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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

## PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT – PEDDLING MYTHOLOGIES

EDITORIAL

It was Indian novelist Arundhati Roy, who won the Booker Prize in 1997 for her novel *The God of Small Things*, who used the words ‘perception management’ when describing the moulding of the attitude or mindset of the middle class to the poverty of the vast majority of the population – to ‘sell’ and sanitise the reality that the prosperity of the few is based on the poverty and subjugation of the many.

This same perception management is also apparent in the unfolding intervention(s) in the Middle East: Iraq in the past, Libya recently, Syria at the moment, with Iran in the crosshairs.

The award-winning, internationally syndicated columnist, Eric S Margolis, in describing the Syrian conflict in terms of peddling mythologies said, ‘Syria’s murky, multi-level conflict continues to grow worse. So does public confusion here in the west as the US, British and some European media keep depicting Syria’s civil war as a simple passion play pitting the evil Asad regime in Damascus against mostly unarmed democratic protestors’.

We saw this same one-dimensional, deceptive reporting recently in Libya that was designed to support foreign intervention. It is as incomplete today about Syria as it was in Libya.

The US, Britain, France, and some conservative Arab allies have funded and armed the Syrian rebellion from its start a year ago. In fact, the US has been funding anti-Asad groups since the mid-1990s. Arms and munitions are said to be flowing to Syria’s rebels through Jordan and Lebanon. Extreme rightwing groups in Lebanon, funded by Western and Arab powers and Israel, are playing a key role in infiltrating gunmen and arms into northern Syria.

The Sunni Muslim Brotherhood has once again risen against the Alawi-dominated regime in Damascus. In 1982 Margolis was outside the Syrian city of Hama when government forces crushed a Brotherhood uprising. Recently small numbers of al-Qaida veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan have entered Syria and are using car bombs to try to destabilise the government. Current al-Qaida leader, Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri, has called for all-out war against the Asad regime.

Interestingly, the US, France and Britain now find themselves in bed with the very jihadist forces they profess to abhor – but of course whom they were happy to use in Afghanistan in the 1980s and lately in Libya.

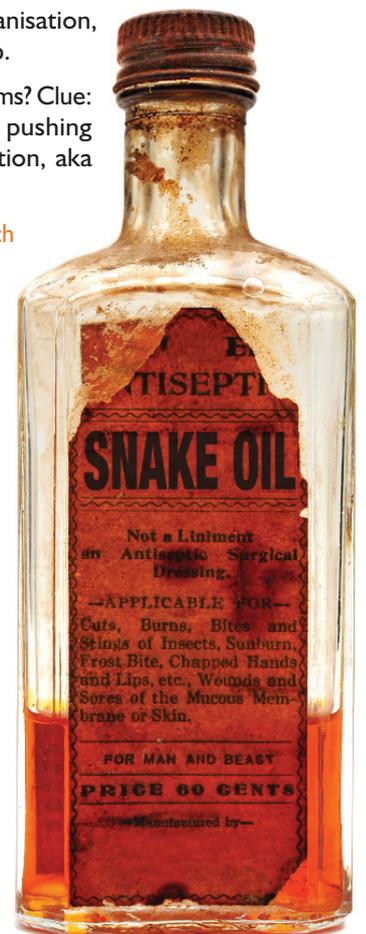
It is not too hard to connect the dots, even with the reporting from mainstream media. The fact that Saudi Arabia is shipping arms to foreign fighters and Syrian rebels operating out of Jordan was reported in *The Australian* as ‘Saudi military equipment is on its way to Jordan to arm the Free Syrian Army’, quoting an Arab diplomat. Of course other mainstream reports point to the fact that the ‘Free Syrian Army’ is led not by Syrians but by NATO-backed Libyan militants from the US State Department-listed terrorist organisation, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

And the source of Saudi Arabian arms? Clue: check those countries that are pushing the loudest for military intervention, aka humanitarian intervention.

‘Meanwhile, drawn out disputes which don’t provide for exciting new footage and complex ones which defy the 30-second news grab go largely ignored in the collective Western consciousness’.

So said Henry Pill, writing in *New Matilda* about the Kony 2012 campaign, who went on to say that ‘the ease by which millions can be so easily manipulated towards picking a side in matters of life and death ask real questions about the cruelty, or at least the credulity, of our age’.

We might add that the aim to have a ‘collective western consciousness’ is all about manipulation of information and ideas. We finish where we began; Arundhati Roy’s analysis is spot on. ■



# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2012

by *Dr Vera Butler*

**O**n International Women's Day 2003 the Australian International Studies Association, of which I was secretary, appealed for peace in Iraq:

- We call upon the government of Australia to use its good offices in Washington and London in an effort to prevent military action against Iraq and to allow for the time necessary to continue the work of the UN inspection team in search of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) until completed to their satisfaction.
- We appeal to all people of goodwill to exercise their civic right of protest, including the ballot box at coming elections.
- We call upon the women of Australia to make it known that they object to the deployment of our military forces for purposes other than the defence of Australia's territory. We plead for the preservation of all life on earth.

