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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

A Climate Emergency

EDITORIAL

Is the claim that we face a climate emergency 'over the top' or far too accurate for comfort? A very definitive answer was put forward in a book launched a few weeks ago by the Victorian State Governor, David de Kretser. In commenting on the book *Climate Code Red* by David Spratt and Philip Sutton, the Governor said, 'There is no doubt in my mind that this is the greatest problem confronting mankind ... It has reached the level of a state of emergency. It does require urgent action, which should obtain bipartisan support'. The co-author of *Climate Code Red*, David Spratt, spoke at the church soon after the official launch; the talk will have been broadcast on our community radio show as this issue of *The Beacon* goes to press.

Originally the book was intended as a report to the Garnaut Climate Change Review that was commissioned six months prior to the November 2007 federal election. The authors' aim was to draw attention to the seriousness of recent climate data and to show that a response to the crisis cannot be a 'politics as usual' attitude as this would be totally inadequate in dealing with the urgency of this problem. The book has much to say about the inadequacy of setting targets that may be politically acceptable but would be ineffective in tackling the medium-term to long-term effects of climate change – perhaps we could also call it a 'business as usual' approach.

The authors draw a parallel with the resources required to fight fascism during WW2 whereby nations changed the majority of their economies on to a war footing. In other words, huge changes can be made when needed, but the dynamics of climate change are not as palpable as world war given that while many climatic impacts are being felt now, the largest impacts are decades into the future.

An important point raised in the book was that transforming the politics of climate change from

conventional to emergency mode will be strongly resisted by those who seek a short-term benefit in opposing change and will only be resolved with the active support of the broad community: from community action groups, unions, and churches to neighbourhoods, schools, and local government; from political parties to corporate elites.

They call this deliberative democracy and two recent examples spring to mind. The union movement worked with the community to remove the repressive 'Work Choices' laws of the Howard government – this was the major issue that saw the defeat of the Howard government and the defeat of Howard in his own seat.

The other example is the work of the Victorian Women's Trust and their Watermark Australia project. As a result of the project, the book *Our Water Mark* was published with over 37,000 copies distributed Australia-wide – this project engaged 2000 people in 200 discussion groups that met for two periods of three to five months each.

Our motto 'Seek the truth and serve humanity' has never had more relevance than it does on the question of climate change. Urgent action is required on a large scale. Such action will only come from an organised community that arms itself with the facts, such as those presented in *Climate Code Red*.

We cannot wait for those who seek only profit and short-term gain. In the words of Jonathan Schell:

'Since after extinction no one will be present to take responsibility, we have to take full responsibility NOW'.

The social situation in Galilee *in the time of Jesus*

Over the past thirty or so years there has been an upsurge in knowledge about the social conditions of Galilee, the northern part of Palestine, in the time of Jesus, some two thousand years ago. This has two main sources. Firstly, the excavations at the Roman towns of Sepphoris and Tiberias, which, for those who have eyes to see, throw into relief issues of land and labour, the role of opulent elites, cultural conflicts and accompanying movements of resistance. From what I can gather, Sepphoris has been the key dig, more excavation has been done there than at Tiberias, by both Israelis and North Americans. Second, there has been a lot of interesting analysis of the gospels, the Qumran scrolls and other early texts, which have become known as the new quest for the historical Jesus and which draw on and fit in with the archaeological work.

A long time ago, I was trained in biblical studies and not in archaeology. Today I want to talk about what I have gained from sampling some of the new literature. I will draw especially on the studies of Galilee by the Irish scholar, Sean Freyne, especially his latest book,

JESUS' ALTERNATIVE VISION WAS CALLED THE KINGDOM OF GOD, OF A WORLD WHERE EACH CONTRIBUTED ACCORDING TO THEIR ABILITY AND RECEIVED ACCORDING TO THEIR NEED.

Jesus, a Jewish Galilean, and the study by the American scholar, Ched Meyers, entitled *Binding the Strong Man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus*, both of whom have spent a lifetime in study of these matters. Myers is indeed coming to Melbourne in a couple of weeks to give lectures at Trinity College.

I want to suggest that, in this context, Jesus' teachings and lifestyle were, as radicals over the centuries have argued, acts of defiance of both the Roman rulers and the Jewish priestly classes. However, there are some new angles coming to light as well.

Social situation in Galilee

Jesus was known as one who came from Nazareth in Galilee, and he built up a following in Galilee. Scholars argue about what exact social status the family of a carpenter had in Galilee but it is clear that they were workers not bosses. Here then is a rough summary of some aspects of the social situation in Galilee in Jesus' time and shortly after.

Galilee, the most naturally fertile agricultural region of Palestine, with perhaps 750,000 people at the time, was different from the southern part of Palestine. Among other things, there seems to have been more Greek and Roman influence there in education, commerce and

technical skills. But archaeology has also found plenty of evidence of continuing Jewish cultural and religious practices.

Jesus came into public life at the time of Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. In Jesus' lifetime, Galilee was changing. Freyne remarks, 'As a young adult, Jesus would have seen Sepphoris, just 4 km from his native Nazareth, being rebuilt and renamed in order to honour the Roman emperor as sole ruler, by the Herod Antipas.

'Less than 30 km away on the lake front, a new city, Tiberias, was also founded for the purpose in 19 CE. Antipas' father, Herod the Great, had begun the policy of honouring his Roman patrons but most of his monumental buildings were in the south.

'Now, however, Antipas, who aspired to succeed his father as king, was anxious to win favour by following the same policy in his building projects in Galilee, albeit on a more modest scale.

...The establishment of a city in the immediate neighbourhood of his own village must have involved a serious disruption to all aspects of life in the region as a whole'.

These new towns of Sepphoris and Tiberias destroyed the patterns of the lives of the farmers and workers in the area. Freyne argues that the immediate catalyst

for Jesus' public teachings was the worsening social and economic situation in Galilee when he returned there after John's arrest and subsequent murder. There were, of course, other factors such as the foreign occupation.

The new cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias meant confiscation of the land of the native population. Newcomers such as scribes, tax collectors, soldiers and de-mobbed soldiers, all supporters of the Herodian regime, gained privileges in return for various favours. Their job was to extract enough annual revenue from the peasants to ensure the opulent lifestyle of the elites, local, provincial and imperial that made up the pyramid of power in Roman Galilee.

