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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

Remember Gough Whitlam's famous words? Well, today even more than then we need to **maintain our rage**, because if we are not enraged by what is happening to our wonderful country, then we do not deserve to live here. A Christian theologian, Augustine of Hippo said, 'Hope has two daughters - their names are anger and courage. Anger at the way things are and courage to see that they do not remain the same'. Anger and courage are the children of our campaign.

Today, the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church extends a challenge to every Beacon reader to join us in a concerted campaign to raise the issue of *globalisation*, which is the imperialist rape of our country's resources, services and future.

of its owners, attempts to create public opinion that serves only a small group of international imperialist capitalists. Some years ago an American editor summed it up thus: 'It is a pity that so many newspapers persist in representing a class interest, a money interest instead of public interest, that they oppose and misrepresent the working man, ignore the rights of the underprivileged to justice and equal opportunity, that they colour and distort news, suppress and invent news in favour of those they are aligned with politically'. The media encourages us to suspect our neighbours, spy on each other, 'dob' someone in, hate those who look different, reject anyone foreign, support unjust wars, put patriotism before truth, disregard corruption, and above all 'trust' our elected representatives. It isn't an exaggeration to suggest that the changes that are occurring happened

EDITORIAL

Maintain your Rage

We have made a commitment in 2007 to expose the impact globalisation is having on every aspect of every Australian's life. We will do all we can to exert our own form of public opinion - the truth. We will work with all others: churches, community groups, unions, political parties and individuals who share our concerns. We will do this by utilising our energies and our resources and developing a campaign to establish a charter for a better society. We know that globalisation is a vicious attack on everybody's political, economic, social and cultural life. Globalisation/imperialism impact on **your** job, **your** standard of living, **your** housing, **your** education, **your** right to a peaceful life, **your** right to healthcare, **your** right to have our resources publicly owned and not a commodity for foreign exploitation, **your** opportunity to live in peace. Like water on a stone, little by little all these rights are being carefully and deliberately eroded. It is something that affects every single one of us.

Today, indeed every day, changes occur which inexorably remove our democratic rights, our long-held values, our commitment to a decent society. Each day, a privately owned media, at the behest

before in the 1930s in Germany. It was ignored then, we cannot afford to ignore it today.

We said it two years ago and we say it again as Henry Lawson did in 1891:

*So we must fly a rebel flag as
others did before us*

*And we must sing a rebel song and
join in rebel chorus*

*We'll make the tyrants feel the
sting, of those that they would
throttle,*

*They needn't say the fault is ours
if blood should stain the wattle.*

To all our Beacon readers we say make a commitment and join us in the struggle to build a genuinely free society. ■

How God is Killing Public Education: Indoctrination versus Education

Our current education situation is, quite frankly, unsustainable. As a society, we cannot afford to maintain two parallel education systems where kids can move from private school to public school at will. At the time of writing, one third of all secondary students attend private schools. These schools may be called private or even independent, but they are funded from the public purse. Some may receive as much as 90% of their income from taxpayers.

This extraordinarily generous funding system - unique in the world - has, predictably, led to an explosion in the number of private schools. Particularly since the Federal Government deregulated the establishment of new private schools in 1996.

Market Contracts

Until recently, the establishment and funding of schools took place over decades, characterised by growing numbers of students. The start of the 21st century, however, has seen a decline in the number of children of school age, so the market has begun to contract. We now have too many schools, too many duplicated facilities and too few students to attend them - all the ingredients for an unsustainable education system. And this will only get worse as we begin to lose an estimated 45-85,000 people of school age over the period 2003-20.

Indeed, in comparison with other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Australia under-spends on actually educating students, while over-spending on the infrastructure needed to support the illusion of choice. Indeed, the rest of the world now sees Australia as an example of a high performing, low equity system. Which means, in plain English, that some of our kids - the most privileged ones, by and large - perform very well, and some of them - the most underprivileged ones - very badly. We now have one of the largest gaps between the lowest and highest performing 15-year-olds in the OECD.

And why does no one seriously question this ludicrous state of affairs? Why is no one in any parliament, in any state in Australia, thumping the table about our class-dominated schools? The answer has very little to do with market forces, or healthy competition, neo-conservatism or even parental choice - and everything to do with God.

The first schools in New South Wales (NSW) were operated by church-affiliated groups and their main aim was to improve the moral condition of the underprivileged. Interestingly, foreshadowing the situation of private schools in the second millennium, the churches focused their educational endeavours in established areas and were less willing to start schools in new and smaller settlements. To meet the needs of children in rural areas, particularly those who could not afford private tuition or to attend boarding schools in the larger centres, the NSW government established 'national' schools in the mid-19th century. By the 1860s the denominational schools were beginning to struggle, once again foreshadowing events almost a hundred years later. At the time, funding for these schools was far more closely tied to curriculum, enrolments, inspections and school fees (fees were paid by students in all schools at that time, religious or 'national') than it is now. However, this tight linking of funding to compliance soon proved to be too much for the Catholic Church. Their chafing under the restrictions imposed by government saw two divergent movements emerge in the 1870s. The Church increasingly resisted state control, while pressure correspondingly increased for a free, compulsory, secular school system. The debate raged for a decade and ended in the heated withdrawal of Catholic children from state schools (a strategy that was to be repeated in the 1960s) and to the Public Instruction Act of 1880. This Act cut the Catholic schools loose from any state restrictions but also from any state aid. This separation between church and state (if I may put it that way) was to remain in place for the next 80 years.

