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Ending the Age of Entitlement – for the Poor

Louise M

The Abbott government has been softening us up for weeks with talk of the “budget deficit”, “cradle to the grave cuts”, warnings that we must all tighten our belts and that everyone is needed to contribute. This, coupled with Abbott’s claims of “the end to the age of entitlement” and “the end to corporate welfare” might fool us into thinking the whole country is going to be pulling together and sacrificing to fix the budget deficit. But as the country reels from the bludgeoning cuts announced in the federal budget, it remains clear whose pockets the government intends to line, and it is not those in most need.

The mining sector has long been a beneficiary of the government's generous corporate welfare. The fuel tax credits scheme alone saves mining companies \$2 billion in tax per year. This is equivalent to each tax payer giving the mining sector \$187 per year. The fuel subsidy is just over 38 cents per litre, effectively providing mining companies with excise-free fuel. Joe Hockey thinks that \$7 is not a lot to spend on a co-payment for people who would obviously otherwise be spending their money on beer and cigarettes.

Well I think that spending 38 cents per litre on fuel is not a lot to spend for companies who make billions of dollars in profit every year. Fuel tax credit is not the only benefit that the mining companies receive. Environment Victoria and Market Forces have demonstrated \$15 billion of savings to taxpayers that could be made if other subsidies, like those that provide for depreciation of equipment, aviation fuel, and prospecting were axed. This is not to mention the environmental effects of these subsidies. Allowing these companies tax-free fuel and aviation fuel subsidies has encouraged wasteful use of fossil fuels, with disastrous effects on the environment. What other sector can be so certain of their profits that they can afford to implement fly-in fly-out working situations?

For too long the mining sector has held its hand under the guise of bolstering the Australian economy and providing jobs. But as the IMF points out, the mining investment boom has peaked and the industry is transitioning into the production and export phase, meaning a steep drop off in new jobs and investment. With mining companies providing less state revenue than gambling or vehicle taxation, you have to wonder why they remain in receipt of such benefits, especially from a government that “do not believe in corporate welfare.”

Treasury estimates that cost to taxpayers for superannuation tax concessions is \$35 billion per year and is predicted to rise by \$5 billion per year. 30 percent of these concessions benefit the top 5 percent of earners and these concessions do not reduce pressures on the Age Pension. In fact, superannuation tax concessions will soon overtake spending on the Age Pension. Maybe these high-income earners are the “pre-eminent” Australians the PM has in mind for knighthood? Or perhaps Rupert Murdoch is in line for the prestigious title? His media group received a tax rebate of \$882 million last year, which was calculated as being the “single biggest factor in the budget deterioration” in the four months between August and December last year.

One of the more sensible things to come out of the Commission of Audit was the suggestion that the Paid Parental Leave scheme, Tony Abbott's pet policy that demonstrates that he truly does understand women and wants them in the workplace, was too expensive, for too little proven benefits to the economy. They recommended capping payments at \$28,000 and putting the savings into expanding child care services. Although the government has not finalised its plans for this scheme yet, it has only conceded capping the payments at \$50,000. There has been little mention in the budget of increased funding for child care. Huge amounts of evidence show the biggest factor in getting mothers back to work is affordable childcare.

Studies by the IMF show that decreasing the cost of child care by 50 percent, increases the number of mothers returning to work by 6.5-10 percent. Instead of heeding these recommendations, the government has yet again gone with the heavy-handed tactic of cutting access and freezing payment rates for Family Tax Benefits, which will increase financial stress for low-income families and will not encourage women to return to the workforce. This will instead take child care even further out of reach for those who need it most. Far more important than affordable child care is Kevin Andrews' desire to peddle his Catholic doctrine by allocating \$20 million for the next financial year for marriage counselling vouchers for newly-weds.

The fact that defence spending was deliberately protected from budget cuts is just another indication of government's priorities. They can save \$12.4bn over several years to spend on new toys (which are actually old shonky fighter jets) but cannot find the money to allow unemployed people an adequate income to survive on. This seems to be largely so that the government can save face in an arms-race pissing contest with other defence-heavy countries. Governments are meant to work for their people. I think it would be hard to find many people supportive of having their tax dollars spent outside the country on expensive, unproven military technology that has so far has been fraught with failures, especially when this spending comes at the cost of cuts in health, education, and pensions.

Another area of irresponsible spending that highlights the government's willingness to plough money to big business at the expense of people who need help most, is the cruel and internationally-condemned practice of mandatory offshore processing of asylum seekers, which the Abbott government is stepping up with vigour. With offshore detention costing \$570,000 per person per year, compared to \$38,000 per person to stay in onshore community housing per year, it does not really matter where you stand ethically on asylum seekers - it just makes no financial sense to continue with such an expensive and damaging policy. This is not to mention the \$25 million that has been paid out so far in claims to asylum seekers for harm done in detention.

Ultimately, over 90 percent of people seeking asylum in Australia will be granted refugee status. The Australian Medical Association has expressed serious concerns about the damaging effects of mandatory indefinite detention on the physical but more alarmingly, the long-term mental health of detainees. The majority of these damaged people will end up living in Australia. They will potentially require years of additional medical attention, are less likely to be able to work and "contribute" (the government's favourite buzzword at the moment), and will therefore end up putting more pressure on the health and welfare services the government is so keen to cut. This short-sighted, despicable policy is a blatant misuse of taxpayer money and a shame on the Australian people.

I have spoken to a number of people about the budget cuts. Many of them seem flippant about them, saying that they will not be able to get the harshest cuts through the Senate. Whether or not that is the case, this budget has made this government's intentions very clear. Basically, if you have large amounts of money, you will continue to receive financial help from the tax payers. If, however, you dare to be unemployed, in poor health or seek an affordable (or unthinkably, a free) education, you can forget it. You do not deserve any assistance from the government and instead should be penalised harshly so that you can go away and think about what you have done. This is, after all, the end of the age of entitlement.