The issue of land, then as now, was a central one. The Roman-Herodian regime involved large estates, some in the hands of non-Jews, some in the hands of Jews. There were many small landholders and many landless labourers. A Galilean peasant farmer could have up to half his harvest extracted as rent and land taxes to the Herodian kings and to the Romans. Then there were the tithes to the Jewish authorities. It is significant that Jesus is never said to have visited Sepphoris nor Tiberias, Freyne points out. He visited other surrounding town and territories. This must be understood as defiance, a throwing down of the gauntlet to the Roman ruling elite

and the Jewish priestly classes. References in the gospels to 'royal palaces' and 'fine garments' were to such people as the elite of Sepphoris and Tiberias.

Jesus' alternative vision was called the kingdom of God, of a world where each contributed according to their ability and received according to their need. Blessed are the poor is thus not a pious sentiment of resignation but a protest and a statement of support for those on the outer.

The texts we have show that Jesus, like John the Baptist, criticised the luxurious lifestyle of the Herodians and their style of rule. Jesus enters public life as a follower of John the Baptist. In contrast to John, Jesus seems to have devoted more time and effort to healing and in taking his case to Jerusalem.

Not only did he heal sick people but he also preached love, justice and equality. His Sermon on the Mount was a declaration of alternative values to those of the ruling class, or sympathy with the poor, the landless and the exploited. He drew a following which Freyne and others call the Jesus movement, and which soon spread throughout the Roman Empire. What happened a couple of hundred years later under Constantine is a story for another day, but you know the gist of it.

As we know, lifestyle matters. The parables of Jesus reflect 'the daily realities of disease, poverty, and disenfranchisement that characterized the social existence of first-century Palestine's other 95 per cent', says Ched Meyers. The kingdom of God was not an idea but a way of life.

That Jesus was crucified by Pilate and the priestly classes – for which there is evidence in the four gospels and also Josephus – is a sure sign that he was a threat to the social order.

Jesus' response to social issues

Where did Jesus' ideas come from? The records do not tell us exactly. Dominic Crossan suggests that Jesus took his critique of the society of the day from the Cynic philosophers of Greece. In particular, he suggests that the instruction to his followers to travel with one cloak and one pair of sandals is parallel to well known Cynic moral teaching. While Greek influence can be found on this point, as it can be found in other aspects of Galilean life at the time, analysis of Jesus' teachings shows that on major points he was drawing on the radical stream, what is known as the prophetic stream, of Jewish tradition.

Like the group at Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls come from, Jesus had a detailed knowledge of the Hebrew bible. Like them and others, he and his group seem to have described the social upheavals of their day in apocalyptic terms, that is, that the kingdom of God was at hand, right now. However, Jesus' teachings about concern for the orphan and the widow can be traced in a direct line to Jewish poets and prophets such as Isaiah, Amos and Osee.

On the issue of Jesus' relationship to the Zealots, a violent revolutionary group, it is worth noting that they do not seem to have been a big factor in Jesus' day but were by the time Mark's gospel was being written. While Jesus was more like Mahatma Gandhi than Vladimir Lenin, there are good grounds for saying that his teaching and lifestyle were revolutionary in the social and political conditions of the time, and Myers argues that Jesus and his contemporaries did not always draw a strict line

between violent and non-violent. By the way, Freyne makes a good case for saying that Jesus, like the Galileans with whom he mixed, had an ecological awareness. Claims that Christian beliefs fuelled the degradation of our environment, made by Lynn White and others, are false. Peasants in Galilee had a love of the land and felt an obligation to care for the land.

A key story in regard to Jesus' approach to the social conditions of his day is that of the cleansing of the moneychangers from the temple. This is action against the Jewish elite and their relationship to the Herodian social order. Meyers again, 'Jesus' story is always more radical when understood first in its own socio-historical terms'.

What this means today

What does this mean today? Allowing for the complexities of the details, it is possible to say that modern scholarship confirms the views of a long list in history of people who have taken Jesus' teachings as a basis for working to alleviate suffering and oppression. There have been, and will be, as many approaches as there are people and situations. However, we can recognise a river of tradition that flows from Jesus, in differing ways, through Francis of Assisi, Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers, Thomas Müntzer and the peasants' revolt, James Connolly, Mahatma Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero and the liberation theology of the Philippines and Latin America; and perhaps Victor James, Joyce Clayton, Catherine Spence and Bernard O'Dowd.

Thus, many Christians I know do not recognise themselves in the pictures of believers presented by Richard Dawkins, Anthony Grayling et al. The new atheists seem to have some taboos not only on words like capitalism and imperialism but also on the teachings of Jesus.

On Monday last I was one of an overflow crowd at St Ignatius' church in Richmond for the funeral of Andrew Dent, 53, head of the emergency department of St Vincent's Hospital. Half a dozen speakers recalled how Andrew gave his life to alleviating suffering and reversing injustices, working for those who are poor and marginalised in our society and also in Papua New Guinea. Friends and family read passages from Jesus' sermon on the mount, the parable of the Good Samaritan and the judgement story about 'whatever you do to one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me'. Andrew Dent, Methodist educated and later a Catholic, read the gospels in a radical way. Millions of others around the world also do that.

The martyred Salvadoran liberation theologian, Ignacio Ellacuría, said that God is to be found in joining in the struggles of the poor for justice. The Industrial Workers of the World, the Wobblies, put that another way: they said, 'an injury to one is an injury to all'. An Irish proverb says that we all live in the shadow of one another, *Ar scath le chéile a mhaireann na daoine*.

My critical reading of some of the latest scholarship on first-century Galilee by Seán Freyne, Ched Meyers and others, suggests that that was the view of Jesus and the early Christians. The gospel stories of Jesus do not give us a critique of today's social issues, nor a plan of action, but they do give us a possible framework for critiquing the issues and taking action. I look forward to discussing this further with you.