Independence

By the end of our first century, therefore, the idea of public schooling for all children became established because churches either couldn't or wouldn't accept the obligation. The principle of very specific trade offs in exchange for public funding of church schools was initially accepted but eventually resisted, and the church schools broke away. A century later one fundamental of that original compromise has remained sacrosanct; that the state and its public schools alone shoulder the responsibility for compulsory education of all children. Church schools and other private schools do not and have never accepted such an obligation. What has changed is that church and private schools are back on the public payroll, this time without having to trade off any significant part of their 'independence'.

This has created schools that are public when it comes to the handing out of taxpayers money, but private when it comes to which ones of those taxpayers kids they will and will not educate. And tragically, it has led to a polarisation of our school system, where we find high concentrations of high socio-economic status (SES) students in private schools, and high concentrations of low SES students in public schools. In other words, government-supported ghettos of privilege and under-privilege. 98% of Indigenous students attend public schools, the vast majority of students with a disability, the poorest 40% of Catholics, and just about every student with emotional, behavioural and intellectual problems sits in a public school classroom.

Even if you don't care about fairness or the loss of our egalitarian spirit, there are other, serious ramifications of this high performance, low equity schooling system that will eventually rebound unpleasantly on us all. They include:

1 The loss of real merit and talent as a basis for success, to be replaced by inherited privilege. When the mediocre get to run the country simply because they went to the right schools, and the brightest miss out because they went to the wrong ones, this is a tax on all of us. We limit the pursuit of true excellence by limiting the opportunities of two thirds of our kids and create a future disaster for our country in an increasingly competitive world - we leave the field open to those countries with high performing, high equity school systems.

2 An increase in sectarianism, and segregation along socio-economic and religious lines. As schools become more homogenised and stratified, the most disadvantaged students become more and more disaffected. The gap between the haves and have-nots is now both widened and exaggerated by our schools, and we can expect more Cronulla and Macquarie Field style riots, more gated communities, more private security guards, more vigilante groups as a result. As the deputy principal of a very underprivileged school said to me recently, if we don't put some more money into public education soon, we'd better build a lot more jails. Teachers at schools where disadvantaged students are becoming more and more concentrated spend so much time dealing with the inevitable and societal results of that disadvantage, they have little time to teach, so all the kids suffer. Yet public school teachers must still be doing something exceptional, given that at least four major studies have shown that kids from comprehensive public schools may arrive at university with a five-mark disadvantage, but by the end of their first year they have neatly reversed the situation, with an average five-mark advantage over both their private and selective school educated peers.

3 An increase in parental paranoia. Parents are frightened and confused, lacking confidence in themselves and their ability to bring up their children. They lack boundaries and are unable to provide them for their children, so they look to the Church for what they call 'discipline' - whether they believe in God or not. It is understandable for parents to want the best for their kids, even if they are misguided about how to get it, but it is unconscionable for governments and hypocritical churches to take advantage of parental

fears and insecurities. Consumerism, education as a commodity and the glorification of the individual over the community are all reasons for the valuing of private good over public good, but it is ironic that the Church is benefiting from this. As Andrew Blair, the President of the Australian School Principals Association (ASPA) said at the NSW School Principals Conference on 15 June; he is not aware of any independent school - religious or otherwise - currently espousing support for the public good or social capital. It is only the wicked secular schools that continue to talk about and fight for equity, and opportunities for all our children.

4 A loss of understanding about the difference between preaching values and practising them. The churches are the world's best and most experienced propagandists. Because their schools - even the low fee ones - are more expensive to attend than most public schools, the churches are running more schools for the richest and least needy students, while the state runs more schools for the children of the poorest and most disadvantaged, yet it is state schools that are criticised for lacking values. But public schools still receive more public funding per student than private schools, as they should, although this is under threat. However, private schools do not have to abide by the same rules or shoulder the same responsibilities as public schools. Public schools remain more accountable, transparent and inclusive, which sometimes backfires on them. For example, the reason we hear more about violence in public schools is because they must publicly report all such incidents; private schools can keep such problems to themselves - unless they are exposed in court.

In fact, the current SES grants system of funding masquerading as a needs-based formula, actually works like a reverse Robin Hood - taking from the poor to give to the rich. Let me give you a concrete example of how this works. Not far from Sydney, there is an area identified as a postcode of disadvantage in Tony Vinson's recent report on the subject. An area also described as one of the five most disadvantaged postcodes in the region by the local area health service.

Located in this postcode are two schools. One is a government-subsidised, religious private school, the other a comprehensive state high school. Each school enrolls approximately 600 secondary students (the private school also enrolls about 200 primary students).

Under the Federal Government's SES formula, to apply for extra funding due to its perceived disadvantage, all the private school must submit is the census codes of its students. (After all, one wouldn't want to pry into a chap's private financial affairs, would one?) Because of the number of its students who live in the area, the school (which charges annual fees of up to \$10,000) has attracted an increase in Commonwealth funding of 135%, taking their total Federal Government subsidy to about \$2.5 million per annum. They also receive around \$450,000 annually from the State Government. (According to the Sydney Morning Herald two weeks ago, over half of all private schools are now funded to above their formula entitlement, and some already very well-resourced schools - most of them religious - have experienced increases in public funding of over 300%.)