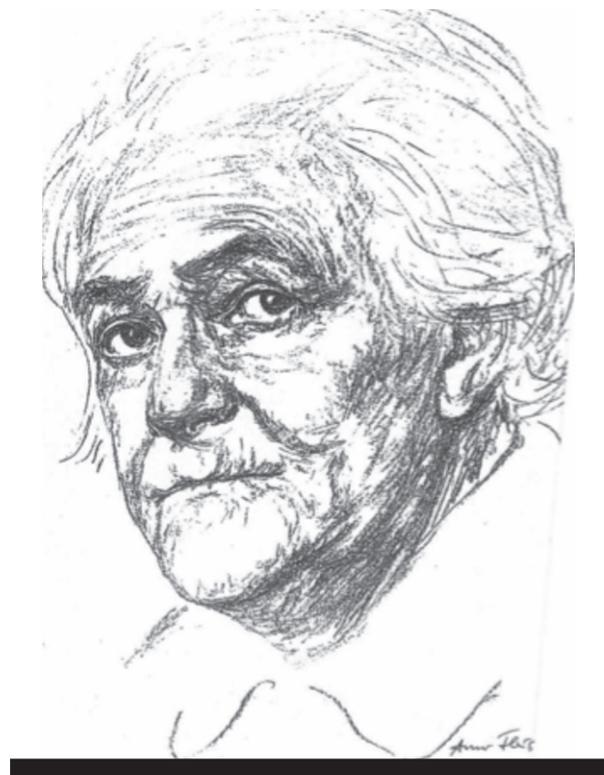
The plea for peace went unheeded. In Iraq and Afghanistan hundreds of thousands of lives were lost since, both by the aggressors and their hapless victims.

Today the world faces new, explosive conflict points. Israel, a nuclear power and armed with American lethal bunker bombs, is rearing to attack Iran; Turkey, Jordan, and Gulf Arabs are banding together against multi-religious Syria on the new pretext that the country harbours chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction (heard this one before?); in Libya, 'liberated' by NATO's French and British bombers, the Benghazi mob is desecrating Allied war graves from World War II. A 'Ring of Fire' is being laid around China's peripheries, from South Korea and Japan to the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma – and to Australia, turning us into a massive base for US military forces.

No – the world is not a nice, peaceful place to live, to raise children and grandchildren. Will women band together in protest?

So maybe today we should remember those women who gave their lives to the struggle for peace and justice, for a better world, where people could live in peace and dignity.

Let's remember Clara Zetkin, the German socialist and founder of International Women's Day on 8 March 1910 in Copenhagen; let's remember Rosa Luxemburg, assassinated in Berlin 1919, by the para-military 'Freikorps' hitmen. Dolores Ibarruri ('La Passionaria') was one of the Spanish leaders against Franco's fascists. Soviet partisan, Sonya Kosmodemyanskaya, was executed by the Nazis. Young Chinese communist Liu Hulan, was killed by Chiang-Kaishek's soldateska. In 1947, Portuguese farm worker and strike leader, Catarina Eufemia, was killed by a gendarme's bullet to her face. American professor and political activist, Angela Davis, hero of 'the other America', was banished from universities and imprisoned on trumped-up charges ... there are many, many others. ■



CLARA ZETKIN

***There may not be much that we can do, and our voices are often stifled by fear – but like so many women before us, we must go on in the struggle for peace!***

“

*‘Freethinkers are those who are willing to use their minds without prejudice and without fearing to understand things that clash with their customs, privileges, or beliefs. This state of mind is not common, but it is essential for right thinking; where it is absent’.*

**LEO NIKOLAEVICH TOLSTOI (1828–1910)**

*Russian writer source: On Life and Essays on Religion*

Dear friends

I have for some time been deeply troubled by developments in Libya, Syria and Iran. In each case the unpleasantness and even brutality of these three regimes have provided a pretext for policies of intervention, regime change, and even military attack.

This places the peace movement in a difficult situation. To oppose these US-led policies may appear as support for these regimes – which, of course, is not what we would wish to do. The result has been a certain silencing of opposition to great power intervention.

Chandra Muzaffar has been especially critical of the hegemonic thrust of Western policies in this context. While I don't necessarily agree with all aspects of his analysis, or the emphasis he places on certain developments, I think he does provide a perspective which is sorely lacking in our media and public discussion.

