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13<sup>th</sup> September, 2012.

The Senate Select Committee on Electricity Prices,  
P.O. Box 6100,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra, A.C.T., 2600



Dear Senators,

Please pardon my late submission, but news of your valuable inquiry only came to my attention via a radio programme last night. As a household user of electricity, my submission is simply one more objection to the extortionate rate of price increases suffered by consumers. Below, I touch on what I consider to be some of the issues involved in the problem.

Firstly, the Electricity companies themselves are acting irresponsibly toward consumers by heaping on us the costs of their alleged "Infrastructure costs", when the companies should have been responsibly budgetting to set aside, out of our past bills (the years when prices had "stayed relatively stable" for a long time), earmarked monies towards the inevitable depreciation of infrastructure which they fully knew would be building up with the passage of years. Any just regulator/ombudsman, acting to protect consumers from the predations of Big Business, would have forced these corporations and their shareholders to bear the financial loss of their own past fiscal irresponsibility. Some of us don't agree with privatization, in principle, firstly because a private supplier has a conflict of interest, unable to simultaneously enrich its shareholders whilst still providing cheap service; and secondly, because, as proved in recent decades of parliaments, we can't trust governments to vigorously protect us from corporate exploitation. The present electricity injustices only reinforce these two objections to the cult of privatization. From where I stand, I can see no real difference between Labour and Liberal on economics, except that Labour spends the nation into astronomical debt, and Liberal sells off the People's own assets to predatory private enterprise which then greedily profiteers out of our need for basic services. Both alleged "sides" of politics have long ago sold out their souls

to Big Business and abandoned the traditional Family unit and its time-honoured moral values. We wonder the money-hungry Electricity Corporations know that they will get away with fleecing the Australian consumers.

Secondly, there is the oft-overlooked fact that the consumer-base of the electricity grid (and therefore the electricity companies' fat profits) is SHRINKING continually as more and more people flee the system and go solar. The only consumers left in the billing-sector are the most vulnerable poor, who, like me, are too poor to install solar power and who can least afford to be fattening the shareholders of the power companies! I have been forced to move 32 times in my adult life, because, through no fault of mine, I am permanently homeless. Dubbo rents are extortionately high, and by the time I've paid rent, electricity and maintenance costs on my very old car, I haven't enough money left to buy my diabetic medicines, food and health treatments. I am dumped on the Dôle (from Latin, 'dolor', "pain/affliction") because I am "over-qualified" and none of the 12 Classical Languages I'm trained to teach is wanted in the schools out here, thanks to government policies. At 62, my "employable" life is permanently shattered by the chronic exhaustion that has followed upon the death of my wife whom I struggled to nurse day and night at home until she died in my arms; yet Centrelink, that has shamefully bullied me for nine years, is too "sexist" to award me a widows Pension (rather than the humiliating Dôle). I explain all that simply because the way some arrogant politicians speak, you'd think all the "convicts" on the Dôle were bludgers. There is such a thing as honourable poverty; and in my case, it is absolutely traumatic to receive an electricity bill, when budgeting is a fiscal impossibility.

Thirdly, the (Rudd) government is to be condemned for its cynical "Solar Rebate" and "Insulation Batts" schemes, because it was only the rich who could benefit from them. At the time, I was forced to rent a house that took 80% of my weekly \$60. It was all-electric and uninsulated; and being only 8 stone, I shivered all winter because I couldn't afford to plug in the electric heater. The homeowners all around me merrily had the batts and the solar panels installed; but my mean landlords refused to allow me to have either. As I say, only those rich enough not to have to rent were able to make use of Rudd's cynical "help". Well did the Liberals warn, back in '07: "No Ruddy Way!" ...

So, as I said, those who can least afford to fatten the Electricity companies' shareholders, are the ones left on the grid to subsidize dwindling company profits by paying ever-increasing bills. For those like me, who are not allowed to install solar, etc., in rented homes, I believe the least a just government should do is pay them a subsidy toward each powerbill.

Fourthly, many of us find it insulting to be lectured about being "more economical" about power, when we're already living like pigs in order to do without appliances. The flat I now rent, I've been paying A.G.L. an average of \$150 bill each quarter, which many would call enviably-modest; but in my chronic financial ruin it is more than I can afford. Few Australians would tolerate the self-imposed discipline whereby I achieve that figure: no freezer, no TV, no computer, no washing machine, no lights, no stove/oven, and no hot showers (I've turned the elect. hot water unit off permanently - very inconvenient!). All my cooking, summer as well as winter, is done on my wood stove (very economical) which gives the whole flat warmth in winter. Prior to coming here, I used to cry myself to sleep with cold, every winter, and envy my wife for at least being out of this most selfish and God-forsaken nation on earth. So yes, I do "economize" drastically,

in order to keep my bill to \$150; but how many people are prepared to put up with such humiliating deprivation? Not many, I would say. The only power appliance I still use is my fridge. The other half of the \$150 bill is AGL's "standing fees"; so they're laughing all the way to the bank.

Lastly, I remind you of the real issue, which no government wants to face: every year, 100s of 1000s more once-independent Australians, are now sliding into poverty and ruin and homelessness. One doesn't need a Royal Commission in order to observe the overt causal contribution of nation-wide poverty to such tragedies as marriage breakups, domestic violence, crime, burglary, immorality, drugs, alcoholism, suicide and other murders. In all these ways, poverty is costing this nation not only economic but social ruin; and we are all fed up with the many decades of treacherous government agendas that tear apart the social and moral fabric of this nation, whilst leaving us exposed to financial ruin at the hands of inadequately-regulated predatory "market forces". So serious as the present electricity price-hoarding is, do not let it be used as a smokescreen to deflect from the real underlying issue it highlights: national poverty. The electricity price-crisis only magnifies and highlights the poverty problem into sharper conflict. If we were all wealthy enough to pay it, it would be irrelevant how dear the bills were.

I fear for our nation, as I watch it, soul by soul, being ground into third-world poverty, and in its ruin, being driven to desperation. I see the 1930s rearing themselves before us. I know my European History very deeply; I only hope and pray you know it too, and use your power to lead our people back to its spiritual roots, while there is still (a little) time.

The treacherous electricity extortion is only the tip of a much bigger "iceberg". May you be given the fearless courage necessary to execute the task of national vigilance, for which you are elected.

With my sincere respect  
under our Crown,

Mark de Hattersley