The high school charges a voluntary contribution of \$50 per annum (which mostly goes unpaid), and, as a result, actually enrolls the most disadvantaged kids in this disadvantaged area. Its base funding from both State and Federal governments is roughly equal to the \$8,000 to \$10,000 per student fees paid by the parents of the private school. To address its disadvantage, the public school can apply for the Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP). To do so, the high school must submit surveys of individual parents' personal and employment details. (After all, you can't be too careful about bludgers and welfare cheats, can you?)

If sufficient parents are prepared to supply such details or, indeed, are literate enough to do so, the school may qualify for PSFP funding (previously the Disadvantaged Schools Program). If the school is successful, they will attract a funding increase of a grand total of \$100,000 spread over four years, plus one or two additional staff. This funding is, however, tied to literacy and numeracy outcomes and, if it is not completely spent, must be returned. No such rules apply to SES funding. Oh, by the way, the school was not successful and receives no additional disadvantaged funding, unlike its fee-charging, highly resourced private neighbour.

So what will be the result of this increasingly polarised, segregated and economically unsustainable education system, which has prioritised parental choice over children's opportunity? I believe we are well on the way to becoming the first western democracy to residualise our public school system. You think I exaggerate? With the current falling school age population, wholesale duplication of school resources, untouchability of ever increasing public funding to private schools - with virtually no strings attached (they say it is to make such schools more accessible, but their fees go up year after

year, unaffected by their increasing subsidies), I believe it is inevitable.

It's already starting to happen. Just this week, the ACT has announced it will close 30 public schools with low enrolments. There is no mention of removing public funding from equally small and unsustainable private schools - surely they are the first schools that should lose funding in any rational universe because, unlike public schools, they are not open to all students. The first schools we should open and the last schools we should close, should be the schools open to all, but in high performance, low equity Australia, we do the reverse. But the ACT - perhaps after their experiences over abortion and civil unions - is also too frightened to take on the Church.

If we go on like this, and I think we will, in 10 years time the hardest schools to get into will be public ones - because there will be so few of them. And as a result of the headlong pursuit of more choice, Australian parents will not only have less of it, many - particularly middle-class parents - will have lost their birthright: access to a free, secular education where all our kids from whatever class and background actually got the chance to get to know each other.

Ironically, in Australia, it is secular public schools, in my view, that are on the side of the angels. ■

Jane Caro is an award winning advertising copywriter and frequent media commentator. Speaker at the 'Separating Church & State' conference held in Melbourne 17 - 18 June 2006.

Editor's Note: Courtesy Australian Humanist Summer 2006 (Subheads are ours).

A Splendid Achievement

'The Guardian' October 10, 2006

George Bush should be congratulated - he has earned the right to join the ranks of despots.

Dear President Bush,

I write to you in my capacity as secretary of the World League of Despots.

It is with great pleasure that I am finally able to extend an official invitation to you to join our ranks. For many years we have watched your efforts to fulfil the requirements necessary to join our number. From the start, we were greatly impressed by your disdain for democratic principles - the way you wrested power from the democratically elected candidate in the 2000 election, and again in 2005 when you managed to swing what was clearly going to be a victory for your opponent.

Contempt for human life has always been a priority requirement for membership of the league, and my

fellow adjudicators and I were well aware of your record as governor of Texas when you quadrupled the number of state executions. But your record since seizing power has surpassed even our expectations. The thousands of innocent people in Iraq who have died so that you could fulfil your declared political objective of establishing "an American force presence in the Middle East", attest to your eligibility to join our ranks.

I cannot, however, disguise the fact that we adjudicators were extremely anxious when you announced your intention to remove from office one of our most stalwart members, Mr Saddam Hussein. However, we need not have worried. According to a recent UN report, you have ensured that there are now even more human rights abuses in Iraq than there were under Saddam. No less than 10% of those in custody are being physically or

psychologically abused. Well done!

Of course, your unstinting efforts to make torture an internationally accepted aspect of human life have surpassed everything we could have ever hoped for. I don't think there is a single member of the league who could have imagined, six short years ago, that our activities in tormenting our fellow creatures would once again be recognised as acceptable civilised behaviour as it once was in the Middle Ages.

Despite these achievements, we had until now, felt unable to extend our invitation to you because you had been unable to fulfil one of our basic requirements: the ability to carry out arbitrary arrests, imprisonment without trial, secret torture and executions at will.

We approved of your attempts to establish the principles of arbitrary arrest under the Homeland Security Act of 2002, but unfortunately it was still restricted to terror suspects. We appreciate that you were hampered by the US constitution, but the restrictions this imposed on your arbitrary powers kept you below the threshold requirements for qualification as a despot.

Now, however, all that has changed. At the end of last month you persuaded the Senate to pass a bill regarding the treatment of detainees. Illegally obtained evidence can now be used against suspects, even if it has been gathered abroad under torture. Anyone you care to accuse can be thrown into prison without the right to a trial or the right to represent themselves.

Officially the legislation is restricted to "enemy combatants", but you have skilfully adapted this definition to include anyone who has "purposefully and materially supported hostilities against the US". This presumably means that anyone who publicly criticises your conduct can be defined as supporting hostilities to the US. You are now free to arrest and imprison anyone you don't like. You've got it in the bag!

It is with great pleasure that we in the World League of Despots note that you have now appropriated to yourself all the powers of arbitrary arrest and torture that Saddam once enjoyed. You are now one of us. Congratulations! ■

Terry Jones is a film director, actor and Python
www.terry-jones.net

Courtesy: ACFS Newsletter November 06



Our Church is a public and usable asset with portable seating and excellent conference, meeting and function facilities. We welcome its use by those who support our motto 'Seek the Truth and Serve Humanity'. Interested individuals or groups can contact the church office – we would be delighted to speak to you. No fees are payable, use is by voluntary donation.