News in Brief

Gabs E

Redfern: Tent Embassy fights for housing

Redfern, an inner-city suburb of Sydney known as a centre of the Aboriginal rights movement, has seen the establishment of an Aboriginal Tent embassy in protest of the Aboriginal Housing Company's development plans for land it owns at 'The Block'. The Aboriginal community in Redfern won ownership of housing on The Block in the 1970s, however these were demolished over time as they fell into disrepair, with no funding injection from successive governments. The AHC has planned a two-stage development. The first stage being a retail precinct and apartment building for student housing, being funded by private sector investors who see Redfern as prime inner-city real estate. The second stage is planned to be affordable housing for the aboriginal community, which remains an un-funded promise, as it has since the 1970s. The Tent Embassy organisers are planning to use direct action to stop the development and have issued the following statement: "On July 7th, the development of new housing is set to occur at the Block in Redfern. The bulldozers will attempt to roll in to erase centuries of Aboriginal occupation, and four decades of Aboriginal social housing. An Aboriginal Tent Embassy stands in their way, and mob are calling for your support. You can visit or stay at the Embassy at anytime, but a specific invitation has been made for your support on Sunday 6th and Monday 7th of July. Let's resist the enclosure of the Block as another shopping mall, as another block of flats that people on low-incomes can't afford to live in."

South Australian Health Sector Unions rally against federal budget cuts

2000 public sector health workers and supporters rallied on June 4th at State Parliament protesting the Abbott Government's billions in cuts to the health budget, which will have an impact on the South Australian public health system, and against the \$7 GP-visit fee. All the health unions came together including the Nursing and Midwifery Federation, United Voice(cleaners and domestic staff), the Public Service Association, the SA Salaried Medical Officers Association(Doctors' union) and the Health Services Union(Physios & allied health). The rally marked the beginning of the Keep SA Healthy campaign, and was an inspirational show of force by the union movement.

Tasmanian World Heritage maintained, but environmental protests made illegal

After the 'Forest Wars' of 2008-2009 in Tasmania's South West, World Heritage status was finally given to the stunning wet-eucalypt old-growth forests of the Florentine, Styx and Wedge valleys. However, upon his government's victory in the Federal elections, Tony Abbott vowed to try to remove this status and allow logging of these ecologically vital sites. Environment minister Greg Hunt lodged a draft of boundary changes to the United Nation's World Heritage Committee, but was completely knocked back, a victory upheld for the environmental movement. However, the Liberal Tasmanian government has decided to try to stamp forest protesters out altogether by bringing in draconian laws titled the 'Workplaces (Protection from Protesters) bill', which an ABC news report says gives protesters \$10,000 on-the-spot fines for offences. It also introduces Tasmania's first ever mandatory sentencing: if a second offence occurs you get 3 months jail, and any more after that between 3 months and 2 years. The bill passed the Lower House on Thursday 26th June after the Liberals used their majority numbers to pass a motion to stop debate, and pass the bill.

Rally in Melbourne in support of the No East-West Tunnel campaign

3000 people rallied in Melbourne on Saturday the 28th of June demonstrating their support for an ongoing community campaign in the northern suburbs against a Victorian government road tunnel project(a toll road) which would connect parallel sections of a suburban ring road(also a toll road!). The community campaign has used direct action to block drilling sites in the northern suburbs throughout 2014 and for a long time successfully prevented the beginnings of tunnel construction. The community is demanding the project be scrapped, and the billions of dollars committed to it to be put toward Melbourne's suffering public transport system.

Refugees whisked away in the dead of night

In a situation better left to the pages of a dystopian novel, an estimated 21 refugees were woken up and shipped out of the Inverbrackie detention centre in the Adelaide Hills at 3am on June 12th, and sent to Christmas Island. Inverbrackie is one of the detention centres the Abbott government wants to close because it isn't a miserable hellhole, and thus doesn't fit into their policy of brutality-induced-deterrence. On June 23rd a religious group staged a sit-in occupation of Mayo electorate Federal MP Jamie Brigg's office, in protest at the Abbott government's brutal refugee policies, and were later arrested.

Editors' Note

Gabs E and Pas F

As anarchists you would think that we already have such a dim view of capitalist politics that nothing could possibly surprise us. Our expectations of the political class, after all, are about as low as one could get. But even we were somewhat taken aback by the audacity and severity of the federal budget, by its deep and far-reaching attacks on ordinary people.

Despite the constant rhetoric about the need for everyone to make sacrifices and pain to be shared around, the bulk of cuts to education, healthcare, and welfare will affect low-income people. Indeed, on some measures, low-income people are more affected in absolute and in relative terms. If this budget is not an exercise in class warfare, in generosity and lavishness for the rich, and austerity and stinginess for the poor, then we are not sure what is.

Most devastating of all the proposals is the Learn Or Earn policy, where job-seekers aged 18-30 are allowed only six months on Newstart before their payment is cut completely for six months. This includes part-time workers who receive Newstart but do not earn enough income to be completely off Centrelink benefits (early school-leavers and people in this age group whose lose their job will have to wait six months before accessing unemployment benefits). This will tie-in with the expansion of Work For The Dole for job-seekers 18-30 unemployed for more than six months.

Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews has suggested affected job-seekers simply enrol in study to ensure that they still receive Centrelink but this raises a number of interesting questions. Will there be sufficient capacity in the education and training sector for an extra 100,000 or so students per annum? What will these changes mean for rates of homelessness among an already-vulnerable demographic? What will be the impacts for young workers knowing that their safety-net has been shredded and that if they lose their jobs they may face a very precarious set of circumstances? Dr. Elspeth McInnes has summarised a number of the most likely consequences of these proposed changes:

- “1. People will enrol in courses to receive an income rather than because they want/need the qualification.
2. People will incur debts with compounding interest and be crippled by debt.
3. People with vulnerabilities such as mental illness, traumatisation, homelessness, pregnancy, etc., will fall through the cracks.
4. People will turn to criminal activities to survive or be criminalised because of their survival behaviour.
5. The demands on emergency services will expand dramatically.
6. Private providers of shonky education products will laugh all the way to the bank.”

As the realities of the budget cuts become better understood, we have seen waves of protest across Australia. CSIRO staff have rallied against cuts which will see a quarter of staff sacked, people have been marching to save Medicare from the \$7 GP tax, retired trade unionists have been protesting the cuts to pensions and increase in the retirement age, and students have been having demonstrations in every city, big and small, to the point where that government ministers, including Abbott, cannot set foot near a university without fear of being chased away by angry students.

