

**EDITORIAL**  
**Who Wins?:**  
**May 2009**

**READING THE BUDGET**

*It is a media convention to assess budgets in terms of 'winners' and 'losers', but who really wins when the needs of the poorest and most marginalized are neglected?*

When journalists ask community groups and commentators who are the 'winners' and 'losers', usually what is actually meant by the question is "who has received some kind of financial advantage, and who has not?"

It is natural that our initial reading of the budget might be in terms of how it affects us personally. Will I get a tax cut? Will my social security payments increase enough to keep up with the cost of living? Is there new spending on infrastructure that will improve my quality of life – or my business opportunities? Overall, will I or won't I be better off? Am I a 'winner' or a 'loser'?

Our commitment to the common good calls us to look more deeply and to extend our concerns more broadly.

**THE COMMON GOOD**

*A key question that Catholic Social Teaching would pose of a budget is: "how effectively will this promote the common good?"*

Budgets are vital to government action, but the purpose of government itself is to organise and promote the common good. The raising and allocation of funds enables action to promote the common good - or it can privilege some sectoral interests over others.

The rhetoric of 'winners' and 'losers' tends to promote a vision of government action dominated by zero sum competition between sectoral interests.

The language of social inclusion, on the other hand, tends to encourage a vision of government aimed at enabling all people and groups to participate and to share in the benefits and burdens of life together in society.

**WHAT ARE WE LIKE?**

*When unemployed people and sole parents are given social security payments that are insufficient to maintain a dignified life, we are all diminished – we are all 'losers'.*

Pensioners received much needed increases in the budget, but were they treated more favourably than sole parents and job seekers on the basis of need, or political power?

Are we embracing a 'competing victims' dynamic rather than solidarity? Do we want to be the kind of society that asks the least powerful and most disadvantaged groups to bear the brunt of the global recession?

The budget sent mixed messages concerning asylum seekers. On the one hand, funds were allocated to make Villawood Immigration Detention Centre an environment more fit for vulnerable human beings, but on the other, more funds were allocated for border protection.

Do we want to be the kind of society that responds to global crises and suffering with self interest, exclusion, and the blaming of people in need? Does our concept of the common good stop at the edge of our immigration zone?

When we share benefits according to needs, and burdens according to the capacity to contribute, we all win.

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