The farmers' plight in Afghanistan

Dr Nettie Wiebe, at the recent Make Peace With Earth Conference in Regina, spoke of the devastating effect of Canada's war in Afghanistan on the lives of farmers there. A farmer herself, former head of the National Farmers Union and a coordinating member of Via Campesina, Dr Wiebe is well qualified to speak on this subject.

Afghanistan is a mountainous country and much of the land is suitable only for grazing. But there are fertile valleys, and in them small irrigation systems make possible the production of fruit and high-quality nuts, Dr Wiebe explained. In the 1970s, about 60 per cent of the world's dried fruit came from Afghanistan. As well, the country was almost self-sufficient in vegetables, meat and grain.

Decades of conflict there have destroyed the orchards, and the roads and bridges that made it possible for farmers to get their product to market, Dr Wiebe pointed out. Now opium poppies, the basis for drugs, profits and arms, have become the most important crop, and this year Afghanistan was set to harvest its largest crop ever of opium poppies, doubling last year's production. Ironically, Dr Wiebe added, more than 25,000 acres of the opium crop is growing on government-owned land. The result is that people are now desperately in need of food aid. At the same time, there is a campaign to eradicate the poppy crop and this is increasing the violence and criminality in rural areas.

The role of Canada's troops in Afghanistan has only made matters worse for the country's farmers, Dr Wiebe stated. During the two months of 'Operation Medusa,' 12,000 families in the Panjwaii and Zhari districts were evacuated from their orchards, vegetable farms and vineyards. Animals and crops had to be left behind unattended. "As any farmer knows, leaving the farm during the peak growing season cannot be a good thing," Wiebe commented. Much of the crop was damaged or lost due to heavy bombing, looting and neglect. Then there is the damage resulting from the building of the road from Panjwaii to Zhari, by Canadian forces, to improve movement of goods, and to facilitate patrolling in a dangerous territory. The road is being bulldozed through a fertile valley, through crop and orchard land, Dr Wiebe declared. Worse still, the construction has choked off water from creeks that irrigate many of these fields, the speaker said. Displaced families return to find their homes damaged or destroyed and their crops in ruin.

This being the situation, the military solution is dangerous and unworkable, Dr Wiebe concluded. "For the sake of Afghanistan and ourselves, Canada should reclaim its role as a force for peace." ■

Courtesy: Peace News (Canada) November 06

We Need a **New** Political and Social Movement



Some people say you should look forward, not back. My view is that unless you look back and analyse what was, you cannot deal with what is or what will be. I applaud whoever said that if you fail to learn the lessons of history, you will be forced to repeat them.

So in this dawning of 2007 and facing a brand new year, we need to look at the year that went, ask ourselves were we satisfied as a church that we did all we could to make the world a better place and then decide how we will deal with the year ahead.

We need to ask ourselves will we in this church, a group of intelligent, thinking, rational people determine to use our energy, our commitment and our wisdom to challenge those that would destroy our world, or will we sink into contemplation and inaction? Will we play and chatter and contemplate or will we read, assess, examine and act? Will we accept what we are told or will we 'seek the truth'? Will we not only look forward, but act to 'determine what should be'? This is the challenge for Unitarians in 2007.

In the past, this church pioneered some very important campaigns.

- **Exposing the Ustasha movement in Australia - a fascist group of Croations encouraged by the then Liberal Government.**
- **Building the Victorian Peace Movement at the time of the Cold War.**
- **Opposing the Vietnam War when it was not popular to be doing so.**
- **Campaigning against State Aid to private schools.**

The church was a Beacon for social justice at a time when no other churches were active on these issues. It took courage and dedication to seek the truth and act upon it.

Unitarian history both in the UK and the US demonstrate the same kind of courage. As always, I draw on past Unitarians, famous for their commitment and ability to recognise the truth and act. A firm favourite, American Unitarian, Rev. Stephen Fritchman, was much more than a person speaking from a pulpit in a comfortable church; he walked picket lines because he believed that 'wages

are still, as in Paul's day, a religious matter involving human rights and happiness.

He was fired as an editor of a religious house paper because he was too anti-fascist. Not in words but in action.

He stood up against the House of Un-American Activities Committee before which he was called and told them, 'We in this church have no tradition of docile conformity to other men's statements of loyalty and sound patriotism'... and I certainly agree 'that the search for truth is itself a religious quest'.

Fritchman would be the first to examine what was, in order to reach what should be. Our own minister, Rev. Victor James, also stood firm on principle in the face of sometimes insurmountable attacks from the powerful in order to reach 'what should be.'

He said, 'It will only be when we topple the god of profit from his throne and learn to use the fruits of the earth for the uplifting of all the peoples of the world that any hope for the bettering of the conditions we currently bemoan will be realised. We must do this by planning and action.'

These were people of vision, but we need our own vision.

So, before we look at what is to be, let us look at what was!

2006 was a year of horror for the vast majority of Australians who demonstrated their opposition to many of the Federal Government's policies.

We were sickened by the Wheat Board scandal that the government was clearly aware of and implicated in, despite an investigative whitewash.

We vigorously opposed the introduction of IR changes that burned the hard-won conditions enjoyed by generations of Australians, won by their forefathers in struggle.