CUBA SOLVES FUEL CRISIS

Adelaide Voices June–August 2008

Roberto Perez visited Adelaide recently on behalf of the Cuban not-for-profit organisation, Foundation for Nature and Humanity. Perez shared with his audience his pride in the way that Cuba has met the challenge of 'peak oil', a situation facing all oil-dependent nations in the not-so-distant future as the worldwide supply of oil dwindles and inevitably fails.

This situation was faced in Cuba earlier than in other nations due to the United States' blockade, imposed after the Bay of Pigs crisis in 1962, which denied the supply of oil, vital goods and trade. This was exacerbated with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, denying Cuba its only regular source of energy and trading partner.

The Cuban response to this crisis was to find a communal plan in which every person shared the responsibility for the provision of food for the nation. The main island of Cuba is only one-third of the size of Victoria, yet has half the entire population of Australia. Seventy-five per cent of this population is urban, so the problems faced were massive.

Cuba had inherited a cash crop economy at the time of the socialist revolution in 1958, and was heavily reliant on mechanised agriculture and export markets. This resulted in major land degradation and desertification, which became greater problems with the cuts in oil supplies in 1994.

The gross national product fell by 40% and 54,000 people left the country, but those who stayed were committed and ready to face anything together. The population was strong and unified, but hungry. The ration cards issued to every citizen struggled to supply basics, so people came together at the grassroots level to decide on strategies to solve the problem.

It was necessary to reinvent themselves, including changes to the constitution, which opened the country to tourism, allowed self-employment schemes and joint ventures.

The obvious answer to food shortages was for Cubans to grow their own, but the challenge was to switch from producing food for cash to growing the type of food which could sustain 11 million people, with some left over for export, while maintaining a dignified form of life for all Cuban citizens.

This was not going to be possible using the methods they had relied upon. It required a radical change in approach, from a highly mechanised rural form of agriculture, to a varied form, which could incorporate both the rural and urban sectors. Despite Cuba having 12% of all the scientists in Latin America, 87 research centres and 57 universities, it was still a monumental challenge.

The best answer was a 'hippy' style of agriculture, which wouldn't rely on petrol or machinery, with no time or money for a transition, and on a scale never before seen on the planet. The government began three levels of agrarian reforms. Its first move was to redistribute 100% of the arable land – 14% to small farmers, with a maximum farm size of 27 hectares.

With low-tech systems, including the use of oxen, these farmers manage to produce 65% of the nation's food resources, making them four times more productive per acre per person than any other form of agriculture in Latin America. Nine to ten per cent of the land has been used to form farming co-operatives, with small farmers joining their lands and sharing the profits as equal partners.

The final 75% of the land was deemed communal land, which meant that it could be used, but not owned. People were urged to return from the cities to work the land, transforming fields previously devoted to coffee and tobacco into food crops and fruit orchards.

With the lack of oil for kerosene, the common form of cooking fuel before the crisis, the need for wood as fuel became urgent. This necessitated forestry farm planting and the creation of biological corridors, which were able to increase the area of forests by 25%, a figure unmatched by any other country in the world.

Limited access to pesticides in recent years has led to farming using organic methods, with a reliance on permaculture techniques of companion planting and organic fertilisers. Contrary to organic methods used in the California Valley, built on exploiting Mexican labour and costing 4 to 5 times more than conventional products, Cuban organic farming is based on a different mindset. It is done on a small scale, with the strong sense of community belonging and social fairness that defines the Cuban approach to nationhood.

Food is produced, not for the market, but for each other. Advice was sought by agronomists from the elderly farmers who had used these methods before the introduction of mechanical and chemical support. The community collectively built knowledge and the ethical values that create culture, in the firm belief that every stakeholder in society has something to contribute to it.

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D. Harold
Wavell Heights 4012

Dear Mr Rudd

I am 86 years old and a life member of the ALP. I am also a long-time member of the Australian Fabian Society. I read a recent article in the *Weekend Australian*, which said that you were following in Mr Hawke's footsteps. I won't dispute that because you are both squarely in the Zionist camp.

Whilst I applaud you for your open apology to the Indigenous people of Australia, I can't reconcile that with your then congratulating the Zionists on the 60th anniversary of their having removed practically all the indigenous people of Palestine from their homeland.

Of all the books, magazines, papers, etc., I have read over the years on the Israel/Palestine topic (and there have been many) the one that impresses me most is a 40-page booklet published by Jews for Justice, Berkeley CA. It contains 15 main sections; well over 100 subsections with quotes/excerpts from numerous sources including Albert Einstein, Jimmy Carter, Ilan Pappé, Naomi Chasan (deputy speaker of Knesset), Noam Chomsky, David Hirst, Ben-Gurion, Edward Said, Hanan Ashrawi (do you remember the performance of Lucy Turnbull?), and Professor Norman Finkelstein. I am enclosing just a few pages from the booklet. In particular, I have highlighted p.21 'Shamir proposes an alliance with the Nazis'. In Robert Pullan's book about Bob Hawke there is a chapter headed 'The Passionate Zionist' in which he refers to Bob's verbal attacks on the late Bill Hartley. On page 154 I read that Hartley said that during WWII, international Zionism collaborated with the Nazis. This is corroborated by Jews for Justice: Will you take time to read it? I doubt it!

According to the book *Bible and Sword* (written by a Jewish lady), the first Zionist leader (Herzl) tried to get help from the German Kaiser, the Ottoman Sultan, as well as England for the Palestine Project. Herzl's successor, Weizemann, conjured the Balfour Declaration from the British Foreign Secretary on 21/11/17 (during WWI, which didn't end until 11/11/18). The Zionists, a minority group within the Jewish population, must have known – should have known – that it would put the German people offside. Is Hollywood to some extent run by Zionists? – Marion Brando said something like that. As far as I know, no mainstream films have ever been shown about atrocities/massacres carried out by Zionists against Palestinians in 1948 when over 700,000 were forced out of their homes. To rectify any lack of knowledge on your part of this bit of history, Google www.deirvassin.org/SAGA.html by an American chap, Daniel McGowan (I have relatives by that name).