Regards

Joe

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## PART ONE

# Iran: the price of resistance

by *Chandra Muzaffar*

European Union foreign ministers have agreed to a full-fledged embargo on all imports of Iranian crude oil. Towards this end, various measures will be adopted gradually from 23rd January to 1st July 2012. In December 2011, the US Congress (with a 100 to 0 vote in the Senate) presented a mandatory sanctions package to President Obama which, starting June 2012, will prohibit any third-country banks and companies from dealing with Iran's Central Bank. Both the EU and US moves, it is alleged, are aimed at pressurising Iran to stop its so-called 'nuclear weapons' program through the emasculation of its oil exports which account for more than 80% of its national revenue.

### Nuclear weapons program

The first question we should ask is: Does Iran have a nuclear weapons program? The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – its mischievous attempt to raise doubts about Iran's nuclear energy program notwithstanding – admits in its November 2011 report that there is no evidence of a nuclear weapons program. Incidentally, every nuclear installation in Iran has been inspected hundreds of times by the IAEA making them the most thoroughly inspected nuclear facilities on earth! Even the US's own classified National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) 2011 – which the well-known investigative journalist, Seymour Hersh, had exposed in May 2011 – states quite clearly that Iran is not producing nuclear weapons and had in fact halted such a program way back in 2003. NIE 2011 in a sense reiterates what is contained in NIE 2007.

Continued on page 10

# DO NOT BE PROVOKED BY BIGOTS

*Here in Australia, as in the rest of the Western world, Muslims and immigrants are being subjected to the same sort of racism and bigotry that the European Jews and Gypsies faced when the last great economic crisis hit that part of the world. Although there are more voices being raised in defence of justice today than there were in the 1930s, there is still a major problem being created.*

One tiny moronic incident serves to illustrate the mindset of many of the bigots in our community. That was the Twitter message sent out by former Test cricketer Rodney Hogg on Australia Day this year. He described how he had put out the Australian flag to celebrate the day 'but I wasn't sure if it would offend Muslims ... so I wrote, "Allah is ..." on it to make sure'. The Union Jack, the British flag in the corner of our national flag was established in 1801 as a sign of unity and inclusion amongst the peoples of Britain, combining the flags of England, Scotland and Ireland. That represents a stage in British history but no longer represents the modern nation of Australia. For it to be used as a symbol of exclusion by the bigots shows its irrelevance.

The 2005 Cronulla riots against 'people of Middle Eastern appearance', when the national flag was used as a cape by racist hooligans without any stand by then Prime Minister Howard, discredited the flag itself. It had become a symbol of white supremacist rhetoric, not of an inclusive democratic community, which is what Australia strives to be.

Australia is facing political instability at present, related to the hung federal parliament, leadership squabbles in the government and a hard-right Liberal Party with a very narrow-minded leader. Should a new government with a pupil of John Howard as prime minister come to office, the Muslim community might face an even more hostile atmosphere.

The European and US economic crisis will impact upon us. The demand in China for our minerals may well decline. We are already seeing how very profitable companies in Australia are sacking workers and employing cheap labour overseas. A government that slashes all spending, as it would under Abbott, would impact upon public employees of all sorts. Economic depression and high unemployment breed resentment and extremism.

## The question is how to deal with such a situation

Hysteria, extremist rhetoric and media-attracting actions from the Muslims serve only the bigots and racists. Just as the book burning by Muslims in Britain after the Rushdie fatwa served the Islamophobes and strengthened feeling against the Muslim community, over-the-top responses will make the right-wing extremists more confident of their righteousness. There will almost certainly be attempts by neo-nazis and their friends to incite disturbances. An emotional response by people not deeply aware of Islamic principles and the functioning of democracy could create disaster.

Islam must serve as our guide in such matters. Oppression is a reality all over the world. All people have a right given by God to be free. Indeed one of the statements that resonated most strongly with me as a new Muslim was that of an Indian scholar who wrote that the purpose of Islam is to evolve a social organisation based on human equality in which people should be neither the slave nor the master of their fellow-beings. However, the means used for working towards such a society are of paramount importance. Speech and behaviour dictated by anger is satanic. We are told: 'The strong man is not the one who is strong in wrestling, but the one who controls himself in anger'. (Sahih Bukhari)

The Quran, describing the behaviour of 'the people of truth' in Al Baqarah 177, says it is 'to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic'. Islam also makes it plain that we must always place central importance upon doing justice: 'Stand out firmly for Allah as witnesses to fair dealing and let not the hatred of others for you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice'. Maida 9

That is advice which we would do well to heed in the days ahead. ■

NEWS

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## PAYPAL ACCOUNT

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*An Occupy Wall Street demonstrator is arrested by New York City police.*

# Brute forces: a year of rough justice

**Nick Harvey**

It's been a bumper year for police brutality. We've seen women mauled by security forces in Egypt, journalists roughed up at the 15M demonstrations in Spain, and teargas canisters fired directly at protesters in Malaysia, to name but a few incidents.

