

London newspapers full of dismal echoes of Brisbane

*TJ Ryan Foundation Executive Director Roger Scott reports from London on uncanny similarities between Queensland and the UK's political spin and drive to the bottom – with Thomas Picketty's new book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* one of the few bright lights on the horizon.*

Less than a week ago we arrived in London to beautiful spring weather and an ugly press. Across the political spectrum, there were depressing echoes of all the issues currently besetting Queensland.

On its front page, Sunday's *Observer* (April 13) reported on pressure groups working against the alternative energy suppliers. These pressure groups had been part of the deal leading to a coalition.

"Cameron's party is planning to block any further inshore wind farm construction in the UK, partly in response to the rise of Ukip."

The political party Ukip mainly campaigns against the European Common Market and for expanded restrictions on migration.

Wind farms are the only feasible green energy in sun-deprived Britain. They were embraced enthusiastically by Cameron who promised "the greenest government ever" but then appointed a prominent climate-change sceptic as environment minister.

The other lead item in Sunday's *Observer* was headlined "Death risks mount on building sites".

A former government adviser told the construction industry it was sitting on a ticking time bomb with inexperienced workers being recruited at a time when safety standards are being run down and unions excluded from work sites in the name of 'cutting red tape'.

A few pages further in, there was a report from an education correspondent about "heads exploiting their powers on teachers pay" about National Health Service patients missing out on life-saving robot surgery because of budget restrictions imposed by local health boards, and about crime statistics being fiddled by senior police officers.

Both editorials dealt with parliamentarians. The first headed "equality for women isn't an optional extra" following a report and feature article on women in politics. The second was about the prosecution of a former deputy speaker ultimately cleared of rape and other sexual assault charges.

Columnists report a million people depend on hand-outs from food banks while property booms and housing become unaffordable.

The theoretical under-pinning for this is provided by Thomas Picketty's new book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Harvard University Press). To summarise: "Capitalism simply isn't working and here are the reasons why".

Capital in the Twenty-First Century was prominent in discussions in the London dailies this week, particularly the *Guardian* and the *Independent*. Columnists predict that Picketty's significance for public policy makers may rival that of Nobel prize-winner, economist Milton Friedman.

The *Independent* on Monday April 14 continued the theme of growing social inequality by reporting the Deputy PM had angered his own party (the Liberal Democrats serving as minor party in the coalition) by downgrading his promise to tax 'Mansions' (houses worth more than two million pounds).

There was also an echo of Australia's Royal Commission into Labor's home insulation scheme. In the UK, the coalition is pressing to speed up the long-running inquiry into the Iraq war that is likely to blacken the image of then Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, in the hope its report is published before next year's election.

Relative wages have plummeted with the general rate of unemployment. By contrast, there is a long-running saga of politicians exploiting their loosely-defined entitlements in politically unacceptable ways which make a Penfolds wine bottle look like small beer.

And the historic visit of the Queen to the Irish Republic went off very quietly so as not to disturb the protestant unionists with century-old folk memories. Naturally overshadowed in all the papers by a small baby at the other end of the earth.