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INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the last Eureka Digest on multiculturalism, *From Integration to Segregation*, when discussing increasing government funding for physical social spaces that act as places for cross-cultural interaction of civic integration, I alluded to a "particularly radical proposal towards this end" that covers more issues than just that without explicitly stating it, as I think making the case for this requires an article of its own.

The cost of living is one of the biggest issues in Australian politics right now, and a big part of that is grocery prices. Proposed solutions on this front depend on where on the political spectrum you look, ranging from deregulation and cutting immigration on the right-wing, to legislatively barring and fining supermarket "price gouging", breaking up Coles and Woolworths, and implementing price controls on the left-wing.

One potential solution that isn't brought up by either side, however – it's pretty obvious why the right doesn't go anywhere near this – is socialisation; bringing the supermarket duopoly, both Coles and Woolworths, under public ownership. In this Eureka Digest, I'll show the insufficiency of other alternative proposals, make the case for socialising the supermarkets, address potential criticisms, and lay out an idea of how this could be implemented in practice. I'll then end by circling back to the connection between socialising the supermarkets and physical social spaces for civic integration.

WHY THE ALTERNATIVES ARE INSUFFICIENT

So, to start off here, what are the alternative proposed solutions to supermarket price gouging and unfair payment to Australian farmers? After all, if those hold up, why do we need to take the radical step of bringing them under public ownership?

PRICE GOUGING LEGISLATION (LABOR)

First, we come to present-day government action. The Albanese government has passed legislation making excessive price gouging illegal for supermarkets, enforced through the ACCC based on independent price evaluations based on a "reasonable margin" after supply chain costs. This is all well and good in theory, but has some critical issues, most of all the fact that enforcement is entirely at the discretion of ACCC bureaucrats, and lacks a hard cap on how much constitutes a "reasonable margin". It feels like one of those measures that exists for public appeasement but doesn't really accomplish all that much in practice.

DIVESTITURE/BREAKUP POWERS (GREENS + COALITION)

Here we have the other mainstream policy proposal proposed by the Greens and (surprisingly) supported by the Coalition as a 'last resort' measure – **divestiture powers**, or in other words, giving the ACCC powers to force Coles and Woolworths to sell stores as punishment for anti-competitive behaviour, supposedly to increase competition in the market. This proposal, again, sounds all well and good in theory, even superior to Labor's price gouging legislation, but there are major flaws, albeit which require just a little bit more to unpack.

Competition within a capitalist system must, by its logic as competitions do, produce winners and losers. The result of this over time is consolidation and, eventually, monopoly. However, an effect that emerges in systems with anti-monopoly laws is that rather than simply consolidating towards monopoly, is that a group of big players, whether that be two, three, four, or more companies operating within the same sector or adjacent sectors, will form a cartel, where competition is put aside in favour of coexistence in order to crush smaller competition. This is what the supermarket duopoly is: two big companies – Coles and Woolworths – setting their prices at roughly the same level, and working together to undermine smaller players.

One significant factor which plays into the formation of cartels is the emergence of an overlap in the composition of shareholders. This is quite the case with the supermarket duopoly. Large institutional investors – State Street, Vanguard, the major super funds – all own large stakes in both supermarket giants. This is to say that a significant part of the profits (via dividends) from both companies end up ultimately going to the exact same beneficiaries.

And herein rests the problem with settling purely on forced divestiture as a means of diluting the power of the duopoly. For an example, let’s say that both Coles and Woolworths are forced to sell a hundred stores to a new company, if that company is also listed publicly on the ASX, those same investors will just buy up shares in the new company. And suddenly, you haven’t actually broken the power of the cartel – you’ve just replaced two companies with three that still operate within the same cartel logic. You have the illusion of more competition, but the ownership structure, and therefore the practical logic of the cartel, remains.

Now, for some nuance here, let's imagine a scenario where divested stores are instead bought up by the growing third major player in the supermarket space – Aldi. Unlike the duopoly, Aldi is not publicly traded, but rather a private company owned solely by the German Albrecht family. The result of this is that Aldi can run leaner margins because it lacks the shareholder pressure for higher dividends that the duopoly has. In this case, you have managed to truly break the duopoly by strengthening a rival that lacks the same ownership structure.