'There's no question that it's part of a global pattern', says Hannah Dee, spokesperson for Defend the Right to Protest. 'Around the world we're seeing growing movements of resistance and discontent against governments which are trying to impose unprecedented authoritarian measures and are resorting to force because they don't have the consent of their populations'.

The Occupy Movement in the US has provided some particularly disturbing examples of police savagery, not least the image from Occupy Seattle of 84-year-old Dorli Rainey being steadied by fellow protesters, her face dripping with milk used to counteract the effects of the pepper spray that officers had directed at her moments earlier. And suddenly people are sitting up and taking notice because the protesters being sprayed, beaten and dragged around by their hair are white-skinned and middle-class.

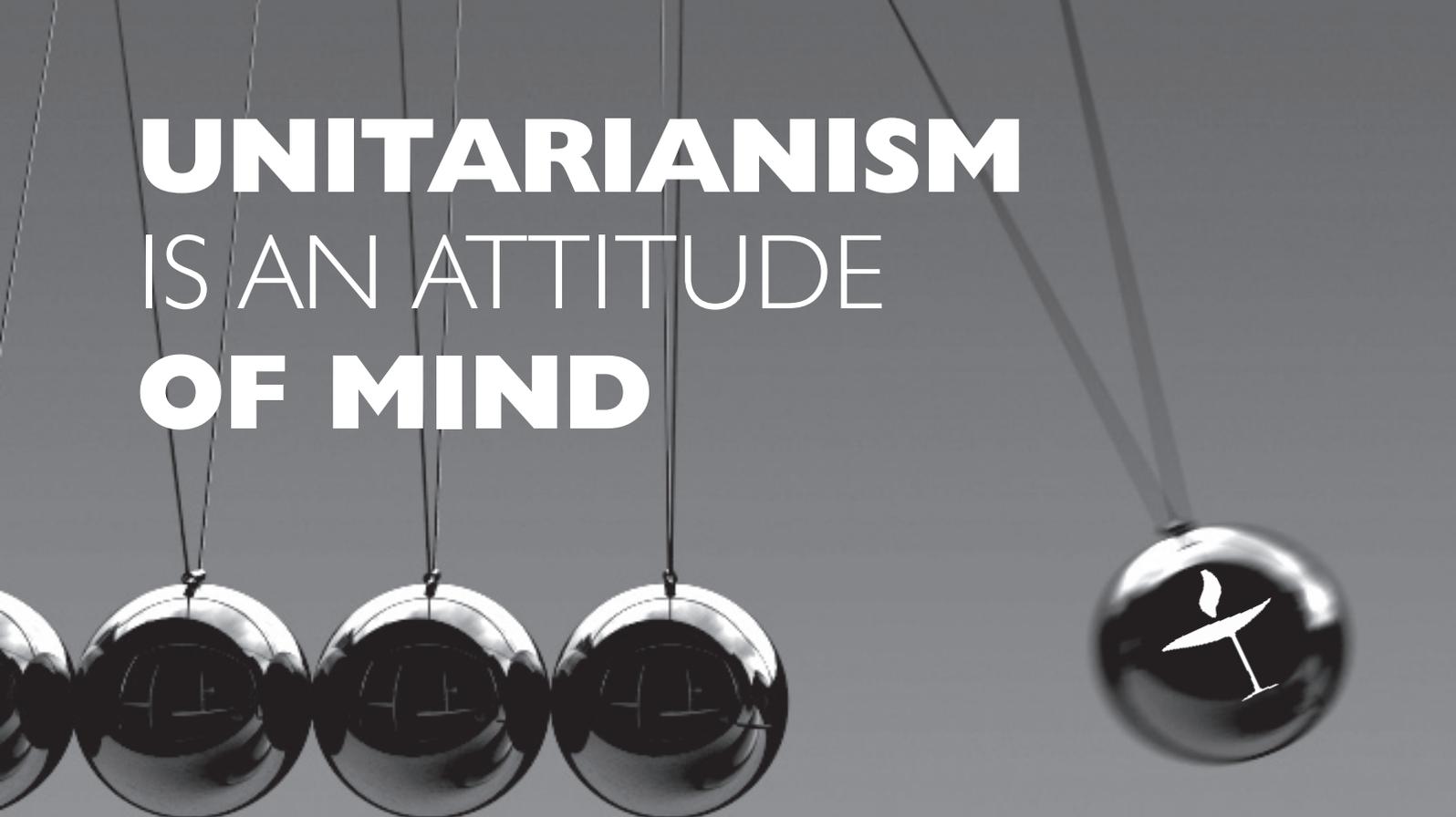
'The treatment of young white people at Occupy opened people's eyes to something that many people with dark skin have known about all along', says Jill Nelson, co-editor of Police Brutality. 'Suddenly it wasn't just racial, you couldn't just say "well, they're black so they must have done something wrong".'