This wave of protest shows a massively increased willingness of people to organise and fight back. The trick is now to get on with the task of forming and maintaining militant movements which can form a barrier to implementation of the budget cuts. Connections need to be made between the various movements so that they can be truly strong.

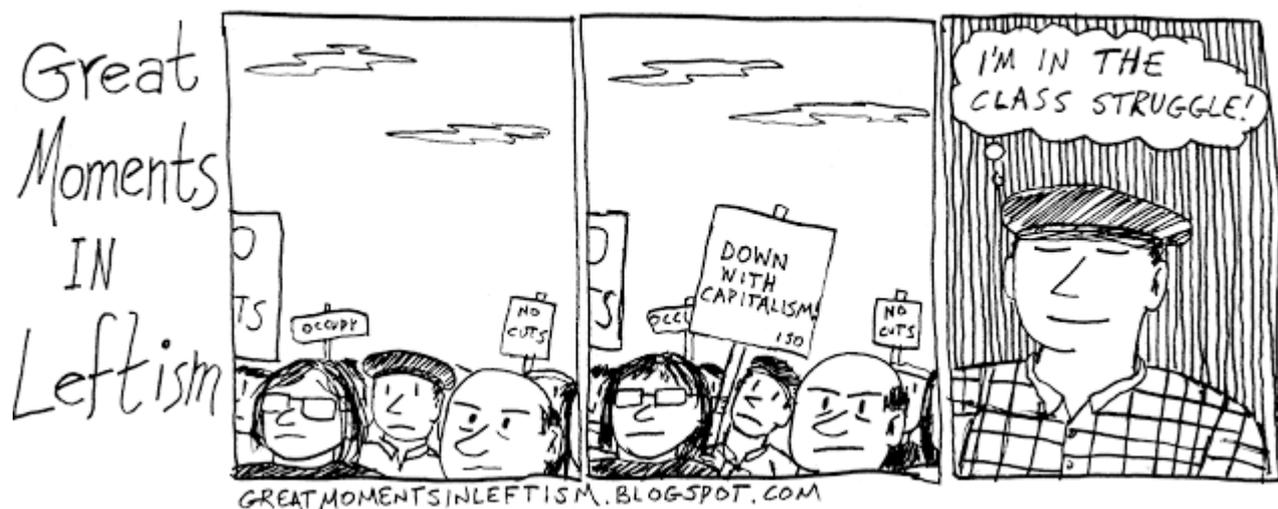
We need to share our understanding that these cuts are a class attack, an attempt by the rich to maximise their profits by destroying all the entitlements the working class has fought for a century to gain, and from this foundation we can move forward. The Abbott government is a result of the raw class power of Australian capitalists, and it must be met with the raw class power of the proletariat: direct action.

Yours in Solidarity,

Gabs E and Pas F.

#BUSTTHEBUDGET? Conjuncture, Strategy, and a Wager on New Possibilities

<http://thewordfromstrugglestreet.wordpress.com>



Two facts:

- 1) The Coalition's first budget is an intensified assault on the living conditions of the vast majority of people in Australia
- 2) This assault has generated more opposition and anger than any element of the political class expected or feels comfortable about.

The budget aims to establish the *infrastructure state* which via encouraging the sale of state assets hopes to generate sufficient funds to create enough effective demand to offset the end of the mining boom; the budget is an attempt to address the rising sovereign debt (caused by the rise in expenditure and drop in revenue due to the global, secular not cyclical, crisis of capitalism) by pushing more of the costs (in both money and labour) of reproduction onto the wage and into the home; and despite (still slowly) rising unemployment the budget attempts to increase the supply of labour through restricting welfare payments, increasing conditions for the disability pension and raising the age to access aged pension (it could be also argued that the increases in debt and costs for workers increases the pressure to work). All this in part works by using and intensifying the internal hierarchies that exist within the incredibly heterogeneous working class in Australia.

The response from the broader population has been generally hostile and angry. There have been a number of relatively sizable rallies. Students opposed to the deregulation of university fees have also carried out a number of brave and defiant acts of disobedience. The media is both reporting a constant stream of stories that represent people's criticisms of the budget and a large section of the media and the political class have responded with tatty front pages and snide columns attacking the Australian population on a whole for their reaction.

Amongst the opposition to the budget there are a number of divergent threads. There is a great deal of hope that the ALP, PUP and the Greens will block the budget forcing a double dissolution election. Sections of the socialist and anti-capitalist Left hope that putting pressure on the trade unions will lead to industrial action (or that making the demand for unions to act, and then having unions ignore these demands, will lead to recruiting new members....) and social media is circulating a call for a general strike.

The budget and the opposition to it are the peaks, the top of the ice-berg but not the totality, of the current conjuncture of capitalist society in Australia (which I try to examine in more detail here). A particular organisation of capitalism has come into crisis and the deal that was offered to the population has started to fall apart. Equally the political disorientation of so many of us is also part of the conjuncture: the long term changes in class compositions, the massive atrophy of social democracy, the rise of anti-politics and the historical experiences of the *defeat of all the major struggles* of the last decade(s).

We could say that the 'disjunctive synthesis' of this conjuncture is on one hand the crumbling popular authority of the state and the absence of any genuinely active and popular alternative.

Comrades come rally...?

Whilst we should always be ready to be pleasantly surprised it is unlikely that either the hope for a double dissolution or general strike will come to pass. Instead it is more than likely that the current discontent will follow the usual trajectory: a series of rallies, more or less framed in opposition to the Coalition and thus more or less supportive of a return of the ALP, which will generate a spark of momentum but eventually burn out and fizzle away. Indeed this is the direction that the vast majority of the organisers of opposition are moving towards.

The problem with a strategy built around rallies needs to be addressed in more detail. In short rallies are trapped within the framework of 'capitalo-parliamentarianism' (Badiou 2003). Rallies are attempts to mobilise as many people as possible to influence the behaviour of the state by suggesting that those in the street represent a significant enough voting bloc that politicians should change their behaviour. Tied into this is often the hope that a rally will be of significant size that it will get significant media exposure; a recognition but a misunderstanding of the 'spectacular' nature of our current society (Debord 2002, 2004).

The historical lesson of the anti-war movement is that ultimately such an approach is a failure (a lesson that almost all movements since have been like painful remedial classes on). In our conjuncture the state just doesn't care, and doesn't have to care, how many people are involved in rallies. They can be safely ignored. And if the rally does make it onto the media we quickly find that rather than shaping the public debate the media shapes the images and presentation of the rally and slides it into the series of representations that work to reinforce the dominant ideological normality.