So for those who support divestiture powers and might find my argument here to be too radical for your liking, divestiture could work on the cost of living front if the new competition is not publicly traded, though we then face the question of whether that is a realistic outcome or one that can last.

PRICE CONTROLS (LEFT OF THE GREENS)

The most straightforward and seemingly simple approach comes from some voices to the left of the Greens – **price controls**. The government sets the price of essential goods and enforces that price in some way, whether that be through subsidies or litigation. This seems pretty simple on the surface. However, price controls have their own issues. The first is the bureaucracy needed for setting prices and for enforcement. The second is that price controls have a demonstrated effect creating market distortions which lead to the emergence of black markets, supply and quality reductions, especially when controls lead to losses.

AGRICULTURE DEREGULATION (ONE NATION)

Now we come to the right-wing proposals, namely those from One Nation. The first is deregulating the agriculture sector to reduce production costs, anticipating that lower production costs means reduced prices for consumers. This often goes hand-in-hand with climate denial and anti-net zero positions, but I'll ignore that here since it's not particularly relevant.

The issue here is that the gap between what farmers receive for their produce and what consumers pay at the checkout is largely unrelated to production costs, but is overwhelmingly captured at the level of retail and logistics – in other words, by the duopoly's own internal operations. Farmers are already paid unfairly for their produce by Coles and Woolworths. This is really just missing the point entirely and using the cost of living as an excuse to deregulate agriculture without doing anything about the actors that are actually charging you high prices at the checkout to pad the pockets of institutional shareholders. It's a rather ill-informed nothingburger. Let's also not forget the potential health risks that could result from deregulation (the recent outbreak of explosive diarrhoea in the US as a result of deregulation comes to mind).

One thing I'll give One Nation credit for, however, is their suggestion of increasing domestic production of fertiliser. This I'm not opposed to, depending on execution and ownership structure.

CUTTING IMMIGRATION (RIGHT-WING)

Of course, we can't mention right-wing proposals without bringing up the one thing routinely treated as a silver bullet for seemingly every problem – cutting immigration. It's argued that cutting immigration will reduce labour costs for agricultural production, and therefore food prices.

However, we have a contradiction here. The general right-wing argument against high immigration to appeal to workers – which, granted, holds up to scrutiny, even Karl Marx of all people noticed this – is that high immigration drives wage suppression by creating more competition in the labour market, often from migrant workers who don't have the same protections as citizen workers. Yet here we have an argument that cutting immigration will somehow lower labour costs. Um… I don't think that's how that works.

If you cut immigration, labour costs will actually go up the more you do it – or the more you pursue more hawkish actions like mass deportations. Also, the workforce within the agricultural sector is overwhelmingly migrant labour, meaning you'd end up with labour shortages and the need to raise wages to draw in citizen workers, hence increasing labour costs. Not saying we shouldn't cut immigration – but we should at least be honest about what that means and think about mitigation measures rather than ill-informed pandering without understanding.

And again, we're ignoring that the gap between what farmers receive and what consumers pay is overwhelmingly captured at the level of retail and logistics, not the agriculture sector. So here, again, we have a rather ill-informed nothingburger.

So those are the major proposals. Now, let's get to why socialising the duopoly is a superior option.

COST OF LIVING: THE CASE FOR CONSUMERS

I'll start with what is the most immediate and straightforward issue to address – the cost of living. This is the one issue which just about every Australian family deals with, and can therefore make the best case of all.

At present, families are paying, on average, around or over $200 a week on groceries, with the amount of course being higher depending on the number of kids within a family and the specific area, with averages differing between states and likely within states as well. This is corroborated by multiple sites including Canstar Blue, Compare the Market, and Finder. Prices have been cited by Greens Senator Larissa Waters as having risen approximately 24% over the past five years. In the same period of time, nominal wages have only increased around 17%, and when factoring in inflation across the broader economy, real wages have shrunk. I anticipate this reality will only get worse once the effects of the ongoing Iran war inevitably catch up on grocery prices as it has with fuel prices.