But still a disproportionate number of people on the receiving end of police violence are from ethnic minorities. The cases of 13-year-old Jimmell Cannon, shot eight times in a case of mistaken identity; and Flint Farmer, who was shot and killed when his phone was thought to be a gun, are just two examples of excessive force used by police against black people in the US in the last year. In Britain, the suspicious death of Smiley Culture during a police raid – ironically on 15 March – and the shooting of Mark Duggan – which sparked the London riots in August – also caused widespread outrage.

Deaths in police custody continue to be an issue, with more than 330 occurring since 1998 in the UK alone and not one person being convicted as a result. Maybe this is because eight out of the nine senior investigators at the Independent Police Complaints Commission are ex-police officers themselves.

This lack of accountability is a familiar story worldwide and the fact police can act with impunity is having a significant impact on the ability to protest. 'The level of police repression and murder of innocent civilians and so-called suspects has, intentionally so, had a chilling effect on activism and the power to express opposition', says Jill Nelson. 'If you feel that standing up to the police could get you seriously injured or killed then you'll be much more likely to avoid doing so'. ■

# UNITARIANISM IS AN ATTITUDE OF MIND

A Newton's cradle with five silver balls hanging from thin wires. The rightmost ball is lit, with a white flame and a white candle body. The other four balls are dark and unlit. The background is a dark grey gradient.

The following talk was given  
at the Melbourne Unitarian  
Church by Victor James in  
September 1963.

*Among those sufficiently interested in Unitarianism to know anything about it, or to come to the point of asking questions about it, there is a kind of lurking sense that Unitarianism is a peculiar sect, a sect of peculiar people. Like the man in a shop in Yeovil, Somerset, England who when asked to send some goods to my home, the Unitarian church manse, asked, 'What-er-arian ?' Many people have only the vaguest idea of what Unitarianism means.*

Some seem to think that Unitarians are just another body of people belonging to some queer cult like the 'Holy Rollers' or the 'Snake Charmers', and are surprised to be told that the first Unitarian Church was opened in Poland in 1565, and that it grew directly out of the ferment of thought called the Renaissance, as it was expressed in the Reformation.

Beginning as a protest against Trinitarianism within the general Reformation movement, it developed into an affirmation, the great affirmation of freedom of the individual mind in the search for what was truest. That may seem to be an over-simplification but it is generally true, as anyone reading the history of Unitarianism will discover. When speaking to the inquirer about Unitarianism, the questions seem to conform to a general pattern. The first question asked is: 'What is the difference between a Unitarian church and any other church?' You then explain that the name *Unitarian* began as a protest against the doctrine of the Trinity, because there was nothing to be found in the New Testament to support belief in this doctrine.

You then call attention to the fact that while Unitarians originally took their stand on the authority of the Bible later, in the early 19th century, under the influence of men like Dr James Martineau, they increasingly asserted that the only authority in religion as in other matters was man's own reason. Following this you will perhaps point out that as a consequence of this development, this emphasis on the authority of human reason, it was inevitable that Unitarians should demand freedom of thought in the

search for what was truest, as duty to one's fellow man must rest on the firm foundation of what the individual believes to be true.

Hence quite a number of churches rightly incorporated this principle in their trust deeds as a legal safeguard for both ministers and church members, and as a protection against those who might attempt to introduce doctrines and creeds as a condition of the employment of a minister or as a condition of membership.

It is essential to emphasise and re-emphasise the free basis of Unitarianism, and to refuse to accept attempts to deny the freedom of the individual mind to grow according to the impact of new truths. It should also make us more determined than ever to safeguard the future of our own movement against any attempts to subvert this free basis.

The enquirer about Unitarianism then asks, 'But why do you call this a church?'

And he will possibly remind you that the dictionary defines a church as 'An edifice consecrated for public worship', and we would have to admit that that is the generally accepted definition of the word. But we would also have to point out that there have been exceptions to this generally accepted definition, such as is given in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. There, while the word 'church' is first defined in the generally accepted meaning, it is also defined alternatively as the word 'applied to various societies, religious and other (e.g. "The Church of Humanity", the Comtists – 1528)'.