We recognised that we are governed by men and women who support an illegal war in our name, now exposed as without justification and based on lies and deceptions at the cost to the Americans alone of \$500 billion, resulting in the calculated murder of millions of men, women and children. How many we will probably never know, but there are some respected individuals and organisations around the world making the following claims: Clive Williams, Visiting Fellow at the Australian National University, and Visiting Professor at the Australian Defence Force Academy, estimates 655,000 Iraqis died in 2003, an article in the British Guardian Oct 12, 2006 reported.

From a group of doctors in the Lancet, organ of the British Medical Assoc. and confirmed by a team from Johns Hopkins University in the USA, that some 650,000 deaths have occurred since the invasion of 2003, this illegal war based on lies has killed one in forty Iraqis or 2.5% of the entire Iraqi population. The editor of the Lancet concluded his appraisal in the following words: "Our foreign policy based as it is on 19th century notions of the nation state is long past its sell-by-date. We need a new set of principles to govern our diplomacy and military strategy, based on national security, health and wellbeing and not economic self-interest and territorial ambition. The best we can hope for from our terrible misadventure in Iraq is that a new political and social movement will grow to overturn the politics of humiliation. We are one human family, let us act like it."

The current Federal Government has introduced or pursued policies which are certainly not in our interests. They have refused to take any action on the degradation of our environment which has resulted in weather conditions that have devastated countries, destroyed cities, leaving millions still living in abject poverty, un-housed, unfed and with no future.

Has continued to ensure that the Aboriginal people die in large numbers at younger ages through ill health, despair, irrational laws and institutional violence.

Has introduced legislation unnecessarily, without proper legal foundation, without logical reason, which takes away from every Australian their political, civil and social rights.

Deliberately decided to leave an Australian citizen in a foreign jail without charge or trial for five years at the mercy of captors who were known to practise torture.

Deported, rejected, imprisoned many innocent men, women and children who were simply seeking asylum and a decent life in a fair country.

Is this the kind of world we want for future generations?

2006 was a year where we changed from a country of a fair go, of decency and humanity, to one of hatred and mistrust, fearful, resentful people looking at each other with suspicion, promoting racial discrimination and introducing a blanket policy of 'dob in a neighbour' - dobbing has become a national pastime and has replaced a fair go.

2006 was a year where a government bereft of decency, humanity, concern, and without any principles or human values talked about forcing others to adhere to their view of what human values should be.

2006 - a year that we would like to forget but can't.

There are still people in the media, however, who are prepared to take a stand and speak out in defence of truth and democracy; one of those is Tracee Hutchinson, a writer and broadcaster. In her column in The Age December 30th Tracee spoke about the 'year that was'. She called her column 'Raise your Glass and Blot out the Year'.

She said, 'If you take a moment to really think about the year that is about to become history, there doesn't seem to be much to feel terribly cheerful about'. She ticked off the 2006 milestones.

"Australian David Hicks spent his 5th year in illegal detention not yet accused of any crime, waiting to be tried by an illegal court, established to suit George Bush's supposed fight against terror.

Sedition laws were enshrined to make sure that nobody said too much about anything in public.

We gave a \$300 million wheat-wrapped gift pack to Saddam Hussein.

We deported Australian citizens who fell through the immigration 'cracks' and locked up others with mental illness in detention centres.

Australian workers had to take to the streets to fight for their right to a fair go in their workplaces while CEO's of big business picked up payouts that ordinary people wouldn't earn in a lifetime.

We talked a lot about values but seemed to lose our identity and we talked about mateship but all over the world we seemed to be losing friends.

We topped off this year of horror by topping Saddam Hussein in the most barbaric and disgraceful execution, after a trial that was a complete travesty of justice, with witnesses suppressed, judges removed or murdered.

It was a kangaroo court which lacked any semblance of legal credibility..."

So said Tracee Hutchinson, an Australian journalist who sought the truth.

So in that horror year 2006, the year of 'what was', we need to ask why? What was the motive that drove governments to perpetrate such crimes against humanity? What is it that changed the face of the world?

In my view it was the drive for global profits, and for power and control over the resources of countries around the world. Control by corporations, not by elected government - global control, corporate control, imperialist control, based on greed, for profit.

Not just ordinary profit, but obscene profiteering in trillions of dollars - each and every one with blood on its surface. What is corporate control in this global world? It is rule by transnationals who control and manipulate foreign governments through financial power. It is countries run by huge capitalist corporations rather than elected government. Globalisation is a serious threat to democracy, to the independence of elected governments. Rule by corporations is now globalisation and is simply another name for imperialism.

Prior to the rise of American imperialism, we had British colonialism. The British utilised very similar policies

around the world. They were the predecessors to US imperialism.

In the early decades of the 20th century the British imperialists stole nearly 30 million sq. kilometres, colonising approximately 400-500 million people, a quarter of the world's population. Their colonies covered every continent and every ocean, which gave rise to the saying that the sun never sets on the British Empire.

It is worth noting that as the British imperialists extended and consolidated their territorial rape, conditions at home for the British people marginally improved; these improvements were bought at the expense of the blood and pain of the colonised peoples.

Today it is the turn of the US imperialists and they have taken imperialism to new heights. As their drive for power and profit increases, the position of their working people worsens, poverty, lack of housing and health care, inadequate education, racism are all looming large in American society today.