In that same period again, the duopoly have made an estimated combined total net profit (after operating costs and tax) of approximately **\$2.5-2.8 billion** annually, totalling a whopping **\$12-14 billion** over five years. Granted, these figures have been extrapolated based on verified annual profit figures from the two companies, and not all of these annual profit figures are available, so there is room for a margin of error.

But regardless, the numbers are damning. While your real wages go down, the duopoly's shareholders raised prices and made over \$10 billion in profit. Now, let's do some quick math and imagine that rather than this value being captured by shareholders, the profit motive is removed and the value is passed directly to you – the consumer – in the form of lower prices. We'll use both the lower \$12 billion figure (\$2.4 billion annually) and the higher \$14 billion figure (\$2.8 billion annually), and for the sake of argument we'll also go lower to a flat \$10 billion (\$2 billion annually), just to illustrate the point. We'll work with the approximate number of households from the ABS at **10 million** households, which makes the math rather simple.

- Eliminating $2 billion in annual profit (the safe figure) would save each household around $200 annually, netting around a 1.9% saving on a weekly grocery shop, or about $3.85 a week.
- Eliminating $2.4 billion in annual profit (the lower figure) would save each household around $240 annually, netting around a 2.3% saving on a weekly grocery shop, or about $4.62 a week.
- Eliminating $2.8 billion in annual profit (the higher figure) would save each household around $280 annually, netting around a 2.7% saving on a weekly grocery shop, or about $5.38 a week.

Now, these figures are fairly modest, around a 2-3% price reduction, only around a $4-5 saving per week. That's not nothing, but it's certainly not enough on its own. But this would be the immediate structural effect of socialising the duopoly and bringing them under public ownership, as public ownership removes the profit motive, meaning all the money currently shaved off by shareholders would now go directly to you by simply selling products at cost rather than shaving off a profit.

There are some other potential structural advantages of public ownership which would further trim the cost. The first is simplified logistics. Currently, Coles and Woolworths each operate their own separate logistics infrastructure – separate distribution centres often existing in the same areas, separate transport fleets running on the same routes to the same areas, separate warehouses, separate delivery networks, etc. With both companies under public ownership, these logistics networks could simply be unified and streamlined into one network serving every public supermarket across the country, saving potentially $2-2.5 billion more, savings which can be passed to the consumer. We'll come back to this point specifically once we get to the case for small businesses.

The second advantage relates to the technology stack used by the duopoly. Point-of-sale (POS) systems licensed by the supermarkets to process card payments are often tied to merchant banking services from the Big Four Banks, often charging anywhere from 0.5-1.5% in merchant fees per transaction, which in an economy increasingly dominated by card transactions, builds up fast. I'll briefly state here that I also propose socialising the Big Four Banks, though the case for that is made most effectively at this stage in the first Eureka Paper, *Modern Monetary Theory: A New Australia-First Economics*, which is out now. But if the banks are socialised, then the POS systems can be made essentially free, with no more merchant fees, saving between $500 million and over $1 billion more, which again, can be passed to the consumer.

Also, with publicly owned supermarkets, we can virtually eliminate the need for marketing and advertising, another $500-800 million saving. And tech licensing outside of POS systems could also be replaced with open-source alternatives depending on safety, security, and so on.

With all this, we're starting to bump the potential savings on the part of a household to 6-8.5% of a weekly grocery bill, translating to over $10 a week in savings. Still modest, but we're getting somewhere. But keep reading, because there's more to consider.

A FAIR PRICE: THE CASE FOR FARMERS

The next case to make is to farmers. There is one example here which can be used to illustrate the reality faced by Australian farmers and show why One Nation's proposal of deregulating agriculture is bound to be completely ineffective on reducing the prices paid by consumers at the checkout: the farm-gate price paid by the supermarkets to farmers for lamb dropped from ~$10/kg to ~$4/kg, a 60% cut in the price paid to farmers. Did the consumer price of lamb paid to the supermarkets go down 60% in proportion? No, of course not – the price of lamb at the supermarket remained stable. So while the price stayed the same for consumers, farmers lost 60% of their share of the value. Where did the difference go? Not to you – to corporate shareholders.