Of course, you are not on your own. Late News! Did you notice that Obama, when claiming victory over Hillary, was on a stage supplied by AIPAC and he promised to be right on side with Israel. I have an article titled 'Israeli PAC's Pernicious and Subversive Influence', which was

first published in US Farm News Sept/Oct 1991. PAC stands for Political Action Committee – the name of the umbrella organisation is American-Israel Public Affairs Committee. This is the Zionist Lobbying Organisation feared by the members of Congress because of its ability to defeat members who have strayed off the pro-Israel reservation. Many Yank journalists, etc., were puzzled as to why Obama was able to beat Hillary. Do you think AIPAC may explain it all?

I happen to subscribe to *The Beacon*, which is a monthly journal printed by a Melbourne church with NO DOGMA. Being a humanist, it suits me fine. Ain't it a shame that Bob Hawke didn't get involved with those people rather than Zionists? It's not too late!

It is tougher for you, Kevin, because you don't have a bank or an airline to sell off. Robert Hawke on the other hand did. In July of 1991, approximately 30% of the shares in 'The People's Bank' were sold. He started the rot and Paul Keating, when he became prime minister, sold the rest of it. An article in the *Weekend Australian* of 13 & 14/5/95 said that by 1987, Bob Hawke had targeted the Commonwealth Bank as being among the government assets he was seeking to privatise. The article went on to mention opposition from some of his colleagues including Bill Hayden who was still voicing opposition against any sale in 1988. If Bill had become prime minister we may still own our bank. In a tribute to the late John Button, the *Australian Fabian News* relates that he (Button) was instrumental in securing Labor's 1983 election win when he persuaded his great friend, Bill Hayden, to relinquish the leadership to Bob Hawke on the eve of the 1983 election. Interesting, compared with Bill's comments that a drover's dog could win that election. I wonder if Zionism may have been a factor – they may have done well with CBA shares! I was definitely sucked in by Bob Hawke in those days. I recall taking a then very young granddaughter to one of your electioneering speeches and found later that she had chalked on my toolbox in the car 'Pop luvs Bob Horke'. Now she could write 'Pop loathes Bob Hawke'.

I intend to stay in the ALP unless I am dishonourably discharged (I'll fight it) but I am going to push for a new leader as PM. I would, first up, support any federal member who didn't agree with your motion congratulating Israel on its 60th anniversary. It would be a bonus to get a Jew who dislikes Zionists as much as I do. The Zionists call such people 'self-hating Jews'. Read *My Israel Question* by Antony Loewenstein – a really top-notch young Aussie Jew or Jewish Aussie.

Yours truly,
Doug Harold

Copies to
Mr Robert Hawke - Former prime minister of Australia
State Secretary of ALP in Queensland
State Secretary of ALP in New South Wales
State Secretary of ALP in Victoria
State Secretary of ALP in South Australia
State Secretary of ALP in Western Australia
State Secretary of ALP in Tasmania
State Secretary of ALP in NT
State Secretary of ALP in ACT
Australian Fabian Society *The Beacon* magazine

If ever a true history of Iraq is written in school history books for future generations, the teacher could use it to count the lies and the war crimes.

The Tragedy of Iraq

by Pauline Mitchell

Secretary of the Campaign for International Co-operation and Disarmament

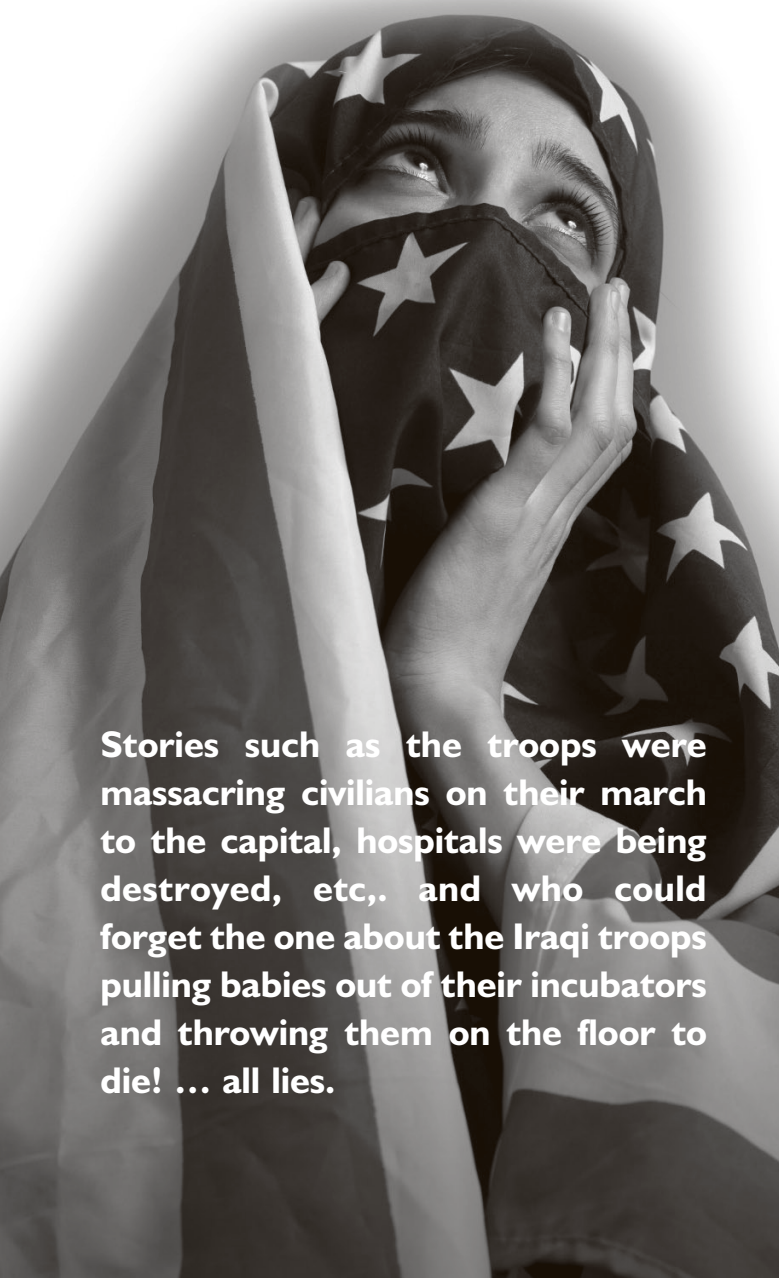
Address delivered at the Unitarian Church on the 8th June 2008.

