



# Let's help our own working poor



## Kate Ellis

It is sometimes strange the places where we find inspiration. It would have been easy to grow despondent after sitting through the past week in Federal Parliament.

Last week, the Howard Government sold out the wishes of the Australian public by passing legislation to sell Telstra.

The Liberals used parliamentary procedure to gag the debate, denying 21 Labor members, three independents and myself, who were listed to speak on the issue, the right to speak out and represent the views of those who have elected us.

Despite these facts, there is more than enough bitterness and negativity in our political scene as it stands. I would instead like to focus on a positive of this week – a positive which I am reminded of each time I catch sight of the white band which is adorning my wrist.

Last Saturday, September 10, was global White Band Day, a day when millions of people all over the world wore white wristbands to show their support for the Make Poverty History campaign.

This campaign is a world-wide campaign which is being organised by community organisations, churches and non-government organisations to encourage world leaders to prioritise eradicating world poverty.

Make Poverty History

dominated headlines earlier this year when a series of concerts were held, commemorating the Live Aid concerts 20 years before and calling on world leaders to get serious about global poverty.

Last week, the campaign was focused on influencing the world leaders gathered at the UN Summit in New York to get serious about achieving the Millennium Development Goals set in 2000.

Our own Prime Minister announced at the summit that Australia was set to double our aid to developing countries over the next five years. But the world must do more.

With an estimated 2.5 billion people struggling to survive on less than \$1.30 a day there is no question we must urgently tackle global poverty.

We have a moral obligation to act with greater urgency through well directed aid, debt cancellation and trade to alleviate much of this unnecessary suffering. We must all ensure that our Government fulfils its responsibilities towards the Millennium Development Goals.

We would be wrong, however, to think this was just an issue about Third World nations and that we did not have to address poverty closer to home.

The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) has esti-

mated that 9.3 per cent of all Australians are living in poverty.

This is a domestic issue which we must put firmly on our national agenda and ensure that we all work to resolve.

The fact that so many people are living in poverty at a time of great national prosperity is a disgrace. After nine long years the Howard Government chooses to pursue its own ideological obsessions rather than address poverty in Australia.

The Government's extreme proposed welfare changes will leave hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable Australians worse off.

A report released this week shows that a disabled person may be up to \$122 a week worse off under these changes.

The unfair attacks on workers' rights in the Liberals' industrial relations reforms further jeopardise Australian workers' wages and conditions.

John Howard refuses to guarantee that no Australian will be worse off. I fear that we may create a new generation of working poor.

The most important thing we can learn from the Make Poverty History campaign is the power of people standing together for a common cause.

Make Poverty History is a

grassroots campaign which has made world leaders sit up and take note.

Millions of people from all over the world have put up their hands and ensured that the issue of poverty is now clearly on the international agenda.

We have pressing issues of poverty in Australia which we must now demand action on. There is much talk about the Howard Government controlling both houses of Parliament and now being armed with total power to implement its extreme agenda.

We must never underestimate the power held by the Australian community to hold the Government to account.

We may not yet have the publicity, nor the celebrities or the pop songs, but united the Australian people can oppose all of these measures and ensure that it is the community who sets the national agenda.

A white wrist band may be an odd source of inspiration but what it represents should always be maintained. We must stand together and fight poverty – both here and abroad.

**Kate Ellis is the Labor member for the federal seat of Adelaide.**