There is always the chance that a rally, or elements of a rally, will break out of formula and act in a different way: an example could be the conflicts with the police carried out by high-school kids during the anti-war movement. Such developments are normally experienced as a rupture with and a crisis in the rally. Most often the organisers of the rally itself work to contain, defuse and police such moments. The mandatory mantra of a rally being 'peaceful' or 'non-violent' is used as the ideological cover to discipline almost any rebellious behaviour that comes autonomously from the participants of the rally itself (and also shuts down the space for the very complex, nuanced and needed discussion about the role force may or may not place in the struggle for social emancipation.)

Strike! Strike! Strike!

Those comrades arguing for industrial action are identifying an objective truth: that the refusal to work is the centre of our power to shape society. But this then leaves open the far more difficult question: how does the class organise itself to carry out this strike action? So far the comrades' strategy seems to be to use general meetings organised by the peak union bodies to demand the coordination of industrial action. This means trying to influence a union leadership deeply tied to the ALP to coordinate large-scale illegal action in a very hostile climate. (As mentioned above for many on the Left raising such a demand is done in poor faith. The aim is to 'expose' the lack of action of the union leadership in a hope to shatter reformist illusions, increase the influence of tiny Left groups and recruit members. Camatte (1995) was right. Such groups are rackets!)

Much of the debate focuses on what the possibility of the union leadership taking such action is. But lets flip the question. Say the ACTU, the QCU etc did call for a strike, even a general strike, how much traction would such a call have? Not only are only a minority of workers in unions it is only in specific industries and specific workplaces where there still exist the corresponding levels of organisation, culture and solidarity for such a call to work. Off the top of my head I would say the construction industry, on the wharves, in some mines, in some schools, amongst nurses and some cleaners. The fact that the anticapitalist Left is turning to pressuring the union leadership rather than their workmates in their own workplaces identifies a very really and debilitating problem.

For the vast majority of us, who work in either unorganised workplaces or workplaces where the union is little more than a corkboard, we need to do a lot more before we can move.

There is also a problem of those of us who are unorganised or poorly organised relying on those other elements of the class who are out the front fighting to do the heavy lifting for us. It is clear that the Federal government is gunning for construction workers through the reintroduction of the ABCC and the Fair Work decision that damages for illegal strike action can be taken from individual workers up to and including asset seizures. It is a lot for those of us not in these industries to ask these workers to put themselves on the line when we are so weak. There is a difference between comrades in the industry and relevant unions raising the demand for strike action around the budget themselves and a group of Lefties outside trying to push for strike action via the leadership.

Single Sparks and A New Possibility

What we need then is the creation of a *new possibility* (Badiou 2009). That is a new way of collectively acting that can manifest power in the present that can push capital and the state and simultaneously chart the path for a different and other kind of future. A new possibility works to negate the present and start to create alternatives (what we can call communisation or the creation of the commons).

Such a new possibility normally emerges as an event, as a tumultuous eruption of masses. Such events are by their nature thought to be impossible before they happen. Their very possibility is denied by the rules of the society they challenge and their foundation is only grounded retrospectively. For us communists we operate with a memory of previous struggles, attentiveness to the present and also try to seek out and see in the quiet 'normality' of capitalism the antagonisms that offer the possibility of emancipation.

This is the hard kernel of an emancipatory and materialist approach – that the potential for something more, something that breaks radically with the social order, exists within the fabric of society even if is unseen and unseeable on the surface level of normality. The axis this hangs on is that our creative capacity is both the very thing that capital vampirises for its endless accumulation and is also what we can, as a class, pull free of capital and organise in different ways. We can

orientate ourselves to this potential. The Zapatistas (2006) are correct when they say as part of *La Otra* that we come 'from below and to the Left'.

Whilst we can't produce such an event as a force of will one doesn't have to wait. If we wish to break from the frame of capitalo-parliamentarianism where do we go? The budget as it moves through parliament is far from us and is in a world that cares little for us. Its passage will be buffeted by the various winds of the political class and we as spectators can do little but cheer or weep from the sidelines.

What is required is the creation of a site, a real space, where the impact of the budget, *as part of the broader coordination and functioning of capital accumulation*, can be contested, and where people can physically and collectively struggle together. Think of some of the real struggles that have emerged that exert some kind of power: the MUA dispute, the Bently Blockade, Jabiluka, the Grocon dispute, etc. Here is a specific space where some workers walk off the job, protestors shut down a project, students occupy an admin office and many levels of supporters gravitate to it. Such sites undermine the state's ability to guarantee normality, they prevent the circulation and valorisation of capital and they facilitate the prefiguring of alternative forms of society. The common thing you hear from being on the pickets or being at a blockade is how different life *feels*. These are the sites the state mobilises the cops against and these are the struggles that corporations higher spies to infiltrate and disrupt.

The Federal budget will probably pass and it will probably be complemented by state budgets that will privatise assets to raise funds for infrastructure investment and reduce the funding of services. This will be experienced on the ground in countless ways by countless people and in countless places: job losses, work intensification, welfare restrictions, closed services. In the present we can lay the ground work, prepare with each other, organise to fight in these spaces in the hope that we can discover our power, that our struggles will resonate through the social terrain and a new eruption will throw everything open. We struggle on the premise of something happening, a 'Miracle', which is '*awaited but unexpected*' (Virno 1996).

Prairie Fire, Contagion and Resonance

What is the lesson presented to us by the global wave of struggles – OWS, the movements of the squares etc? Firstly that it is possible that seemingly from nowhere great crowds of people step into collective struggle. Despite the long *depoliticisation* (Hui 2009) that was generated during the neoliberal period, as economic questions were declared undebatable and generally we retreated to the personal to find utopia, now that the neoliberal period *is over* we see that suddenly and very quickly great crowds of people return.

