

THE GREEN AGENDA

A MESSAGE FROM CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

On March 26 the people of NSW will go to the polls in the state election. The majority of the candidates belong to a political party and those parties have policies which they will strive to enact by law, if elected.

What are the Greens promising to deliver into law if their candidates are supported? Many Catholics have asked our opinion of the different parties and candidates, especially the Greens who are a relatively new phenomenon on the Australian scene. Of course Catholics and other people of good will can be found in most parties.

Not everything the Greens are promoting is bad public policy. Protecting the environment, for example, is an important responsibility, and we share the widespread concern that more needs to be done to achieve this. But concern for the environment does not mean that all Greens policies are acceptable. The full offering of the party has to be taken into account. Greens who are elected will work within the legislature to change the law to reflect their policies. If elected they will claim a mandate to pursue the legal reforms outlined in their policies. The Greens will not win government in NSW, but experience Federally and in other States shows that they can exercise significant power over governments, even with only a few seats.

It is important then for religious people, particularly those from the major monotheistic traditions, to recognise there are some specific Greens policies that give rise to grave concern.

Religious Freedom

The Greens are committed to removing what are called “exemption provisions” from the Anti-Discrimination Act. This would force non-government schools to employ teachers whose views, values and lifestyle are contrary to the religious traditions of these schools, and the hundreds of thousands of parents who send their children to them. This is not about “exemptions” from the law. Church agencies and schools are bound by the Anti-Discrimination Act. The real issue is religious freedom, which in addition to private prayer and worship also means the right to live out our faith in the community. The language of “exemptions” is misleading. Parliaments are obliged by international human rights conventions to protect religious freedom. A failure to protect freedom of religion also threatens freedom of thought and conscience.

School Funding

The NSW Greens want to reduce State grants to most non-government schools, including all Catholic systemic and some Catholic independent schools, to the same total level they were at in 2003 from both State and Commonwealth grants combined, with an allowance for inflation. That means that NSW Catholic system schools alone would immediately lose more than \$318 million a year, which would be a reduction from the current 2011 amount of 85% for primary schools and 65% for secondary schools. To cover this loss in funding and maintain current standards, fees in Catholic systemic primary and secondary schools would have to rise substantially, possibly by as much as \$1,550 a year. The Greens will also work to end all government funding for the so-called “wealthiest private schools” but do not define what they mean by “wealthy”. Non-government schools which support parents with the religious education of their children would very likely be denied all State funding under the Greens policy if they enrol students and employ staff on faith-based grounds.

Drug Use

The Greens will work to treat personal drug use as a health and social issue, and therefore acceptable, while keeping “commercial-scale” drug-dealing, importation and “unsanctioned” manufacture as crimes. They do not define these terms. They also support the removal of “criminal sanctions for personal drug use and the possession of associated implements” along with the removal of “criminal sanctions for the possession and growing of a small number of cannabis plants for personal use.” Again, they do not define “small number”. But the use of non-therapeutic drugs damages health, life and communities and is an offence against human dignity.

Marriage

The Greens are applying pressure on the Federal Government to amend the Marriage Act and enable two men or two women to marry. If the Federal Government does not move to address this “unfair discrimination” they will introduce a bill into the NSW Parliament to try to legislate for homosexual marriage at the State level. But it is not “unfair discrimination” to recognise that marriage is the union of a man and a woman who bind themselves to each other for the well-being of their children.

Changing the law on marriage would expose churches and schools to coercive pressures from the state to cease teaching their beliefs about marriage and family. Same-sex relationships and the relationship between a man and a woman are different realities, and it helps no one to call different relationships by the same name.

Abortion

The Greens will pursue the removal of abortion as an offence under the Crimes Act in the next parliament. Abortion involves the deliberate killing of an innocent unborn child, and current NSW law offers some limited protection to mothers and their unborn children. The Greens support the law in Victoria that specifically denies doctors and other health practitioners the right of conscientious objection to participating in or being associated with the practice of abortion. It is remarkable that such offensive laws could be passed in an Australian parliament, denying individuals the fundamental freedom of belief, conscience and religion.

Euthanasia

The Greens sought to introduce euthanasia legislation into the NSW Parliament last year and almost succeeded. However, there is cause for on-going concern. For all the talk about choice, freedom and dignity, the reality is that euthanasia is the killing of another human being. Evidence from countries like The Netherlands and Belgium shows that many of those euthanised are involuntary victims. They did not choose to be killed. You cannot write into law absolute safeguards and protections to prevent this here. Abuses and exploitation of the vulnerable will occur.

Conclusion

The Greens' position on a number of fundamental points of human and social policy areas conflicts directly with the beliefs and values of virtually all religious people, and the beliefs of many other people as well. The conflicts are not superficial or inconsequential. They go to fundamental issues such as respect for all human life from conception to natural death. They attack religious freedom and freedom of conscience. Greens who are elected will bring a whole set of policies. You cannot pick and choose. They are not only concerned for the environment.

Every vote in this election counts. We should remember that in the last parliament there were some members in all major parties who supported bad legislation on same-sex adoption, cloning and the destruction of human embryos, and surrogacy, and there will be some in the new parliament who will take a similar view to the Greens on the issues discussed in this statement.

We need to ask candidates where they stand on these issues and talk to our families, friends and workmates to ensure that those elected on 26 March are truly concerned for the rights of every person in this State, rich or poor, young or old, the dying or the unborn.

The Greens website:
<http://nsw.greens.org.au/>

The websites for other NSW parties are as follows:

Australian Labor Party
<http://www.nswalp.com/>

Liberal Party
<http://www.nsw.liberal.org.au/>

National Party
<http://nsw.nationals.org.au/>

Cardinal George Pell
Archbishop of Sydney

Bishop Terry Brady
Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney

Bishop Anthony Fisher OP
Bishop of Parramatta

Bishop Gerard Hanna
Bishop of Wagga Wagga

Bishop Peter Ingham
Bishop of Wollongong

Bishop Geoffrey Jarrett
Bishop of Lismore

Bishop Michael Malone
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle

Bishop Kevin Manning
Administrator of Wilcannia-Forbes

Bishop Luc Matthys
Bishop of Armidale

Bishop Julian Porteous
Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney