

Redress for abuse victims will stay in the bottom drawer this election

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With less than four weeks until polling day the heavy slumber of the electorate is showing signs of lifting.

Opinion polls continue to signal a close result. Nothing new there really. The polls always tighten as election dates close in.

Hip pocket issues begin to surface and politicians expend enormous emotional energy attempting to convince us that they are engaged, down to earth and responsive. Again, nothing new there.

And that's the point. Disengagement is the problem. People stop listening because they are not listened to. The current craft of narrative manipulation that besets political strategists has become self-defeating. Political parties have sought to tell the community what it needs and when it needs it.

Focus group polling is now the basis of political messaging. Engaging local community concerns has been relegated to a 'West Wing' type robo call data file! No wonder ordinary voters figure that they will think about their ballot box duty when they have to and not much before that!

The tragedy is that the deeper and bigger issues, particularly of justice and the restoration of fairness, simply don't play in this type of election. All the strategies are pitched at individualism, not community responsibility. Notions of personal sacrifice for a greater good are hard to even get on the agenda, let alone sell.

The classic case in point is the concept of national redress for victims of child abuse. I am convinced that this is instinctively popular with most Australians. It resonates with our sense of fair play. It is totally consistent with our desire to help the underdog. In other words it is part of the DNA of our national ethos. And yet where is the political momentum to deliver it?

Justice McClellan deliberately fast tracked his Commission's recommendations on redress so that governments could act. There is no need to wait for any more detailed considerations from the Commission.

Yet since September last year the Commonwealth Government has been at best confused about what to do and at worst, deliberately in go slow mode! Their attempts to develop a system of redress, even shape a decent discussion seem limp and half-hearted. Feigned rhetoric about the needs of victims falls flat. Little wonder people lose faith in the system.

Along with many others I would be astounded if the issue of national redress for victims gets any decent coverage in this next month. It is almost as if the issue is an inconvenience.

Sadly, this is a typical experience for people who have lived a life where they have struggled to be believed, struggled further to be treated justly and struggle still, to be recognised and appropriately compensated.

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