It can also be used in its pre-Christian sense as translated from the Latin word 'ecclesia', meaning a *congregation*. Seeing that the generally accepted meaning of church is 'an edifice consecrated for public worship' and that worship is accepted as the worship of God, it is my personal opinion that we are much nearer the truth if we call ourselves instead congregation. The natural question to follow this statement would be 'Then don't you believe in God?' to which my answer is 'I believe it is true to say that the majority, if not all the members of this church or congregation, would prefer to call themselves agnostics and that the general trend of belief in this congregation is humanist, that is, the members refuse to subscribe to a belief in a supernatural world and concentrate on the welfare of their fellowmen in this world, the only one they know'.

This is a trend of thought that has been made possible by our sponsoring of the principle of freedom of thought in the search for what is truest. It is an inevitable development and, as I personally believe, it is the logical development from the more theistic Unitarianism, and as time goes on, it will become more and more the characteristic Unitarian attitude in this world of growing knowledge, demanding as the indispensable condition of continual growth the unrestricted freedom of thought.

It is just here that the superficial thinker, the person who has been unable to prise his thinking from the traditional, will express the opinion that this freedom of thought will tend towards disunity of thought and action. That will be because he has been trained to accept the idea that unity must depend on general acceptance of creeds and doctrines; that membership of a congregation such as this must be based upon the subscription to definite beliefs.

It is difficult I admit for such a person to imagine how people, meeting together as those recognising not a system of beliefs but rather a principle underlying their thinking and acting can, in fact, unite at all. To him it must seem as



*Unitarianism is essentially an attitude of mind and in a much more significant way we can work for changes of attitude in others as much as the Christian works for what he calls a 'change of heart'.*

though these are the conditions of bedlam and he often concludes that Unitarians are people who believe what they like instead of what they ought.

He will not be able to see at first that to be a Unitarian means to be a responsible person. It means being responsible for thinking for oneself. It means being responsible for translating those thoughts into words and actions. It means the serious, complete acceptance of personal, mature responsibility for seeking what is truest at any one time and the recognition that honest conclusions must be shared and put into practice.

One could simplify the whole matter by saying that 'In the best sense of the term, Unitarianism means the acceptance of personal responsibility for growth in a world of continually unfolding knowledge'. It means that Unitarians must be concerned about every kind of activity affecting the welfare of men and women. Unitarians cannot live in respectable ivory towers outside of which men struggle to live; outside of which the problems of war and peace are solved nor will they be able to flatter themselves that they are making any real contribution to human progress if they are not to be found in the hurly-burly of the battles of life with all their mental and physical hurts, including the ostracism that will come from identification with questions of vital importance.

The test of the real value of our Unitarianism is the extent to which we are known as uncompromisingly associated with all aspects of human welfare and that includes our forthright declaration at all times of what we think is true. I realise that for too many people, brought up in the atmosphere of traditional beliefs and customs, there is attractiveness about conforming to popular modes of thinking and living that are difficult to overcome. I realise that for too many people there is a sense of acute discomfort in the prospect of being without the voice of authority for their beliefs and actions.

The tradition of relying on priest, parson and book has for so long been accepted that even those who may pride themselves on their self-reliance in matters of belief and action can often detect in their attitudes a sort of sneaking yearning for the voice of authority. At times they will detect in themselves, if they are honest with themselves, the remnants of the desire to conform to popular opinion, even to the extent of fearing to be associated with those who speak and act in a forthright manner on problems that have in them the taint of suspected extremism.

These try to combine acceptance of the principle of freedom of thought with the principle of safety and fair seeming, and thus tend to damn the cause to which they give their nominal adherence. They would put their intellectual

activities into the restricted framework of respectability and only because, in their hearts and minds they want to be popular, and beyond criticism. But this is not the Unitarian way. If it becomes so then it ends in dalliance with a flirting with life and its problems, and the end of such a cause is death.

The way of the responsible Unitarian is not easy, particularly in this modern age. Without any authority but that of his own fallible reason he must become used to the idea that he lives in an indifferent universe and that there are no other resources on which he can rely but those he finds within himself and those like him.

If we do not create in this world of ours some satisfactory pattern of living then no other power will do it for us, for there is no other power. In these days when there is so much talk about reunion of the Protestant churches with the Roman Catholic Church (which means in actual fact, if the Australian bishop's recent pastoral letter is anything to go by, the absorption of other churches in the Roman Catholic church on that church's terms), there is an increasing need for emphasising the basic attitude of Unitarianism and its fundamental principles.

That increasing emphasis is necessary because Christian reunion is the sign of the recognition that we and those who like us demand freedom of thought and speech are considered as the growing threat to orthodox religion, which must be fought even to the extent of agreement where there has previously been no possibility of agreement.