The political lessons of this cycle of struggles are obtuse and of course these struggles are not exhausted. At first what we see is the great occupation of key centres of the metropolis that (unlike rallies) jam the ideological and practical normality of their functioning. These occupations have a radically hostile attitude to mainstream politics in total, often engage in various forms of confrontation with the state and model various kinds of direct democratic practice. Whilst most of the occupations have ended they have created numerous different subsequent political projects – though as Egypt shows there is no guarantee of victory and as the Ukraine shows the ideological dominance of an upsurge can be grabbed by the radically right and various 'reactionary form(s) of anti-capitalism' (Postone 2006).

What should we take from this? After all the various Occupys in Australia remained fairly small if spirited and defiant. But then they happened before the long waves of the crisis really were felt here. At the very least since there is broadly similar political-ideological coordinates in Australia as there is in the rest of the North we can take heart in the high levels of contempt that mainstream politics is held in and the possibility of the return of the crowd.

What may be done?

On the periphery of the Left, sometimes sadly caught in its gravity, exist the thin network of comrades, dearly loved, fierce and caring, within which this blog sits. Rather than suggesting to a great audience 'out there' what to do, I would rather suggest a few limited moves to those in the room.

Intellectual

One thing we can do is work on developing and communicating a credible intellectual framework that explains the budget in the context of the global crisis of capitalism and our current conjuncture. Such an approach means dropping the easy tropes like 'neoliberalism' and actually sitting down together and collectively thinking and reading and perhaps writing. (Jokingly I would suggest that comrades read the budget with a copy of *Capital* on their desks). Coupled with is the equally hardwork of trying to communicate this understanding in ways that can be heard – an art and not a science. This would mean both experimenting with contemporary media and trying to organise forums and gatherings outside the geographical safety zones of the Left. A Trot paper and a meeting under the blinking fluorescents of student union or trade union offices just won't cut it.

This can be paired with a process of investigation into sites where the budget will impact, working out how the cuts will impact, what that means for people's lives, what forms of solidarity, rebellion and dignity already exists and how this is nestled in the broader social terrain. These investigations can both shape our work and provide the basis for other forms of knowledge to communicate.

This I see as part of constructing a radicalised vision of Lenin's (1973) 'revolutionary theory' – where the lived knowledge of daily life is combined with rigorous engagements with theory as part of an ongoing organised process which then produces something new and greater than the sum of its parts.

This is listening, talking, and discussing.

Organisational

What organisational initiatives can we take? Left Flank authors Liz Humphrys and Tad Tietze (2014) recently wrote 'Workers would be best served by starting a conversation based around how to secure their collective interests, whether or not they are part of a union'. We can contribute to organizing these conversations. This would mean experimenting in ways similar to the above of organizing meetings and using contemporary media to create the spaces for these conversations.

We can also work to start putting into contact with each other friends and comrades we know who work in similar budget impacted industries or use similar services that face cuts and support them in working together (in an old language the formation of 'cells'). (Rob suggested this approach in the context of the state government cuts). This should be done in an ongoing and systemic way and then we can stitch together these links into broader forms of coordination and cooperation.

We can work to amplify any struggles that are happening and circulate as much as possible the experiences in their totality, good and bad, amongst the class as a whole in the hope that these many resonate, inform and inspire with others.

Lastly lets put back on the table for discussion the idea of increasing the coordination, cooperation and organization of anticapitalist militants in a way that goes beyond the limitations of the network, the inwardness and moralism of activist milieus and rejects the racket building follies of the socialist sects and anarcho-syndicalist sectettes. [As I get older and have less and less spare time it becomes obvious to me that only with the existence of some kind of organization can the few things I can do become part of something more coherent. I doubt I am the only one.] (A conversation with Andrew convinced me of the importance of this and of no longer shying away from such a project).

Initiative

We live in the world. Left practice often erroneously draws people away from the terrain of their lives, affects, and experiences. We can start to tally how the budget will impact (as part of the broader processes of capital accumulation) the places we inhabit. We can take stock of the relations we have there, the already existing antagonisms and points of tensions. We can begin to experiment with organising in these spaces on the wager that our acts here can contribute to transforming these areas into a site of open contestation and emancipatory politics.

The local Centrelink office is more important than the Senate. Those on the dole are more important than any Senator.

A necessary correction to get back on track

In writing this I have obviously focused on opposing the budget. But we must remember that the budget is only part of the state's attempts to facilitate and coordinate the accumulation of capital in a specific historical conjuncture. It is capital and capitalist society as whole we oppose and it is this society that is strewn with antagonisms. Thus if one focuses on the budget it is necessary to also have a wider view and an appreciation of the ability for emancipatory struggle to emerge anywhere in society.

Coda: Elections? A trap for arseholes!!

Breaking the gravitational pull of elections is a core part of the struggle for class autonomy. Why?

- 1) The problem *isn't* Abbott. The Coalition government is merely a faction of the political class that is attempting to drive the state in a way that responds to the problems confronting capitalism in Australia. Whatever the noxious elements of their ideology and actions these aren't the source of the problem.
- 2) The state is over-determined by the movements of capital. It doesn't matter who wins elections it is the imperatives and logics of global capital accumulation that really shape the actions of the state. Even if the Left wins the elections in the absence of society-wide collective anticapitalist struggle there is little they can do.
- 3) The atomisation of the voter is an entirely different dynamic from that the same individual may experience as part of a collective struggle.
- 4) The voter is an abstraction removed from the lived world which contains the 'mines' which can 'explode' capitalism (Marx 1993).

References and links available at

<http://thewordfromstrugglestreet.wordpress.com/2014/06/03/bustthebudget-conjuncture-strategy-and-a-wager-on-new-possibilities/>

WELFARE MYTHS – AND HOW TO BUST THEM

Andy L and Pas F for the Anti-Poverty Network SA

MYTH #1

People who want to work can find work. Barriers to employment are mainly the poor attitudes of people receiving Centrelink benefits.

THE FACTS

There are not enough jobs to go around. In December 2013 that there were 716,000 job-seekers. Job vacancies were 140,000.

Research shows that there is always around four to six job-seekers competing for every one job. This figure would be even higher if you included people who became discouraged and stopped searching for work.

Available jobs generally favour the well-educated, whereas half the long-term unemployed have less than year 12 qualifications.

People with major caring responsibilities (like single parents) often find it very difficult to find work that fits around their commitments, i.e., jobs that allow them to pick up their kids in the morning/afternoon, and take into account school holidays.