ACCC investigations and Senate inquiries have consistently found evidence of the duopoly taking advantage of market shifts on the agricultural output end to secure higher profits by keeping prices the same, including with beef, vegetables, and more. Dairy farmers are paid $1 per litre for milk, and then consumers pay $3.50 at the checkout; beef farm-gate prices dropped 60-80% with no change at the checkout; vegetable prices in some regions dropped 70% before leaving the farm, again, with very little change in price at the checkout.

The Menzies Centre for Health Governance has described farmers as "price takers, not price makers", since the supermarket giants use their market leverage of dominating two-thirds of the market. The supermarkets also dictate arbitrary cosmetic standards to farmers, leading to food losses before they even leave the gate of up to 20% of produce, and give farmers extended credit periods of 30-90 days for payment, pressuring cash flows for farmers and then charging them early payment fees just to pour salt on the wound. Some farmers have even reported no real price increases in over a decade.

Remember that prices have risen 24% at the checkout while real wages have fallen? Our farmers – the backbone of our economy – are being strangled by the supermarkets too, and have no real leverage to demand better terms out of fear of losing their revenue outright.

This is where we come to the real gap between what the supermarkets pay farmers and what you pay at the checkout, which One Nation ignores completely – the gross margin, the markup between the farmers and the checkout before operating costs and taxes are subtracted to get to the net profit figure from the last section. The gross margin, between both supermarkets, is ~$27-28 billion annually.

So, how can socialising the supermarkets benefit Australian farmers? Firstly, the absurd cosmetic standards set by the supermarkets serve purely marketing ends, prioritising having straight carrots and uniformly red apples over just feeding people, at the expense of farmers who watch their hard-grown produce go to waste. These cosmetic standards can be eliminated in favour of a baseline of health standards which anyone can agree is necessary. With that, the 20% of produce that gets wasted at present can now go to consumers rather than being left to rot. After all, do you really care whether your carrots are straight, or do you care about just having carrots?

Public supermarkets can also offer farmers a surplus produce buyback guarantee, ensuring that all viable produce grown is purchased at a fair price, securing an income for farmers. The surplus beyond what can be sold at the supermarket could be used for food relief programs, community kitchens, or processed for long-term storage in a strategic national food reserve. With this, farmers get security, and communities get food security. Everybody wins.

Thirdly, and most fundamentally, prices can be set in consultation with farmers rather than imposed on them for the sake of a corporate profit margin. Rather than a duopoly strangling them to feed the pockets of shareholders, farmers get a seat at the table and can help determine prices based on actual production cost and a reasonable margin.

This would coincide with numerous other policies I propose, including incentives to restore agricultural cooperatives and shift towards regenerative forms of agriculture such as permaculture, though I won't elaborate on these here – they're better tackled elsewhere in the future.

And to keep prices down if needed, some of the operating costs – wages, logistics, etc. – could be subsidised using public financing rather than being passed to consumers. I'll get to why this is possible, along with addressing other possible objections, in a later section. But first, there's one more bloc left to make this case to.

LOGISTICS: THE CASE FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Now, if you're the owner of a small business – an independent local grocery store or local restaurant – alarm bells are probably going off in your mind by this point – "What happens to my business if public ownership can make groceries so cheap with no profit motive and possibly government subsidies? How can I possibly compete with that?" This is a valid concern, and rest assured, I have a case to make for small business owners who might feel this way about the notion of publicly owned supermarkets.

Mentioned above was the matter of logistics networks – of all the trucks, warehouses, distribution centres, and so on – which have always given an edge to the duopoly that isn't available to smaller local competitors. Local restaurants will often get deliveries (or even purchase themselves) from supermarkets, whether that be the duopoly, Aldi (in areas where they operate), IGA, or local grocers. But many of these smaller local grocery stores (and IGA) get their own deliveries of stock through third-party wholesalers and transport networks, the largest among the wholesalers being Metcash, and some of the major transport players including Linfox and Toll. Aldi operates its own centralised logistics layer which has been shown to prioritise simplicity, efficiency and automation to a degree which the duopoly lacks.

Currently, the logistics layer of Coles and Woolworths is duplicated, separated, and exclusive. This is of course to be expected – two separate companies with their own profit motive, and a desire to maintain their market dominance at the retail layer. Why would they risk sacrificing their dominance by allowing smaller competitors to access their logistics layer to save costs when that means lower prices they might not be able to compete with while feeding the pockets of shareholders?