The war on Iraq daily exposes the arrogance and exploitative nature of imperialism. Who benefited from this war? Not the American people, but major corporations who have extracted billions of dollars as well as blood from the people of Iraq.

We need to ask ourselves do we believe it is acceptable for America or any other nation with enough power to invade and occupy another sovereign country and loot its wealth? If we don't actively oppose this, we tacitly support it. Is it fair or accurate to be criticising the United States for its actions, is it fair or accurate to call them an imperialist nation? This was asked by an organisation called JUST INTERNATIONAL who asked themselves the following questions.

Which is the only country in the world to have dropped bombs on over twenty different countries since 1945?

Which is the only country to have used nuclear weapons?

Which country's illegal bombing of Libya in 1986 was described by the United Nations Legal Committee as a class case of terrorism?

Which country rejected an order by the International Court of Justice to terminate its unlawful use of force against Nicaragua in 1986 and then vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling on all states to observe international law?

Which country unilaterally withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in December 2001?

Which country prevented the United Nations from curbing the gun trade at a small arms conference in July 2001?

Aside from Somali, which is the only country in the world to have refused to ratify the UN Convention on the rights of the child?

Which is the only Western country that allows the death penalty to be applied to children?

Which is the only G7 country to have refused to sign the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty forbidding the use of landmines?

Which was the only other country to join with Israel in opposing a 1987 General Assembly resolution condemning international terrorism?

Which country refused to pay its debts to the UN yet reserves the right to veto UN resolutions? The answer to each of these questions is the United States of America.

Some, particularly our very welcome visitors from America, claim that we unfairly 'demonise' the United States. Unlike us, they find criticism of their government difficult to deal with. Our criticism of the US government does not reflect our feelings for the American people who are themselves beginning to demonstrate their rejection of US policies around the world. They, the American people, have our respect, but to ignore the policies of any country or to pretend that they don't exist would be to deny our right to seek the truth. It reminds me of a little story about Arthur Calwell, who was once accused of being soft on communism.

Callwell replied, 'If a communist says it is 12 o'clock and I look at the clock and indeed it is, should I deny it?'



Globalisation, corporatism and imperialism flow from the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that are dominated by the West. These bodies control the financial, economic, social and political programs of most countries. The reputation of these bodies has been very tarnished, and rightly so. Their public statements about tackling corruption and transparency in their development programs conflict with their actions.

The March 2004 issue of the New Internationalist features the IMF and is pretty damning of this body.

It claims the IMF has been taken over by fundamentalists as extreme and narrow-minded as an Al Quaida lieutenant or a US Bible-belt preacher.

Nobel Prize winner and former World Bank Chief Economist Joseph Stiglitz says in the article, 'They are an institution that seems to believe in market fundamentalism but yet exists because of market failures, an internal contradiction they have never come to terms with'.

He claims that their real objectives are hidden. 'Look at the decision-making structure, with the United States the only country with a veto.

These bodies look at the world with a particular perspective, a particular ideology that accords with their economic interests; their fundamental interest is ensuring that creditors got paid and that takes precedence over what is good for the country involved. The debt contract always takes precedence over the social contract.'

The British chapter of the World Development Movement sums it up well.

'When democracy is undermined and governments are unable to act in the interests of their electorate, one of the only channels left is for citizens to demonstrate their objections. Civil unrest, demonstrations and strikes should indicate to governments, law makers and the

international community that their policies are not working'.

The World Bank and the IMF were established in 1944 to begin a new global economic order at the end of World War 2. Voting power in both the IMF and the World Bank is based on economic power. The 30 countries of the OECD, e.g. the rich world, control almost two-thirds of the vote. The US has stated that it will not allow its voting power in the IMF to drop below 15%, which gives it a veto over all key decisions.

45% of the \$25 billion that the World Bank lends each year is dispensed directly to western transnational corporations.

Why have I spent so much time on these two bodies - because between them they control not only international finance, they decide our future in our country, indeed in most countries. They decide what should be privatised, how our social services system should operate, what kind of healthcare we get, in other words, these two bodies outside our country, over whom we have no control, whom we don't elect, who are not answerable to the people, make decisions and policies that affect our lives.

I ask you to think carefully about the following words of Paul Hellyer, former deputy prime minister of Canada, because they are still significant and accurate.

'Globalisation is about power and control. It is the re-shaping of the world into one without borders, ruled by a dictatorship of the world's most powerful central banks, commercial banks and multinational companies. It is an attempt to undo a century of social progress and to alter the distribution of income from inequitable to inhuman.'

So this morning, January 2007, the beginning of a new year, an important year with federal elections in the

offing, we must think about how this church can make a difference, how this church can help to create an informed public opinion (because when people are armed with information that is true, there is nothing they cannot achieve.) How can we build a force for a better, fairer and more democratic Australia?

Firstly, it should be the churches. Isn't the demand for justice, freedom, a creative abundant life and ever-widening fellowship for every human a fundamental tenet of all religions?

Secondly, it should be those organisations trying to cope with the jobless, the homeless and the hungry. Who would better know the impact of globalisation/imperialism on ordinary working class families?

Thirdly, it should be the trade union movement whose charter is to serve its members and their families and to take responsibility for all of those former members whose jobs have been lost in the drive for increased profit.

Fourthly, it should be members of the Australian Labor Party, a party whose very existence was created by the forefathers of those suffering exploitation today.

Fifthly, it should be those minor parties who are committed to social justice and democracy.