It has been documented (by a 2008 Federal Government survey) that employers discriminate against people like single mothers, those with disabilities, older unemployed and long-term unemployed (even when they have recently had training).

Blaming job-seekers distracts us from the real causes of unemployment and helps to justify successive crackdowns on welfare recipients. Instead we should blame the system. Why are there not enough jobs? Not enough family-friendly jobs? Do governments and businesses even want full employment? If not, how can we possibly blame Centrelink clients?

MYTH #2

If Centrelink clients struggle financially it is because they are incompetent or irresponsible.

FACTS

Many Centrelink recipients suffer from financial stress, but this is usually because of very low payment levels, not because of mismanagement or excessive consumption of alcohol, cigarettes, or gambling.

An Anglicare Victoria survey from 2009 found only 4 percent of Centrelink recipients' payments was spent on alcohol, cigarettes and gambling, whereas 70 percent was spent on necessities like groceries and housing.

Australia has the lowest unemployment payment in the developed world, at \$260 per week. Student payments (Youth Allowance/Austudy) are \$50 per week lower than Newstart). Most Centrelink payments are below the poverty-line, with Newstart \$182 per week below the poverty-line, Parenting Payment \$170, Disability Support Pension \$129, and Age Pension \$86.

Even with the maximum rate of Rent Assistance, the average single unemployed adult would have only \$24.50 per day for expenses after rent.

40 percent of Newstart recipients cannot afford to pay their bills on time or visit a dentist and more than half cannot raise \$2,000 in the event of an emergency. Two-thirds of students live below the poverty-line and 17 percent report going without food/necessities.

MYTH #3

Australia spends too much on Centrelink payments and too many people rely on it. This is unsustainable and we cannot afford it.

FACTS

We spend less on age pensions, less on family payments, less on unemployment benefits. We spend only 6.9 percent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on payments and it is expected that spending levels will be more or less the same in

2050. We spend 3.5 percent of GDP on age pensions, 2.5 percent on family payments, and 0.5 percent on unemployment benefits.

While spending on age pensions will grow to 3.9 percent by 2050 this will still be very low compared to other developed nations: in the UK spending on the Age Pension is at 6 percent, 8 percent in Sweden, 10 percent in Belgium, and 14 percent in France.

We have a strict system that provides income support to only those who need it. In 2011, 18.5 percent of people received Centrelink payments, down from 23 percent in 2001. Only 4.8 percent of working-age households derive 90 percent or more of their income from Centrelink, down from 7.1 percent in 2001.

An OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) report into welfare spending showed that among developed nations, only in Mexico and Korea are those on average incomes less dependent on welfare than their Australian counterparts. More of our welfare spending targets those at the very bottom than in most wealthy countries.

MYTH #4

It is too easy to receive the Disability Support Pension (DSP). The number of people on the payment is dramatically rising.

FACTS

As of December 2013 there were 830,000 people on DSP, or 5.4 percent of people aged 18-64 – this is down from 5.5 percent two years earlier. Over the past decade, the proportion of people on the DSP has risen slightly but that is mainly because Australia has an ageing population. Most of the rise came from over 60s (mainly women) being placed on the DSP.

To be eligible for the DSP someone must have a serious medical condition that would prevent them within the next two years from working 30 hours per week or more in any job in Australia (even with retraining/rehabilitation).

The process involves a detailed questionnaire, written reports from doctors and/or specialists, and assessment by government-chosen experts. If your only problem is a back condition, you would have to be in almost constant pain or be unable to sit or move around properly to get the DSP.

The Anti-Poverty Network SA is fighting for the dignity, needs, and rights of all people on Centrelink and other low-income people. Phone: **0411 587 663** - E-mail: **antipovertynetwork.sa@gmail.com** - Facebook: **facebook.com/antipovertynetworksa**



Ad Altare Populii Abrenuncio Acta Abbottus

Sermon read at *Funeral and Protest Against the Death of the "Fair Go"* on June 6th organised by the Anti-Poverty Network SA. Rev. N. Theogen

Dearly beloved: we are gathered here today in the sight of dogs to pay our final tribute of respect to that which was mortal of our deceased loved one: The Fair-Go.

As all present will know, the fair-go kicked the budget after dedicating its existence to uplifting those in need by extending the ability of all society to assist their fellow Australians collectively.

Australians were as glad to help one another as they were to receive help, for it was known that to build a society you have to care for one another within that society.

For is it not written: We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please our neighbour for their good, to build them up.

The Fair-Go allowed many a grateful Australian the chance to build themselves up and to live with dignity.

The Fair-Go didn't do this because there was a financial gain involved, it did this because it was working toward a society where the most marginalised amongst us were given an equal footing.

Does it not make sense to build people up when they are their weakest rather than further burdening them?

I firmly believe that today is the parent of tomorrow and the present casts its shadow far into the future.

The negative impacts that this tragedy will have will be most immediately apparent to those who are affected by it but will also serve to rend society in twain: leaving the privileged few constantly in fear of the disenfranchised masses who still remember the light on the hill that was the Fair-Go.

Let us not forget: the social welfare that the the Fair-Go represented was sacrificed needlessly to maintain corporate welfare: rewarding the moneylenders and war-makers with the funds diverted from parents, the elderly, disadvantaged children and the disabled.

I will remind our faithful and most devout of Christians, Tony Abbott, of the words of this book: Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.

I will also remind him of this quote: I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

I'm pretty bloody sure they weren't thinking of the manufacturers of fighter planes when they wrote that either.

I'm reminded of a famous phrase concerning needles and rich folk, needless to say if I were in the company of certain rich folk I would not be worrying about the logistics concerning camels.

Those who profit from this budget must surely be poor in spirit. And heaven must be an awfully dull place if the poor in spirit reside there.

For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

For: where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organised conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe

Let us not focus too long on the negatives, though there are many, in death the Fair-Go has brought us together and given us purpose:

To those of you who, untouched by these cuts, who currently feel no pain: we ask you to stand with the poor, sick and disadvantaged of our communities and forestall the coming anguish.

To you members of the community who mourn your loss and fear the future, we offer our solidarity and we shall toil alongside you in your struggle. We call for your presence: make yourselves known and speak out against these starvation policies.

Ad Altare Populii Abrenuncio Acta Abbottus.
(From the altar of the people I renounce the acts of Abbott)

Ashes to fascists, dust to the unjust.
Amen.

