

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 601#

DAVID GONSKI:

THE MAN THE ‘CHARITABLE MAN’, AVOIDING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

David Gonski is a wealthy man savant and servant for the wealthy, corporate consultant, sliding through the corridors of power, trying, mellifluously to do ‘good’.

He believes in charity. He believes in trying to make the world a fairer place – maybe. He does not believe in the ‘right’ of all children to an education that is free secular and universal. Perhaps he belongs in the days of aristocrats and noblesse oblige, sniffing the air for future trends, in a post-enlightenment world.

Public school supporters should be wary of the ‘charitable’ philosophy of David Gonski as they try, desperately, to gain some public funding for schools which are discriminated against outrageously by the Abbott/ Pyne and Andrews governments. Make no mistake - Gonski is a deal broker, protecting governments from the righteous anger of public school parents while justifying handouts to powerful and wealthy religious institutions on the other.

A very revealing portrait of David Gonski appeared in the Weekend Australian Magazine of May 23-24 2015 after he wrote his latest book: Consider the following excerpts:

In a recent speech, Gonski sardonically thanked NSW education officials — who have committed to implementing his entire program — for ensuring his name isn’t “consigned to oblivion”. But if there’s any residual bitterness, he keeps it to himself. Instead, he is turning his mind to another cause: trying to get Australia’s parsimonious rich to give away their money.

Gonski’s Academic background

Gonski has attributed his focus and drive to being an immigrant, albeit one from a privileged background. His mother, a kindergarten teacher, came from a wealthy family in South Africa; his neurosurgeon father trained the famed heart-transplant doctor Christiaan Barnard. As a boy in Cape Town Gonski lived in a large house with “native” house staff and nannies, but in 1961 the family emigrated to Australia at the insistence of his mother, who was appalled by the massacre of 69 black protesters at Sharpeville and couldn’t abide the

thought of her three sons being compulsorily conscripted into the army of a regime she loathed.

The apartheid regime banned emigrants from taking their assets so the Gonskis started their new life in Sydney in depleted circumstances...It was hardly a life of deprivation — Gonski was enrolled at Sydney Grammar by Year 5 — but it shaped his ambition. “I did want to make my roots in Australia,” he says. “You don’t feel a permanence and you have a sense of needing to prove yourself.”

The eldest of the children, David proved to be dazzlingly brilliant, coming close to dux at Sydney Grammar and topping his year in law at UNSW...Snapped up by the commercial law firm Freehill Hollingdale & Page (as it was then called), Gonski became a corporate lawyer at the dawn of 1980s merger-mania, armed with all the talents necessary to thrive in that world — a prodigious memory, highly developed numeracy and a facility for lateral thinking. He was a partner at 25, and by 29 was advising National Bank of Australasia in its merger with The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney. A few years later he devised a trust structure that helped mining giant BHP take over a Queensland coal company without incurring heavy taxes.

Gonski’s Political Background

Former federal treasurer Peter Costello took a pot-shot at him three years ago when the Gillard Government asked Gonski to supervise the selection of the next chairman of the Future Fund, then appointed Gonski himself. Costello (who coveted the job, and later got it) believed Gonski should have declined the role.

But that was a rare moment of public opprobrium. ...Gonski worked as a close adviser to both John Howard and Julia Gillard .

Gonski’s ‘trickle down’ view of Education: From his \$20 million house in Sydney..

In his book, Gonski describes his shock when he visited a public high school in Sydney four years ago during the research for his school funding report and encountered barren playgrounds, unventilated rooms and inadequate science facilities. “I cannot easily forget the differences I saw between the schools I visited,” he writes. But what’s notably absent from the book is any discussion about the widening gap between rich and poor, which a growing number of economists attribute to the excesses of executive pay, corporate tax avoidance and wealth accumulation by the super-rich. Gonski doesn’t see it that way, and opposes government intervention to reset the imbalance between haves and have-nots. A true believer in free markets, he is not particularly alarmed that six heirs to the Walmart fortune in the US are said to have more wealth than the bottom 40 per cent of the country’s entire population.

....In Gonski’s view, great innovators like Walton are stifled by excessive regulation and taxation. Perhaps that’s no surprise coming from a corporate adviser who made his fortune in part by reducing the tax bills of big companies, and who chairs a bank which last year paid its chief executive \$10.7 million. In Gonski’s ideal world, the rich should be left largely unfettered by government and give back to the poor voluntarily.

“I do believe that it’s up to the rich to be benevolent,” he says. “And if you look back in history, you go back to the royal families years and years ago, how did they keep people happy? Basically, there were handouts; they looked after the court. I think that if you believe in a meritocracy — that people can do better than others — it’s incumbent on those who do better than they need for their own spending to set an example.”

It’s a beneficent view of capitalism. Whether Gonski can spread it through the nation’s boardrooms and yacht clubs will be a true test of his persuasive powers.

Gonski’s Own Wealth

Gonski’s personal wealth is not substantial enough to rate a listing in the *BRW* rich list, but he’s sufficiently comfortable to have bought a \$12 million Sydney apartment in 2012 and sold it 18 months later. His home, which is owned by his wife, could be worth \$20 million. When his friends say “modest” they’re referring to Gonski’s eschewal of luxuries such as yachts, sports cars and lavish parties.

Perhaps the most revealing comment is his own concluding comment in this article:

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Read further in <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/david-gonski-the-centre-for-social-impact-and-the-art-of-giving-back/story-e6frq8h6-1227365125650>

This is the man of various mansions, the friend of the Packers and Lowrys seeking to project a good, charitable heart, who seeks to ‘do good’ among the wealthy amongst whom he moves. He believes that the education of Australian children from straitened circumstances is charity dependent upon the goodwill of people like himself. He belongs with the courtiers of the ancient regime of France . He rose to prominence in the Boardrooms of the multinationals reducing their tax bills but those taxes would have provided an education for our children –to which they have every right.

Gonski’s value to public education is limited and public school supporters should beware of accepting his philosophy that the education of our children depends upon the charity of his powerful and wealthy friends. Australian history is against him.

When did the rich last tax themselves to ensure the education of the poor?

When did the rich last place their children in the same schools as the poor?

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