We must not rest now for the present situation has been created by the vigilant alertness of those who think as we do. And when we talk about freedom of thought, let us be clear as to what we mean. It means that there must be no restriction whatsoever in the expression of our thought within the scope of the democratic process. It means that however much we may disagree with the conclusions to which another Unitarian comes, we must ensure that he be allowed to express himself fully. It means that we cannot afford to stop him saying what he honestly thinks to be true in case we are deprived by his enforced silence of facts that we may not have taken into consideration.

But it also means that he must hear us and that our different points of view must be discussed fully. Both sides must fully recognise the vital necessity of observing in discussion agreed democratic procedure and that the desire for action of some kind must not violate the freedom of others. There must, of necessity at times, be discussion enlivened by deep feelings but we do truth a disservice if we permit feelings to lead to suppression. As far as is possible we must recognise majority decisions, but the minority must also be entitled to publish its report and its disagreement when the issue is vital.

But freedom of thought and freedom of expression do not mean the same thing as freedom to destroy, although occasions will arise when in the cause of what is true and just we may have to oppose with all our strength to the point of revolt what we honestly believe to be wrong. Everything will depend, in our use of the democratic procedure, on whether we are honest in our thinking, on what our real aims happen at the time to be and here we have to be careful that we do not permit considerations of prestige, of personal ends, of dislike for individuals, etc., to be mistaken by us for our honest convictions.

So often we can deceive ourselves, yet if we set out to do the things that are best for the whole community then very often we will avoid the pitfalls. Generally we

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*Unitarianism is essentially an attitude of mind and in a much more significant way we can work for changes of attitude in others as much as the Christian works for what he calls a 'change of heart'.*

act without sufficient knowledge. Often we act because we feel disturbed about what seems to be injustice and oppression. This means that one of the responsibilities of the Unitarian is to make a real search for the facts and if they are not available, to reserve for the time being any judgment we are tempted to make.

Perhaps the best test of the genuineness of our point of view and the rightness of the course of action we want to take is that of inquiring into the real nature of our motives. If, in those motives we detect personal animosity, a tendency to judge by the use of clichés or according to feeling only, we should beware of the conclusions to which we have come. This means that part of the Unitarian attitude must arise out of a knowledge of oneself, the facing up to ourselves in the privacy of our own minds and hearts. We must beware of snap judgments and always be ready to give reasons for the views we have.

Our right to be free depends upon the right of everyone else to be free also, to be free to think, to be free to have all available facts, to be free to express our thoughts and to be free to act for the best, and in the context of the larger freedom of the rest of the community to do the same. We must stand by the principle that persuasion is always better than force and that in most cases force is the negation of the democratic process. One of the causes of much of the misunderstanding between nations today is that there has not been sufficient opportunity for persuasion, for negotiation. As I said last Sunday night, I care not how warm the arguments, how wide the disagreements, that provided the opposing sides are sincere in their desire for arriving at the truth and doing what is best for everyone, here will be some hope for some mutual plan to further their common aims.

To the questioners about Unitarianism we can reply that above all else, Unitarianism is essentially an attitude of mind and in a much more significant way we can work for changes of attitude in others as much as the Christian works for what he calls a 'change of heart'.

Yet fundamental to this Unitarian attitude of mind there must be the desire to work for humanity.

We must feel deeply our intimate relationship with other human beings wherever they may be, and given that sense of intimate relationship, there will be much added to it in the way we think about them and try to work for them.

This is where Unitarianism becomes in essence humanism and causes humanists to set out boldly and bravely to think correctly, to speak without fear and work for a better world order as the final goal of all their efforts, as well as the meaning and purpose of living. ■

# THE TOXIC LINK BETWEEN COMPULSORY SUPERANNUATION, PPPS AND INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES

Synopsis of talk by  
**Kenneth Davidson** given at the  
church on 4 March 2012

**D**ISSENT co-editor and Age columnist, Kenneth Davidson spoke to the Unitarian church on Sunday 3rd January about the toxic relationship between compulsory superannuation, public private partnerships and the distortion of public infrastructure priorities. He argued that the relationship was the most egregious example of how secrecy and its close relation, complexity, are breeding grounds for bad government leading to corruption.

Davidson pointed out that the superannuation levy (now 9 per cent and legislated to rise to 12 per cent over the next seven years) is no different to an income tax except that it is mainly used to gamble on Australian and international share markets. Further, it has become the major factor behind the push for financing infrastructure via PPPs instead of public borrowing.

According to the budget papers, the cost of subsidies for superannuation is now \$31 billion a year compared to the \$34 billion a year cost of the aged pension. Most of the subsidy accrues to the richest taxpayers.

Superannuation funds under management now total \$1,400 billion (equal to annual GDP) and the compulsory levy pumps an additional \$60 million per annum into the funds. The powerful vested interests behind this industry extend beyond the financial institutions who wax fat on the commissions and advisory fees for managing the money. They include the high-income groups who find superannuation a tailor-made vehicle for tax avoidance and also the trade unions whose leaders earn handsome fees as the trustees of industry funds.

