free service in public schools.

DOGS suggest that the neo-liberal market economy, the invisible hand of a mythical God of Mammon has not served our next generation well. It is now in a state of collapse; and the only thing between our children and educational disaster is the much maligned public system.

It is to be hoped that the Brahmin left will not flee to their sectarian holes but seize the opportunity at this time to finally nationalise the denominational system and force wealthy schools to become genuinely independent.

**LISTEN TO THE DOGS PROGRAM**  
**855 ON THE AM DIAL: 12.00 NOON SATURDAYS**  
**<http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>**