Relations between the Western powers and Iraq had been strained since the Ba'ath Socialist Party came to power in 1968, and a few years after that the government managed to oust the British and United States oil monopolies and nationalise the oil for Iraq. The West, though, never gave up hope of getting it back.

The first big lie was told in 1991 when President of the United States, George Bush senior, said that Iraq had invaded Kuwait. At first glance that was true, but the lead up to that invasion tells a different story. The big Ramalia oil field straddles the border between Kuwait and Iraq and Kuwait had been drilling along-wise into the Iraqi field and stealing Iraq's oil. Iraq asked Kuwait to stop this practice but they did not and the Iraqi government went to the United States embassy in Iraq and told them that they might have to use force and what would the United States do? The then United States Ambassador, April Glaspie, said that the US was not concerned as it was an internal problem and they would not interfere.

So the Iraqi troops did go into Kuwait, they made rapid progress and did not meet with much resistance because the Kuwaiti rulers were not popular with their own people. Meanwhile, back in the United States, the propaganda machines were allowed free rein to demonise the Iraqi government and its troops. Stories such as the troops were massacring civilians on their march to the capital, hospitals were being destroyed, etc., and who could forget the one about the Iraqi troops pulling babies out of their incubators and throwing them on the floor to die! ... all lies. Then came the Iraqi retreat from Kuwait and the 'turkey shoot' with US helicopters firing on the retreating troops ... a war crime. And how would you class the fact of the United States bulldozing and burying Iraqi troops alive in their trenches ... an atrocity?

The first Bush administration's invasion of Iraq commenced on the 16th January 1991 and lasted until 1st March 1991 – about 43 days. During that 'Shock and Awe' assault the United States unleashed 88,500 tons of bombs in 110,000 air raids, deliberately targeting and destroying all civilian support systems, water storage, pumping stations, food production and processing facilities etc, a war crime. They also used cluster bombs and weapons with depleted uranium. There were the oil wells too! There were a lot of pictures taken of the burning oil wells near the Kuwaiti border – Iraqis did this in revenge said the US



Stories such as the troops were massacring civilians on their march to the capital, hospitals were being destroyed, etc., and who could forget the one about the Iraqi troops pulling babies out of their incubators and throwing them on the floor to die! ... all lies.

administration – but did they? Western oil experts said that it was not easy to fire an oil well; it would take well-placed chemical and incendiary bombs to do this. The United States had stocks of napalm canisters in Iraq at an airbase, and in fact, I'm pretty sure that a pilot came forward some months after that war and confirmed that it was the US because he was one of the pilots.

Then in 1991, directly after the 'Shock and Awe' campaign, the United Nations Security Council placed sanctions on Iraq. But Bush Snr also issued another authorisation saying that the sanctions would not be lifted until the removal of Saddam Hussein.

The sanctions were in place for 12 years, everything was restricted, especially anything that had a 'dual purpose', which was nearly everything. The 'Shock and Awe' raids on Baghdad had smashed the infrastructure so rebuilding and repairing were extremely difficult, agriculture suffered because fertiliser was classed as 'dual purpose' as it could have been used for bombs. Medical supplies were restricted because some medicines could be used in chemical weapons. A shipment of children's immunisations from Britain was stopped because it was classed as 'dual purpose'; even pencils for school children were classed as 'dual purpose' because of the lead in them! These were the most savage sanctions ever put on a country and one of the sanction inspectors resigned over them. Nevertheless, several times the United Nations inspectors commented on the fair handling and distribution of these restricted supplies by the Iraqi government. By the 10th anniversary, John Pilger reported that ½ million children had died as a direct result of the sanctions, and who could forget the words of the Clinton administration's secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, when she was told that 5,000 Iraqi children were dying each month because of the sanctions, and her reply was 'We think the price is worth it!' Also, during these sanctions, illegal 'No fly zones' were put in place by the United States and Britain so they controlled the skies over most of Iraq and things that they didn't like were fired on. But all this did not dislodge Saddam Hussein.

In 1998, the Republican-controlled Congress passed the 'Iraqi Liberation Act' which virtually called for the military overthrow of Saddam Hussein and in 1999 when the Clinton administration hadn't acted on it, an open letter was sent to him condemning him for not implementing it. The letter was signed by such war hawks as Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Armitage and others. Then in the year 2000 something happened that struck fear into United States capitalism – Saddam Hussein changed to the Euro currency to sell Iraq's oil.

In the election year of 2000, the removal of Saddam Hussein was a plank in George Bush Jnr's campaign for president. George Bush Jnr won the election, but not by fair means. It was contested for a long time because there were the electronic failures and malfunctions in the voting system, there were missing ballot boxes, closed voting booths and intimidation at others. So the second Bush regime started under a cloud and in the first year, its approval rating sank to an all-time low.

Then came the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on the 11th September 2001 and everything changed. A frightened and grieving people looked to

the President for reassurance and protection, and President Bush gave them that reassurance; he branded the Muslims as terrorists, putting in place harsh anti-terrorist laws and pinpointing Afghanistan and al Qaeda, then invading Afghanistan.

But six days after that attack in New York, President Bush had signed a top-secret document directing the Pentagon to start planning for an invasion of Iraq. So the rumour mill began to work overtime again – the terrorist organisation of al Qaeda was also in Iraq, it said – and without doubt Iraq had weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; one weapon inspector resigned over these US lies. The Bush administration said that Iraq just kept hiding them. In those circumstances, how can anyone prove that they haven't got something? Then, of course, we had those wise words from Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld who said that 'the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence'!

All this time the United States troops were building up in Kuwait, the United States tried to get the UN Security Council to support an attack on Iraq but were not successful because it violated the United Nations Charter ... so the US cobbled together the 'Coalition of the Willing', and in March 2003 the United States attacked that already crippled country.