Last but not least, all of those in the legal profession who know from their experiences what the people are suffering and why.

Imagine what kind of a new society could be created if all these forces would come together around an agreed program for a new and democratic Australia? If unity could be reached with all of these organisations there is nothing that can't be achieved. This should be our commitment for 2007 to unite these forces for what the editor of the Lancet called a new political and social movement, united in action. ■

by Sandhya Srinivasan

Killersting

The World Bank has vowed to tackle corruption and fight for transparency in the development programmes it funds. In light of this Sandhya Srinivasan takes a close look at one of its pet programmes in India.

The thick forests and natural wealth of Gomia in Northern India conceal an appalling poverty and a variety of illness; Malaria is one of these illnesses.

Men and women survive by selling coal extracted from abandoned coalmines, or working for daily wages in brick kilns and stone quarries, or as agricultural labourers. Most live in mud huts, often along *with* their livestock.

The hospital in Gomia receives 20 to 30 malaria patients a month. But it has no facilities for routine pathology

tests and it takes one month to get the results of blood smears - far too late to be relevant for treatment. In this area, malaria is on the rise - especially in its deadly *falciparum* form.

Some 70 million Indians get the disease every year, according to a WHO estimate. Hundreds of thousands die of what can be described as the country's single biggest public health problem - bigger even than tuberculosis.

But official government figures record 'only' two million cases a year - with 1,000 deaths. And the World Bank hails the malaria control programme it has funded in India as a 'success' that resulted in a 45 per cent decline in cases. What is going on?

Deception, some would say, with the World Bank peddling false data to claim false victories.

Let's take a look at their star project. Called the Enhanced Malaria Control Project, it ran in eight Indian states between 1997 and 2005. Transparency does not seem to have been a key feature - even the amount loaned by the World Bank is variously reported as \$86 million, \$119 million and \$165 million.

The Bank claims that as a result of its programme, malaria in the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, and

Rajasthan declined by 93 per cent, 80 per cent and 40 per cent respectively from 1997 to 2002. And it attributes this success to a fundamental change in approach to malaria control. However, a study by a group of public health researchers holds the Bank's claim to be a pack of lies. Writing in the 15 July 2006 issue of *The Lancet*, Amir Attaran and his colleagues quote government documents indicating a much smaller drop in malaria in the states where the programme was conducted. In some states it actually went up, they note. The Bank's statistics for the states of Maharashtra Gujarat and Rajasthan did not correspond to Indian government data between 1997 and 2002; in fact in 2004, there was more malaria in Gujarat than there had been in 1997.

Tellingly, the Bank refused researchers access to data needed to examine its claim that the programme has been a success.

Health professionals working in malaria-infested areas are unimpressed: 'The Bank's programme has made no difference in Orissa,' says Johnny Oommen, a medical doctor working in Bishamcuttack for more than 13 years. 'The Government's figures are a fraction of the total number of cases. The ground situation is much, much worse. Malaria is our single biggest public health problem.'

Ravi Dsouza, who trains health workers to treat malaria and tuberculosis, reports: 'I have seen villages where three out of four people have a swollen, palpable spleen - the effect of repeated, untreated malaria.'

Even when it doesn't kill, untreated malaria leaves people with severe anaemia because it destroys the red blood cells. Children's growth is stunted. 'In tribal areas, where it is the most common, it is an important cause of infant and maternal mortality,' says Dsouza,

And while the number of cases officially recorded is not increasing, the proportion of people with the deadly *falciparum* strain of malaria is up from a little under one-third of all cases to about half today.

'The fact is that no one really cares about malaria because it is a poor person's illness,' says Yogesh Jain of Jan Swasthya Sahyog, a non-government organisation running health programmes in the central Indian state of Chattisgarh.

Map the high-malaria districts and you've got the poorest districts in the country. Tribal or indigenous people living in heavily forested areas where the mosquito thrives, are most susceptible. Pregnant women are more vulnerable, though women in general are less likely to receive treatment. Malaria also affects urban construction workers living in makeshift housing, surrounded by debris and stagnant water. A number of epidemics are directly linked to the environmental

disruption caused by 'development projects' - such as the Bank-funded Indira Gandhi canal.

Health professionals like Jain wonder at how the Bank can take its own claim seriously when even the Indian Council of Medical Research has accepted that official records of malaria are only the tip of the iceberg.

'These figures don't mean anything because in more than 95 per cent of people treated a diagnosis is never made,' explains Yogesh Jain. Few people go to government centres for treatment - the only places where the data is collected - and only those who test positive after a blood smear are recorded as cases. This excludes the millions who get treated for malaria without testing; it excludes those tested in private clinics; and it also excludes the millions who cannot afford to seek any treatment at all.

If no one has credible figures for the number of malaria cases in India, how can the World Bank talk about reducing the numbers by 45 per cent?

But then the Bank's false claims about its contribution to malaria reduction is of a piece with its systematic destruction of India's public health services. It has done this in part by putting pressure on governments to provide 'targeted interventions' - like the enhanced malaria project - in place of comprehensive health care.

India's expenditure on public health as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has always been one of the lowest in the world. Since 1991, when India took an IMF structural adjustment loan, this has fallen further still from 1.3 per cent to 0.95 per cent of the GDP. Rural health has been especially hard hit. There are now fewer than half the number of community health centres than the Government itself says are needed and these centres suffer from severe shortages of staff, equipment and drugs. Half the health centres don't have microscopes; others don't have technicians. There used to be one malaria inspector for every 10,000 people - now there's just one for 40,000.

