

## Richard Denniss is Dead Right

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**Date :** May 5, 2019

In the interests of affirming that all Men are equal in death the names of the Roll of Honour in the Australian War Memorial are in equal font size. Now they are dwarfed by the names of sponsors such as AGL, Santos and East Australian Pipelines while Origin Energy keeps the Eternal Flame alight. Anyone notice anything about this line-up? If this national monument is so important in reminding us of those countless people killed in war, why does it need sponsorship? Will ceremonies commemorating the fallen be dependent on sponsorships on the 25th April? The fossil fuel industries are not the only ones in the sponsorship stakes; so too are BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin, Thales and any other weapons manufacturer that has some spare change in their pocket. Soon one of these industries will have naming rights for their contribution of about 2% of the total cost of upkeep which is what is asked of those of Etihad, Marval, Westpac, MacDonalds and others who have naming rights over our sports stadiums, emergency helicopters and health services.

It was a coincidence that I was reading ***Richard Denniss's Dead Right: How Neoliberalism Ate Itself and What Comes Next***, Black Inc. (2019) on ANZAC Day when I came across the above information. For those Australians about to vote, this book is an invaluable insight into the political awe of Neoliberalism and its impact on government and economic policy. I have no background in economics and anything about money management results in a tight glazing of the eyes, but I do know that what we have been experiencing over the last thirty years is not good economic policy for those of us without a stash of wealth in property and investments. It was therefore surprising to me that I could not put the book down.

Denniss unpacks the myths that our politicians spread in order to reduce services in health, education and welfare. In creating the myths they have divided the nation and created a climate of fear resulting in people looking to their own self-interests regardless of the impact of those interests on others. He points out that Australians have become wound up in a web of fear and anxiety in case they lose their jobs. They work unpaid overtime and are fearful of asking for commensurate wages. To do so would mean they would join the demonised queue of the under- and un- employed. He drives a hole through Government solutions in the name of efficiency which has led to the privatisation of various services resulting in increased costs to the consumer and reduced efficiency (often requiring governments coming to the rescue). These results undermine the argument of greater efficiency.

It is the shape of our economy, not its health that determines our well-being, Denniss argues. Is subsidising Adani the best way of creating economic activity if it undermines other economic activities such as agriculture, the development of alternative energy sources and tourism? How is poisoning the artesian water and degrading land helpful in the long run? But then BP claimed in 2016 that an oil spill in the Great Australian Bight where they were drilling could be good for the economy because of the jobs it would create. That argument encapsulates the whole faulty conversation about "growing the economy".

The health of the economy in the prevalent political speak is far more important the health of people or the environment on which we depend. Denniss argues that we need to stop focussing on any one policy and have the courage to broaden the conversation to equality, equity, values (beyond the polemic of Christian values espoused by those whose behaviours seem very unchristian), compassion, and truth. What sort of society do we want to live in? How do we wish to be judged?

Denniss argues that Neoliberal politics and the debates and conversations that emerge from them have undermined democracy by convincing us that we have no power to explore alternatives to market forces and deregulation. He asserts that we do have the power and we need to explore the imaginative

alternatives.

Australia is not alone in the big Neoliberalism con. Trump rose on its back carefully orchestrating the divisions it created. It is also seen in the Brexit mess. We need to interrogate our politician more stringently. We need to come together, show strength and call for greater transparency, more honesty and vote for policies that promote the well-being of the environment and us. We need to support the striking school students, Operation Libero and Extinction Rebellion. We are not the economy and the economy is not us. We can shape the economy for our benefit, which of course includes the environment. We are nothing if our environment cannot support us. Not even the wealthy and Neoliberals will survive a degraded environment.

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