Matt Howard, a United States soldier who had taken part in that invasion, toured Australia a couple of years ago speaking of his experiences in those first few weeks. He told about military convoys running over children and others in their path because they were ordered not to stop for anything on their way to Baghdad. He also told of the children along the roadside who begged for food, and he actually threw them some food from the supplies he had, but he was severely reprimanded by his superior who said that they were soldiers and were not there to hand out humanitarian rations. When he got to camp he asked the commander what to do with the other rations and was told to 'bury them with the other trash'. He also told of a new weapon where the bullet did not have to hit its target to cause damage.

This account by Matt Howard and all the other soldiers who took part in this invasion have now become extremely valuable. At the beginning of last month it was admitted by the White House that no tapes or emails of the period between March 1st 2003 to May 22nd 2003 have been kept, that is, the weeks leading up to President Bush's decision to invade and for the first two months of the war unleashed on a country that had not attacked the United States and had no weapons of mass destruction – another war crime. It is estimated that more than 10 million emails are missing or have been deleted and a huge piece of this critical history has been lost.

Also to protect itself, the US administration only allowed journalists in who were 'embedded' with the United States forces and it was hazardous to be an independent reporter. The International Federation of Journalists has called for an enquiry into the shelling of a Baghdad hotel in April 2003, which killed two foreign journalists the day before Baghdad fell, as evidence shows that it was no accident. Iraq remains the most dangerous country to report from; up to last year 232 journalists had been killed since the invasion of 2003.

The invasion of Iraq was first of all to find the weapons of mass destruction, but then it changed to toppling Saddam Hussein and we remember the many pictures of a jubilant crowd pulling down Saddam Hussein's statue which was supposed to indicate to us that the people wanted it – but it came out later that it was what we would call a 'rent-a-crowd'. When the United States troops entered Baghdad, the first thing they did was to put guards around the oil ministry; other ministries were left to be looted or destroyed. So there are no records, personal or national, but as well as destroying a nation's records, the US succeeded in destroying world history too.

Known as the 'Cradle of Civilisation', the famous Iraqi National Museum was one of the first looted, while the US troops looked on. It is estimated that over 15,000 museum pieces, ranging from statues to clay tablets were stolen or smashed. Some pieces have been recovered but most will never be recovered. But what will never recover are the significant archaeological ruins dating back to 2500 years BC., near the ancient city of Babylon. Damage to historical records is ongoing. Babylon is the site of a helicopter landing zone and layers of earth were removed so the destruction of that legendary city is complete. But that is not the only one; all across southern Iraq there has been looting of Mesopotamia's archaeological sites and the ancient city of Ur, the site of another Babylonian city, was bulldozed and has been completely obliterated.

the death and injury of more than 4,000 civilians after the fighting ended. Cluster bombs have been used again in Baghdad and the cities of Basra, Najav, Kerballa and Hilla. Using cluster bombs in civilian areas is also a violation of the Geneva Conventions. Robert Fisk, an independent journalist, described what he found in the wards of the Hilla teaching hospital and he said that what he found was proof that something illegal, something quite outside the Geneva Conventions occurred in the villages around the city once known as Babylon.

Prior to the US invasions, Iraq enjoyed the highest living standards in the Middle East. It was a socialist economy and the oil money was used for people's needs. Iraqi doctors were among the most sophisticated and highly trained, hospitals and pharmacies had the latest equipment and were well stocked, patients came from other countries for treatment. Education was the same – Iraq was known for its high standards of education and its quality universities, all these things were free to the Iraqi population. Farmers were guaranteed an income because the government bought most of their produce, one shop owner said that even under the sanctions he and his family were doing well but now he has been forced to sell everything and eventually the family had to flee altogether to escape the violence and now they are poverty stricken. Farmers now have been forced off their land because of the difficulty in breaking into overseas markets and plus the cheap produce that comes in with the event of global trade and the 'free market'. Iraq

THERE ARE NOW 2.4 MILLION DISPLACED PEOPLE IN IRAQ, REFUGEES WITHIN THEIR OWN COUNTRY

In November 2004, the US launched a major attack on the city of Fallujah. First there was an intense bombing campaign intended to drive out all the women and children; all the males aged between 15 and 45 years who attempted to flee were turned back. Terrible stories emerged from eyewitnesses and independent journalists who risked their lives to report on this. They reported that hospitals were emptied and patients and hospital employees forced outside to sit or lie on the floor and troops tied their hands behind their backs. This is a violation of the Geneva Conventions that says that medical facilities should not be attacked in any circumstances. When some residents started to go back to Fallujah under tight military surveillance, they found a desolate world, no power, no running water, the smell of corpses and lakes of sewage – Fallujah had been a modern city of ¼ million people.

Matt Howard's mention of new weapons could partially explain another mystery. When people started to return to Fallujah there were many eyewitness reports of cranes, bulldozers and trucks taking away tons of soil – this was never explained. The United States and British troops in Iraq breached international law by depriving civilians of food and water in Fallujah and other cities ... this was to encourage the residents to flee before the assaults began, said the US led forces, but using these things as a weapon of war on a civilian population is another breach of the Geneva Conventions and a war crime.

Cluster bombs were used extensively in the 1991 war on Iraq and Human Rights Watch say they are to blame for

also enjoyed a secular society where everyone helped and respected each other, but now the constitution of 2005 separates people along religious lines. Violence and terror stalk the streets, hospitals are ruined and doctors often have to operate without drugs. Once a modern country, third world decay is now everywhere, garbage chokes the streets and there is little clean water, sewage leaks into the streets and the streets themselves, once paved, have now been ploughed up by tanks and other military vehicles, after more than five years of war. The capital, Baghdad, receives less than 4 hours of electricity a day and outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and polio have increased and this is besides the increase in cancers caused by the use of depleted uranium weapons.

There are now 2.4 million displaced people in Iraq, refugees within their own country, and tens of thousands are homeless in Baghdad, 2 million more Iraqis have fled to neighbouring countries and a million have been killed. Is it any wonder there are suicide bombers? Women who have lost their husbands and children and homes can now only think of revenge and to become suicide bombers; teenagers who have lost their parents and have no future want to become suicide bombers. Then there are the photos from that prison that shocked the world, but the prison is still there and torture is still rampant, and there are many prisons in Iraq.