This is where public ownership offers another transformative possibility – that the logistics networks of the two most powerful players in the market, when socialised, unified, simplified, and potentially expanded, could be made available to local grocers, restaurants, cafes, etc. – and crucially, without the profit motive that requires wholesalers like Metcash to shave cream off the top of their distribution network. The logistics and distribution layer of the duopoly could become a unified, publicly owned, and most importantly, publicly available, logistics network for entire sectors of the Australian economy, with wholesale, transport and delivery services available to small business customers at cost, without profit shaved off. Metcash could either be absorbed into the public logistics network or left to compete against a public alternative offering distribution at cost – a competition it would struggle to justify its margins in.

Local restaurants and cafes currently pay inflated prices for ingredients because their suppliers – the wholesalers, the transport companies – are all taking their cut along the way. A public logistics network delivering at cost means the local pub pays less for the tomatoes in its salad, the local bakery pays less for its flour, and the corner café pays less for its milk. These are all savings which can be passed to the consumer.

Now, as for the question of government subsidies lowering the cost of products at the checkout. There of course needs to be consideration given to whether smaller private competitors are able to compete with subsidised prices if that is something that is done. There is a simple answer here – if subsidies are applied at the logistics layer rather than at the retail layer, then those subsidies could also potentially be passed through to smaller players rather than solely to the public supermarkets. The matter of subsidies – if applied at all, which isn't strictly necessary except in particular circumstances – can also be negotiated directly with smaller players to ensure they're not being disadvantaged compared to the public supermarkets.

This is of course something to perhaps mull over and develop further in time, but for now, there's something else important to tackle before moving onto implementation and making the case for current employees of Coles and Woolworths – the inevitable objection.

"BUT SOVIET BREAD LINES!"

This is the big objection – the collective "memory" of state-owned supermarkets in 20th century socialist states like the Soviet Union, with shortages, empty shelves, and rationing.

Now, given the timing of this part's release – or the full article's release – if you've come to this point having read the Eureka Party's rural and agriculture policy suite, the notion of also socialising foreign and corporate big agribusiness is also probably weighing on your mind. So the best way to approach this question is to juxtapose my proposed approach with that of the Soviet Union, the cautionary tale of command economics. Which means it’s time for a brief history lesson.

In the October Revolution of 1917, the large landholdings of the feudal landlord class and the Russian Orthodox Church were confiscated by the new Bolshevik government under Vladimir Lenin with the **Decree on Land**, which redistributed all of the land to peasant households, leading to a partial recovery of agricultural production during the period of the New Economic Policy from 1921.

The later collectivisation of agriculture from 1928-1933 under Joseph Stalin’s first Five-Year Plan was a process which was imposed on peasant farmers at gunpoint, as they were rounded up and forced to work under party commissars on state-owned farms. Peasants resisted collectivisation by slaughtering their livestock. Grain quotas were imposed by central planners from Moscow regardless of local conditions. Add to this the pseudoscientific ideology of Lysenkoism that was backed by Stalin, and you have the conditions which produced the famines in the early Soviet Union.

Shortages and inefficiencies continued over the decades, however, due to bureaucratic central planners operating a top-down command economy with no price signals, no feedback, no incentives, and no accountability. This was the big mechanism that produced continuous problems until the Soviet system stagnated and eventually collapsed in 1991.

That’s the history. Now, let’s get to Australia today and my own proposal. Foreign entities own 13% of Australian agricultural land, though this foreign ownership is largely concentrated in just 45 businesses. I propose socialising this land, and either redistributing it free of charge to smallholders or keeping it under public ownership, depending on suitability.

It is the processing and export chokepoints of Australia’s food sector which are dominated by foreign and corporate agribusiness: JBS controls 30% of red meat processing, Cargill and ADM dominate wheat exports, and names like Simplot and McCain’s dominate vegetable processing. All of this would also be socialised.