Blood smears for malaria are entirely possible in a properly equipped health system. But not within a healthcare system sabotaged by World Bank policies.

Why does the World Bank peddle false data and false victories? One reason it gives for its India 'success' is that it promoted a targeted intervention to 'high-risk' areas.

We can only speculate: by claiming such 'successes' perhaps the World Bank seeks to divert attention away from its systematic destruction of the public health system. ■

Sandhya Srinivasan edits a journal on medical ethics in Mumbai.

Courtesy: New Internationalist December 2006

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from our readers



Dear Beacon Mob

The little paper gets better by the month.

Jeez, Hugo Chavez and Helen Caldicott in one serve makes for the best dish on the menu.

Isn't it great to see the other end of the America's starting to rattle the can and Caldicott is an international hero.

As an old (very lately) journo I need Beacon and 3CR as the daily media turns more commercial, more apologist for capitalism and sacks working journo's, making the Right's press releases the only news source.

When 3LO'S 'Jon Feign' continually refers to demonstrators as 'rent a crowd' and the rest of the ABC becomes Radio Fairy Floss (sugar on a stick), then people need the Truth.

PS I am a disabled pensioner living next to a disabled forest and therein lie two more immoralities.

Regards

Peter Henderson

The Editor

It is rather disturbing that the left allies itself with fundamental Islam when it is clear that they have no love of the Left. Conservative Jews and Christians are seen as the enemy, whereas the real enemy is Power, whether it is used by the Right or the Left. Power and its total obscenity is the real enemy. Most conservatives are deluded by ignorance and greed and in time, can understand the error of their ways. True democracy is the goal we should all be struggling for, real democracy, not the smokescreen put up by the global puppets, even though in all probability, democracy is the most impossible dream.

K. Whitfield NSW

The Editor

Please find enclosed some thoughts on mining issues I feel important to every Australian.

I have worked underground at Bendigo (Central Deborah) and at Daylesford (Maxwell Consolidated) and also Mt Isa, Tennant Creek and mined Wolfram on my leases in North Queensland. I attended the Bendigo School of mines and gained a First Class Mine Managers' Certificate.

The last decade of my mining life was underground, coal mining at the Clarence mine near Lithgow.

So you could say I have been at the coalface. Fortunately, I feel young people are starting to question political policy made in the house of the Big Con in Canberra.

Sincerely

L. Winters NSW

Letter to the Editor

SMH Sydney

Dear Editor

The economic boom is riding high on the miners' back, high grade iron ore from WA, clean coal (no iron sulphide) from Queensland and NSW along with bauxite and pure silica sand (SO) from North Queensland, manganese, zinc and lead from the Gulf country and of course, our old favourite, uranium. The list goes on, all owned by overseas cartels.

Billions of dollars go offshore tax free per kind favour of the two major political parties, but to be fair, John Howard, bless his soul, serves his masters well. The miner's hand shovel is now a relic of the past to the time of the Eureka Stockade at Ballarat where 'flags flew over golden holes' and a Miner's Right was won.

Will blood again stain the wattle?

So, Paul Keating's prophecy has come to pass. With most of big business foreign-owned, we are now a Third World country.

L. Winters

Dear Beacon

Perhaps never before has the world been in such a parlous state, socially, economically, environmentally, politically.

Millions of refugees roaming the Earth hungry, homeless, destitute. Poverty is the constant companion of millions. HIV/aids is raging, especially in Africa, with little prospect of a miracle cure.

Then over all we have global warming and climate change threatening all life on our beautiful planet Earth, our only home.

According to Patch Adams, activist and great human being, 35000 children die every day from starvation and that is a fearful statistic when one considers that we have food aplenty in the rich first world countries, so much food that great quantities are constantly destroyed so as to make room for fresh supplies into the mammoth consumer society.

It is a terrible anomaly that women who consist of half the population of the Earth should have so little participation in the affairs of society at large.

According to reliable statistics, the proportion of assets held by women, worldwide, is merely 7%.

Not only are women the progenitors and nurturers of life as disadvantaged as they are, especially working class women, they are subject to working at tough repetitive jobs as well as domestic drudgery and many are now working more than one part-time job to help their partners pay off huge mortgages.

On top of all that, on the darker side, our mothers, sisters, daughters are often the victims of rape, physical and sexual abuse and belittlement and seen as being nitwitted.

Despite the fact that women have achieved a lot in recent decades in their struggle for social justice, as the saying goes, they still have the proverbial million miles to travel before they achieve total emancipation in every facet of society.

There is reason though for optimism. At primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education the girls seem to be outstripping the boys and education, we know, is the great leveller.

Furthermore, when women take their rightful place at all levels of society there will be no more wars; no more proliferation of murderous weaponry; no more mass poverty, and social justice for all.

Yes, I do believe that women - the progenitors and nurturers of life - by their very nature will their deep-rooted-ness bring peace and harmony to this troubled world of ours.

And no, women's long heroic quest for social justice has never been a gender issue.

J. Morrissey NSW

Dear Editor

Your wonderful newsletter is greatly appreciated. It is indeed a shining beacon in the sea of misinformation to which we are daily subjected.

Many thanks.

F. Lillimagi Vic

Dear Sir

I really enjoy reading your publication 'The Beacon'. It's the only honest media around today.

Keep up the good work and good luck to you.

Yours faithfully

M. Gleeson NSW

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