What the US has done to Iraq is appalling but their own nation has not escaped unscathed. At least 300,000 troops suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or depression, another 300,000 have sustained traumatic brain injury

and there is an extremely high suicide rate among veterans. When the soldiers do come home, hospital care is inadequate and in many cases non-existent, and many vets are now homeless. Families have broken up and there is an extremely high rate of divorce. Hundreds of military veterans who testified at the Winter Soldier 2008 hearings held in March 13–16, 2008 and organised by the Veterans Against the War told of the systematic beatings, gaolings, torture, humiliation and killing of civilians, which was a part of the standard military operations. So far there have been more than 4,000 American deaths in combat. Then there is the corporate pillaging and the corruption and the military contractors who are not answerable to anyone; they earn a very high wage but also have a very high death rate.

Every United States administration has had its wars, but the administrations of the Bush family have destroyed the whole nation of Iraq and its people and have destroyed any respect that the US had. The present Bush administration has become known for its flouting of all international laws and treaties and changing policy to suit its own imperialism.

The world continues to be appalled at the long and ongoing slaughter of a people and the destruction of a nation which was no threat to anyone, and it is only when we put it all together do we realise the absolute enormity of the crime.

In 1946, after the 2nd World War, the Nuremberg judges ruled that:

‘To initiate a war of aggression ... is not only an international crime – it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole’.

Note: A few days after this address, Sky News reported that ‘Families in the Iraq city of Fallujah are calling for an independent investigation into the rise in the number of newborn children suffering from deformities. They’ve raised concerns about weapons used by US forces in 2004.’

CUBA SOLVES FUEL CRISIS continued from page 4

Organic fertilisers were used to build up the soil and transform the landscape. However, when the spraying of pesticides was stopped, damage to food crops was initially severe, which necessitated the cultivation and release of native predators to restore the natural balance. Cuba now boasts the use of less than 1,000 tons of pesticide for 6 million hectares and is 86% organic.

Urban agriculture, both in cities and on the fringes, is seen as a vital part of the food production chain. There is a strong belief that the closer to the city food is produced, the more efficient is its distribution and the more human the city becomes as people are more closely involved in their own food production.

The new face of Cuban urban agriculture is the intensive garden known as a ‘hydroponico’, a hydroponic system that replaces the substrata requiring expensive nutrient solutions with high-yielding compost to produce fresh vegetables all year round at a rate of 20 kg per square metre. The industry employs 250,000 people, making 4 to 5 times the minimum wage, and provides more than 70% of the vegetable needs of Havana, a city of over 2 million people.

Allotments have become the basic form of community food production, but these are not the kind of allotments seen in urban England. In Cuban allotments, people think together, plant together, work together, eat together and share the harvest according to the number of hours they have worked in the allotment.

Patios – any area less than 800 square metres, including rooftops and balconies – have become a target for permaculture methods to convert idle urban spaces into places of food production using the available resources. Any small space is seen as a potential food production area, and training is given in smart design to maximise yield.

This is seen as not only an opportunity for food security, but also a way to build health through exercise, and cultural strength through self-sufficiency and community involvement. Even when the economy improved, people continued to grow their food because they liked the sense of community it afforded them.

Perez stressed that Cuba is not unique. The lessons in peak oil management practised there can be applied in any community anywhere, but there is no one-way of doing things. Every community must respond according to their own culture, resisting the homogenisation of approach that has put the planet under such stress.

Sustainability is perhaps a utopian ideal, but Cuba is heading towards it while most of the rest of the planet is going in the other direction. Roberto Perez reminded us that another way of thinking and a better future is possible, and Cuba is proud to be on that pathway, leading the way for the world. Viva Cuba!

Sue Shepherd

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Beacon Editors' note: The editor note referred to below is from the editor of *Swans* magazine, where the original article from Mr Schrei attacking Michael Parenti appeared.

Michael Parenti responds:

To the Editor:

In his passion for old feudal Tibet, Schrei repeatedly resorts to misrepresentations and slurs.

I never said the situation in Tibet was "so rosy" after the overthrow of the feudal system, and even pointed to abuses by the Chinese.

Schrei writes that my "use of state-controlled information as a prime source calls into question not only the credibility of the article but also Parenti's credibility as a historian." But throughout my article I used Western sources almost exclusively, and I also used reports by the Free Tibet people regarding Chinese mistreatment of Tibetans. Schrei's misrepresentation of my sources calls into question his credibility as a critic.

I did not confuse the 5th and 6th DLs with the 1st and 2nd. It depends on how you want to count them. The High Lama who first declared himself the Dalai Lama was the fifth High Lama. If you want to retroactively declare the earlier four High Lamas as Dalai Lamas also, that's okay with me. Some people do and some don't.

The peasants did not migrate from feudal Tibet for the same reason they could hardly move from one village to another. They were often taxed, beaten, intimidated, hunted down by the landlord's thugs when they did flee, then hamstrung, mutilated, etc.

Too bad a spiritual fellow like Schrei must repeatedly stoop to ad hominem snideness and personal attacks such as "The fanbase that Parenti seems to increasingly pander to ..." I never pander to any fan base on any issue. Taking on the religious true believers of old Tibet is hardly the work of someone pandering for favor, as witnessed by the torrent of fulminations that pour forth from people like Schrei.

All the letters that have come to *Swans* complaining about my article on Tibet, including Schrei's, have four things in common:

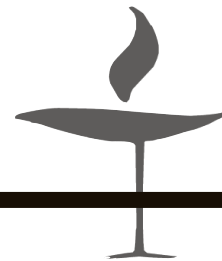
- (1) They give proof that the romanticized belief in Shangri-La is alive and well.
- (2) They never explain the immense accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few lords and lamas in old Tibet, an otherwise simple and poor agricultural land.
- (3) They accuse me of supporting the Chinese occupation of Tibet when in fact what I do is criticize the earlier feudal theocratic rule – while actually offering criticisms of the Chinese occupation.
- (4) They have not a word to say about the active alliance of the Tibetan ruling class with international reactionary elements including the CIA.