And – most importantly – I’m not proposing forced collectivisation. At all. Big agribusiness would be socialised, but big agribusiness is already collectivised in essence – all that changes is ownership and management, which would be – spoiler for the implementation section – democratic by the workers themselves. The backbone of agricultural production – the family-owned farms that still produce 80-90% of agricultural output – would be offered incentives to voluntarily pool resources and land together into private farming cooperatives, which used to exist in Australia prior to the neoliberal turn and the removal of tariffs which protected them from foreign corporate competition – but this is strictly voluntary, and on the upside, can allow farmers to move up the supply chain and compete with public firms, capturing more of the value that is currently dominated by corporations.

And none of this would be centrally planned from Canberra. The first Eureka Paper does mention the framework of Fluid Fiscal Planning, though this isn’t central planning in the sense of setting quotas and directly controlling production and distribution – it’s just using fiscal tools for maintaining price stability and avoiding inflation. Publicly owned firms – including the supermarkets – are democratically managed by the workers and participate in the market, maintaining price signals, competition, and incentives for innovation and quality maintenance.

As for choice and variety, another objection likely to be raised – Aldi, IGA, the local grocer, and potential cooperatives would all continue to exist, and public firms on the production side would have the freedom and incentives to be creative and innovate on products without Canberra bureaucrats breathing down their necks.

With that necessary clarification out of the way, let's get to the implementation, where I'll address some other potential objections as we go through.

IMPLEMENTATION & THE CASE FOR EMPLOYEES

The first step to implementation is of course the government acquiring Coles and Woolworths in full. My proposal involves acquiring the companies at 110% of market cap, which should be sufficient to avoid a High Court challenge on Section 51(xxxi) of Australia's constitution, requiring "just terms" for acquisition. Superannuation funds, which own many shares in the duopoly, will be compensated above value, same for any other shareholders, foreign or domestic.

If done today, on paper, this will cost the government around $90 billion given the current combined market cap of the two companies totals around $81.2 billion. You're probably asking – "$90 billion?! Where are you getting the money for that?" And this is where Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) comes in. As I explain in the first Eureka Paper, *Modern Monetary Theory: A New Australia-First Economics* (which you can download today to learn more about MMT and the Eureka Party's Fiscal Policy suite), MMT tells us that a government which issues its own currency (in Australia's case, the Australian

Dollar) can never run out of money, and does not need to "find the money" via taxes or issuing bonds.

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The government can easily create the funds necessary to credit the accounts of shareholders. It's as simple as a balance sheet swap on the accounts of the Treasury – liquid cash for shares. No taxes or bonds needed. Then we come to the matter of inflation – "Won't this cause massive inflation?" The answer is **no**, and it's especially true in this case, since much of the compensation is not going to regular households – it's going to your super fund and to institutional investors like State Street and Vanguard. The compensation is unlikely to circulate rapidly into consumption and drive up prices – it'll either sit idle or be invested in shares or financial assets elsewhere in the economy. The other potential source of inflation is capital flight – for this I propose an immediate Capital Lockdown Bill before any state acquisitions, in order to temporarily prevent the compensated capital from leaving Australia and tanking the value of the AUD, slowly allowing the capital to leave as Australia's economy develops to absorb the effects.

After Coles and Woolworths have been brought into public hands, the next step is to begin unifying, streamlining, and expanding the logistics network, which can then be made available as a public utility for small businesses and other players at cost. By this point, the removal of the profit motive can already provide some of the immediate cost of living effects pointed to earlier, while consultation with farmers on fair pricing can also take place.

But infrastructure and logistics are only half the picture. The other half is the over 200,000 Australians employed by the duopoly. So this is where I come to current Coles and Woolworths employees, and the case for you.

A central part of the Eureka Party's policy platform as it pertains to labour is the creation of a Public Works Army (PWA), which serves two roles simultaneously – firstly, as a single-employer public sector model where all public sector employees become part of a fluid national labour force with easier interoccupational mobility and free vocational and higher education directly integrated; and secondly, as a federal job guarantee aimed at eliminating unemployment, casual and precarious work by guaranteeing a full-time job at a living wage for all who can and want to work, setting a floor for the Australian labour market. This goes hand-in-hand with pushing for a 32-hour (or 4-day) work week, as well as the implementation of per-site workplace democracy, meaning bureaucratic management is replaced with autonomous democratic management by the workers themselves.