Work for the Dole: Useless and Unfair

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One of the most significant welfare announcements in this year's federal budget is the expansion of Work for the Dole. Affecting unemployed people aged 18-30, participants will be forced to undertake placements of 25 hours per week for six months, if they have been unemployed for more than six months.

Work for the Dole workers receive only Centrelink payments and travel allowance for participating in the program and have none of the standard industrial rights and conditions. They will work at *less than the minimum wage*. Newstart Allowance recipients will be working for \$10 per hour while Youth Allowance recipients will be working for \$5-\$8 per hour (depending on the category of Youth Allowance). The minimum wage is \$16.87 per hour.

Still, the scheme remains popular. I want to explore two of the main arguments used by supporters and explain why these arguments fail. These two arguments I will call **the paternalism argument** and **the Mutual Obligation (or fairness) argument**.

The Paternalism argument

Work for the Dole is often justified on paternalist grounds: it is beneficial to job-seekers to participate because it improves employment outcomes and therefore forcing them to participate is justified (obviously improving employment outcomes benefits everyone). Putting aside whether forcing people to act in their best interests is acceptable (we often allow people to act in ways that are not in their best interests), what does the evidence suggest?

Jeff Borland and Yi-Ping Tseng recorded the experiences of 888 Newstart recipients aged 18-24 participating in Work for the Dole. It found participants were no more likely to move off payments in the 12 months after finishing the program than a similar group of Centrelink recipients who did not participate. Their findings are consistent with international research suggesting programs like Work for the Dole do not improve employment outcomes.

As Borland argues, "the track record of those type of schemes in Australia and internationally is that they do not tend to have a very good record of assisting people to move into employment."

There are two key reasons why Work for the Dole does not work. First, it does not increase the supply of jobs. Second, it does not do enough to build the skills of unemployed people. Programs are short-term and there is usually little formal training provided.

The study showed that six months after commencing Work for the Dole, 71.4 percent were still unemployed, compared to 59.1 percent of non-participants. After six months this gap began to slowly reverse so that by 12 months the difference between the two groups continued unemployment had narrowed from 12.3 percent to 10.3 percent. By 12 months after commencement, participants had received payments an average of 2.2 fortnights longer than those who did not participate.

Many participants viewed their placements as work and so stopped or reduced their job-searching. Naturally people working part-time will have less time to look for paid work.

This would explain why job-seekers are less likely to secure employment during their Work For The Dole phase than similar non-participants - but it does not explain why Work For The Dole participants have never caught-up to non-participants in terms of their likelihood to find jobs, even long after exiting the program.

It might be the case that the stigmatising nature of Work for the Dole has a "scarring" effect, demoralising and changing the behaviour of participants. It is also well-known that employers respond negatively towards Work for the Dole participants, many of whom avoid including Work For The Dole in their resumes.

Where are the jobs?

Work for the Dole focuses almost exclusively on the supply rather than the demand side of the equation: it focuses on the attitudes, backgrounds, and skills of unemployed people, not on the demand for workers. Work for the Dole ignores the availability of jobs, the fact that there are not enough for everyone who wants to work.

In December 2013 there were 716,000 job-seekers. Job vacancies were 140,000. This means there were five job-seekers for every job. This figure would be even higher if you included people who became discouraged and stopped searching. Available jobs generally favour the well-educated, whereas half the long-term unemployed have less than year 12 qualifications.

People with major caring/parenting responsibilities find it very difficult to find work that fits around their obligations. It has also been documented by a 2008 Federal Government survey that employers discriminate against people like single mothers, those with disabilities, older unemployed and long-term unemployed, even when they have recently had training.

Work for the Dole does nothing to address the shortage of paid work, the shortage of family-friendly work (or single-parent friendly work), or employer prejudices.

The Mutual Obligation (or Fairness) argument

Many supporters of Work for the Dole argue it is only fair that those who receive benefits from the community also have obligations to meet. Whether or not Work for the Dole helps job-seekers secure employment is irrelevant. What is important is that job-seekers give back to the community - that they "contribute" like everyone else.

Work for the Dole helps ensure welfare is a two-way street: unemployed people have conditions they must meet to receive payments. The term Mutual Obligation is often used to describe this idea: the community (or governments, and perhaps others) have obligations to job-seekers, who in turn also have obligations.

Closely related is the idea that there are people on welfare who do not need it, who are taking advantage of the system when they could be working. The term "job snob" is used to refer to these people, who could be employed but are too fussy about the kind of work they are willing to do. It is claimed Work for the Dole will help push these people into work and ensure only those who need payments receive them.

Mutual Obligation is not a new idea - benefits and burdens have long gone hand-in-hand in our welfare system. Job-seekers do not receive payments no-strings-attached. They are required to search for 6-10 jobs per fortnight, sign "Employment Pathway Plans" requiring job-search and education/training commitments, and accept jobs requiring less than 90 minutes travel one-way.

They lose eight weeks of payments for refusing "reasonable" job offers. In fact, obligations faced by job-seekers and penalties for non-compliance are about to be strengthened, with the government moving to make it harder for Centrelink workers to waive penalties for non-compliant job-seekers.

"Givers" versus "Receivers"

The division of society into "givers" and "receivers" is simplistic. It assumes that those on welfare have never been and never will be taxpayers when the vast majority have been and will be again. In fact, Centrelink clients are taxpayers too: they pay consumption taxes like the GST, which represents 27 percent of government revenue. They often make important non-economic contributions, through voluntary work and unpaid care work. And needless to say, taxpayers also receive public benefits.

Note also the assumption that receivers of public benefits must give back at the same time as they receive those benefits - not afterwards, not when they are back in the workforce, but at the very same time.

Who is really not fulfilling their part of the bargain?

So much focus is on the obligations of job-seekers towards the community that it is easy to forget the obligations of others. What are the obligations of the community (or governments) towards job-seekers?

Maybe something like this: to ensure an adequate income for job-seekers while they are not employed, and that there are enough jobs for everyone who wants to work. And in return job-seekers would be required to search for any work that is realistic for them or take advantage of available study/training options.

Is the government fulfilling its side of the bargain? It would seem not. As we saw, there is a massive jobs shortage. Since the 1970s governments have abandoned even a rhetorical commitment to full employment.