Michael Parenti

Oakland, California, USA – 23 July 2003

[Ed. note: Three other letters regarding Michael Parenti's article were published in the July 21 issue of *Swans*. Mr Schrei refers to one of these letters, that of Nima Dorjee, in his last paragraph. Mr Schrei should note that this letter had to be edited for some of its deeply demeaning content, though the unedited version was forwarded to Michael Parenti. Ad hominem attacks on someone's character tend to weaken one's argumentation, not strengthen it!]

from our readers



Dear Editors and Unitarians

After 30 years of reading many inspiring articles in our *Beacon* magazine, it is with bitter disappointment that I am writing this joint letter with my son, Ivan who is a monk of the Buddhist Tibetan tradition.

It is our view that the two articles by Dr Michael Parenti (May & June *Beacon* issues) and the May editorial, were profoundly inaccurate on the many historical and political aspects of the Tibet issues at stake. Parenti's writing was typical 'straw-man' argument, as only the most superficially informed would believe the myth of a Tibetan Shangri-La, as portrayed by his articles. The relevant issue is not about whether Tibet was a backward feudal state, or whether the Dalai Lama has received funding from the CIA or the USA Congress, but about self-determination for the Tibetan people in the face of the colonial ambitions of an autocratic capitalist China.

Although Dr Parenti may be an internationally known author and lecturer (as the editors are at pains to point out) that doesn't make him well informed on these issues.

As you know, Brian Walters SC and Deputy Chairman of Liberty Victoria, has prepared a detailed reply to the Parenti articles but, sadly, the Editorial Board has decided not to publish his article. Failing that we would like to suggest to *Beacon* readers that they make up their own minds by reading an article at the website <<http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2008/03/20/18487287.php?printable=true>>

We appeal to fellow Unitarians and fellow seekers of the truth, please read what others have to say and support the Tibetan people's right to self-determination, just as we support the rights of Indigenous Australians, even in the face of the portrayal of their culture as primitive and backward in the conservative media.

Yours sincerely

**Two saddened and disappointed Beacon readers,
Peter and Ivan Milton**

Ed Note: A response from Michael Parenti to the above article mentioned in the link in this letter is shown on page 10.

Dear folks

It was great to find a friend reading a recent copy of *The Beacon* and I immediately asked her to get a copy sent to me. It was like re-discovering an old friend, as I subscribed for some years in the late '60s – early '70s. At that time my family and I were involved in the Vietnam war protest marches, etc., and *The Beacon* truly was a beacon of light at a time when speaking up against Australia's involvement in Vietnam would mean you wore the 'COMMO' label.

Now many years later, having reared a family, quietly I find myself once more impassioned to work for peace. I now belong to WILPF (Qld Branch Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) an organisation which recently celebrated a 93rd birthday, having been formed in THE HAGUE in May 1915, just one month after the Gallipoli landing.

I now look forward to a renewed acquaintance with *The Beacon* and particularly look forward to the second part of the TIBET article. On the back are two names and addresses. These people, if not already subscribers, may be interested if you'd like to send complimentary copies.

Yours in peace.

J. Collins Qld

Dear Editors

I have just read the letter from Lev Lafayette and the editor's note on Tibet in your June edition.

First of all, I congratulate you on the two articles by Dr Michael Parenti i.e. your printing of them. I had already read the articles on the internet. Tibet is a popular if mistaken cause by those with no knowledge of the country, either its history or its present-day situation. I would like to add a little more information. The ravages of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet were carried out, almost exclusively, by Tibetan mobs; the CIA has had a substantial involvement in stirring up anti-Chinese troubles in Tibet since the 1950s; religion is supported in Tibet as a handy adjunct to capitalism; the victims in the recent protests were Han Chinese.

Another point of interest: Tibet, because of its location and importance will be dominated, as is so for all small nations, by one great power or another. The strategic importance of Tibet makes it vital to the Asian region, which accounts for Western interest. Should US imperialists continue the 'Great Game' of the British, French and Russians in the late 19th century, or is it more reasonable for China to continue its more than 1000-year-old association?

I contribute to *The Beacon* because it seeks the truth. Unfortunately, many people cannot accept the truth if it conflicts with their ideological stance. In essence, they do not seek the truth and therefore, do not serve humanity.

Yours sincerely

J. Michie NSW

Dear Peter

The address by Pauline Mitchell of the Campaign for International Cooperation and Disarmament on the continuing tragedy in Iraq, broadcast recently in the Unitarian Half Hour on 3CR Community Radio, was poignant and timely for the current election campaign in the United States of America. She accused the present US Administration of appalling war crimes against the Iraqi people, as judged by the Geneva Conventions on conduct in war.

Her case was based on an array of horrifying facts. These included the pre-emptive nature of the military invasion justified through lies, the estimated more than one million civilian and military deaths, the 4 million refugees within and outside Iraq, the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Americans crippled physically and/or mentally for life, the torture of political prisoners, the plundering of priceless cultural heritage items, the destruction and neglect of vital infrastructure and non-delivery of essential services, the impoverishment of the people and the daily stressful security nightmares throughout the country.

Regrettably, the principal co-conspirators in this war, namely the current Italian prime minister and the now deposed prime ministers of Spain, Britain and Australia, were virtually overlooked. These individuals, and their vocal supporters, gave blind ideological and military support to the US actions. Invariably, this occurred in opposition to the expressed appeals by the clear majority of their constituents, and of those in many other countries including France, Germany and New Zealand, to solve alleged outstanding issues with Iraq through genuine diplomatic efforts by the United Nations.

Had the people's voices been heeded, as they should have been in true democracies, the Iraqi tragedy could have been avoided, as unilateral military action by the US would have been inconceivable. Sadly, it is now up to new political leadership in the US and elsewhere to spend much time, effort and resources on repairing the badly tarnished image of the Western democracies as honest brokers in reducing the scourge of poverty and promoting the ideals of democracy, justice and freedom in Iraq and elsewhere in our troubled world.

Fred and Meredith Neumann, Vic

Dear Beacon

Thank you for your never-ending work.

R. Harvey Vic

Dear Marion

The Beacon always has a good argument.

H. Soerink WA

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The Tragedy of Iraq

Beacon Editorial Board:

Peter Abrehart

Marion Harper

Jack Woodhams

Julie Stafford

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