All existing public sector employees at all three levels of government, including employees of socialised enterprises, would automatically become employees of the PWA.

For Coles and Woolworths employees, who are at present largely casualised, working irregular hours with unpredictable rosters and no income security, this means that once the companies are socialised, all employees would become members of the PWA, now earning a living wage for a reduced 4-day work week, with the ability to shift to other occupations within the public sector – whether that be to construction, manufacturing, healthcare, education, or something else – with training and upskilling covered entirely by the state, and with democratic management of your workplace.

There would be no layoffs, redundancies, or forced early retirements, and existing management and operational staff would remain, only now accountable to workers and the public, not to distant foreign and institutional shareholders.

The PWA and the Eureka Party's broader labour policy will be expanded upon alongside industrial policy in the second Eureka Paper, *Future Made in Australia Mk. II: The Path to the Working Man's Paradise*, coming in December.

A VISION OF SUPERMARKETS AS SOCIAL SPACES

Now it's time to circle back to the last Eureka Digest piece, *From Integration to Segregation*, and how socialising the supermarkets could tie to physical social spaces, not only for civic integration, but also more broadly for building connections and ending the atomisation and social alienation that has proliferated since the neoliberal turn. Here, I'm going to get a little more imaginative.

Woolworths has had a franchise agreement with Sushi Izu, Australia's largest sushi franchise, for some time now, with Sushi Izu pop-up bars in over 200 Woolworths supermarkets nationwide, using ingredients from the store to make sushi. I've personally been to a couple of these pop-ups in Townsville, the sushi is quite delicious – but you still ultimately take the sushi to the checkout just like anything else, scan, pay, and leave. We also have existing sections within Coles and Woolworths supermarkets – the deli and the bakery come to mind – where workers actively cook and make things to be put out on the shelf for consumers to purchase, checkout, and leave.

But what if you could eat inside, with chairs and tables and all? What if supermarkets also operated as restaurants and cafes, the fresh produce and products purchasable on the shelf being also used to make and cook cheap, fresh meals and drinks for customers to sit down and eat, whether alone, as a family, or in friend groups? Imagine high-school students finishing for the day and being able to go to their local supermarket with friends for a feed, or university students engaging in study groups with friends and fellow students. Workers – not just supermarket employees themselves, but others as well – on their days off going with their family or some coworkers, among whom may be migrant workers, for a lunch.

More, imagine that restaurants inside supermarkets, with expansive seating areas, actively held or hosted events like video game or trading card tournaments, larger social gatherings for students, young adults or even other groups like the elderly and disabled. Supermarkets, once just a bunch of aisles where you do your weekly shopping trip, grab what you need, checkout, and go home, become spaces of social integration and building real connections – new friendships, even perhaps deeper connections.

All this is possible – the building blocks are already there that could enable this kind of vision – so why isn't it done or even considered? The answer is simple and revealing: the duopoly don't consider it profitable or desirable. Their business is in retail, in selling stuff to you to cook at home, not in fostering connections between people.

All this can change with public ownership. Government could invest in transforming supermarkets to serve not only as places of retail, but as places where people can meet others, eat shared meals, hang out, participate in events, and build connections they might not otherwise. This is more than just civic integration for migrants – it could be the de-atomising social infrastructure of an entire generation of Australians. All we need now is the courage to act, to make it a reality.

CONCLUSION

I hope that if you've gotten to the end of this Eureka Digest, you can now walk away seeing the proposal of socialising the supermarkets not as something inherently negative, but as something which is not as radical as it sounds on the surface, but rather a commonsense step towards solving many problems faced by Australians of many different walks of life – and maybe creating new possibilities in the process.

Groceries don't need to be expensive; farmers can get a fair price; small businesses can get a leg up; employees can be freed from precarity and given a fair go; and supermarkets don't have to be places we simply pass through on the way home – they could be places we stay and socialise.

Don't forget that from today, you can go to eurekaparty.au to check out the Eureka Party's full policy platform as well as download the first Eureka Paper to read now and learn more about Modern Monetary Theory and details on the execution of our fiscal policy suite.

I'll see you in the next Eureka Digest.

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