The conventional economic wisdom is that there is a conflict between employment and inflation, that too much employment leads to prices rising too quickly, "overheating" the economy. In short, there is supposedly a goldilocks zone for unemployment - not too much, not too little - that governments try to maintain, but there is no interest in getting rid of unemployment as such.

In fact there is another reason why unemployment exists and it has nothing to do with unemployed people being lazy. There has never been full employment under capitalism, even during the so-called golden age of capitalism, the period of sustained economic growth between the late '40s and early '70s.

The reason is important: it is desirable for capitalists, because sizeable pools of desperately poor unemployed workers gives employers more power by increasing competition for jobs, pushing down wages, and keeping workers disciplined and easily replaceable.

If it is true that we need unemployment to avoid inflation, we should be thanking unemployed people. Their involuntary sacrifice is good for economic stability. If unemployment, on this argument, is to some extent necessary and desirable, they are already doing their fair share and should not be punished. All the more reason to ensure they have an adequate income.

But here the government is also failing those on welfare payments: it does not provide an adequate standard of living to those without paid work.

Australia has the lowest unemployment payments in the developed world, at \$260 per week. Newstart is \$182 per week below the poverty-line, Parenting Payment \$170, and Disability Support Pension \$126. Even with the maximum rate of Rent Assistance, the average single unemployed adult would have only \$24.50 per day for expenses after rent. 40 per cent of Newstart recipients cannot afford to pay their bills on time or visit a dentist and more than half cannot raise \$2,000 in the event of an emergency.

Our unemployment benefits have not risen, in real terms, in 20 years. They are now so low even business groups, like the Business Council of Australia, think they should be raised.

Contrary to the claims of politicians and most of the media, if there is anyone that is not fulfilling its side of bargain, that is taking advantage of the situation, it is not unemployed people but governments (and businesses) that are guilty.

Mutual Obligation – for whom?

Think of all those who receive public money who have no obligation to give back to the community. For example, businesses receive grants, subsidies, and tax breaks yet have usually have no specific attached obligations. Think of the mining industry, which receives \$11 billion in subsidies per year and yet is able to cut jobs whenever it likes and has no obligation to keep its profits in Australia or reinvest them into mining communities. There is something very selective about unemployed people being one of the few groups required to repay what they have received.

Is Mutual Obligation even a reasonable idea?

It might seem like common-sense that receivers of public benefits should repay them but let us dig deeper. It is worth comparing welfare with healthcare. People are entitled to healthcare because it is a matter of need: when people need treatment, particularly emergency treatment, they have access (or should – hence why GP co-payments are so unpopular). Should welfare be any different? Surely need should be enough.

Should anyone have to deserve or earn healthcare? Most of us would say no. Because healthcare (despite recent attacks on the public health system) is an entitlement, and it is dangerous and inappropriate to make it conditional. And usually no distinction is made between those whose health problems are beyond their control, and those whose health problems are self-inflicted.

Work for the Dole represents Australia moving away from welfare as a right and to welfare as a privilege: something to be grateful for, to grovel for. It is exploitative, ineffective, and punitive. With anti-government sentiment at extremely high levels, this might be the perfect time to mount a ferocious campaign against this dismal policy.

Minister Morrison: What I have said is that it is our practice to report on significant events at sea, particularly where they involve safety of life at sea. Now there is no such report for me to provide to you today. If there was a significant event happening then I would be reporting on it.

Question: So what does that mean?

Minister Morrison: You are a bright journalist I am sure you can work it out.

Question: No we are asking you sir, you are the Minister.

Minister Morrison: And I have given you my response.

Question: Yeah why are you having a press conference if you are not here to reveal...

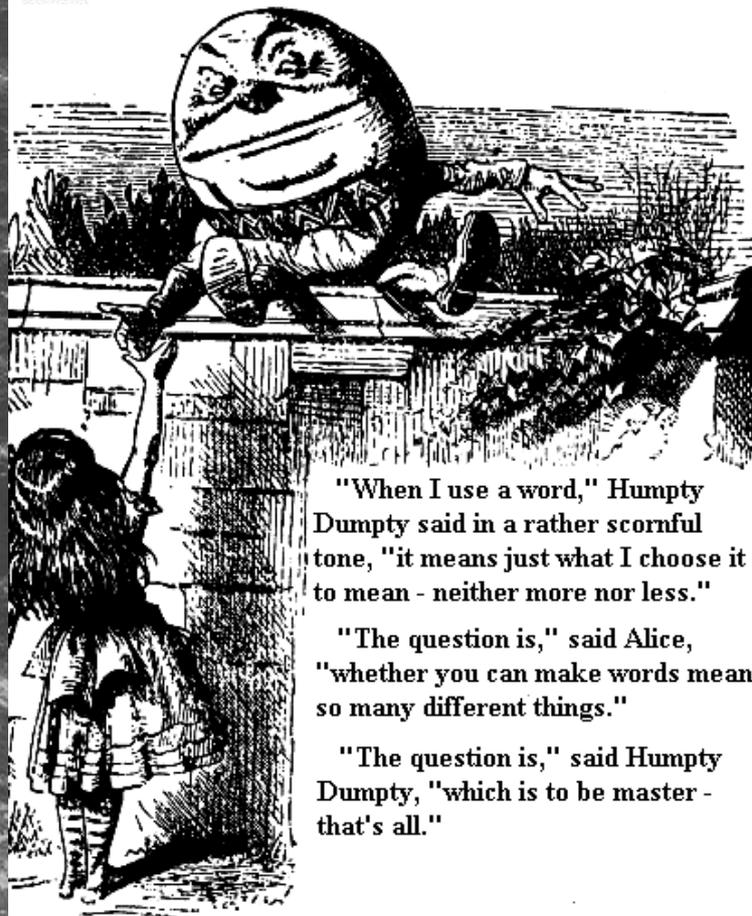
Minister Morrison: I am on my way in to the Federal Council and I was happy to provide a doorstep because I understood journalists had questions today.

Question: So could you clarify sir for us at what point does an event become a significant event involving a boat on the water?

Minister Morrison: When you see me here standing and reporting on it.

Question: And you are standing here reporting.

Minister Morrison: I am not. I am saying there is no such report for me to provide to you today. There is therefore no significant event for me to report at sea.



"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all."