PPP investment is skewed towards investment in areas such as roads where the 'benefits' of the investment can be most easily captured by the private investors in the form of tolls. This can be compared with investment in rail where a high proportion of the 'benefits' take the form of lower levels of pollution, congestion and accidents and higher levels of urban amenity.

In Victoria, PPPs are now the preferred vehicle for financing social infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, police and railway stations and law courts, even though the capital costs alone impose a significant burden on the taxpayer and result in under-investment in providing the actual service.

Davidson detailed the example of four hospitals (Bendigo, the replacement for the Peter MacCallum, the Children's and the Women's) where the interest expense of funds ranged from 8 per cent to 13.7 per cent in the case of the PPPs and 5.5 per cent if the money had been raised by public borrowings.

If the money had been raised by public borrowings – even if the hospitals in each case had used the same architects, the same builders and the same contract for maintenance – the annual cost of servicing and repaying the debt over the 25-year life of the project would have been \$110 million a year less. This would have been sufficient to pay a salary increase to public hospital nurses of an additional \$3,700 a year without chiselling their conditions and undermining hospital safety by increasing patient/nurse ratios and replacing professional nurses with nursing assistants. ■



***PPP investment is skewed towards investment in areas such as roads where the 'benefits' of the investment can be most easily captured by the private investors in the form of tolls.***

Of course, Iran continues to enrich uranium up to the 20% level required for the production of medical isotopes. This is far below the 85% plus necessary to manufacture a nuclear bomb. Every major leader in Iran has emphasised over and over again that they have no intention of making a bomb. They regard it – rightly – as haram (or prohibited in Islam).

Because its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes – medical research and electricity – the Iranian government agreed to a nuclear fuel swap deal initiated by Brazil and Turkey in May 2010 which would have seen Iran shipping low-enriched uranium to Turkey in return for fuel for a research reactor. The Western powers and Israel rejected the deal.

Their rejection underscores the stark hypocrisy that surrounds the entire issue of Iran's nuclear program. If it is nuclear weapons that they are concerned about why didn't they accept a deal that would have, to a large extent, curbed any clandestine move by Iran to produce such weapons? Or, are certain Western powers and Israel against Iran producing nuclear energy even for peaceful purposes – a right that Iran possesses as a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)?

It is important to raise these questions for two other reasons. One, the countries that are most vocal in demanding that Iran terminate its uranium enrichment program are all nuclear weapon states. The US has an arsenal of more than 5000 nuclear warheads while Israel, an undeclared nuclear state – the only nuclear weapon state in West Asia and North Africa (WANA) – has perhaps between 200 and 400 warheads. Two, countries such as the US, Britain, France and even Israel had no qualms about assisting Iran to launch its nuclear program in the fifties when it was under the Shah, Reza Pahlavi. US President, Dwight Eisenhower, saw it as an 'atoms for peace' enterprise. One does not have to second guess why they were all so enthusiastic about the Shah's nuclear energy program – because the dictator was their gendarme in that corner of WANA, protecting their strategic, political and oil interests with all his brutal might.

Why did the West and Israel change their attitude towards Iran's nuclear program? Was it because an Islamic Revolution had occurred in Iran in 1979? Was Islam the decisive factor? Islam per se was not the major reason for the change in attitude. After all, the West counts as its allies a number of countries that view themselves as 'Islamic States' and subscribe to a somewhat narrow, exclusive idea of Islam and Muslim identity. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and most of the Gulf Sheikdoms would be outstanding examples. Colluding and collaborating with these states and other Islamic movements has never been a problem for the centres of power in the West.

### Independence

The real reason why the Islamic Republic of Iran and its nuclear program became anathema for the West and Israel was because of Iran's defence of its independence and integrity in the face of US and Western hegemony. The Islamic Republic under the guidance of its charismatic leader Ayatollah Khomeini was not prepared to submit to US dominance or acquiesce with Israeli arrogance. From the outset – from 1979 itself – Iran was determined to manage its own destiny which is why it nationalised oil and strengthened its self-reliance.

“

*There is no doubt at all that it is Iran's refusal to be subservient to the US, Israel and their allies, its readiness to resist, that has incensed the powers-that-be.*

In an earlier period – in 1953 to be exact – another Iranian leader, this time a highly principled secular democrat, Mohammad Mosaddegh, had also sought to assert Iranian independence and sovereignty by nationalising oil. This incurred the wrath of the British and American elites whose companies dominated the local oil industry. With the help of their intelligence services, they managed to oust Mosaddegh from his prime ministership and restore full authority to the Shah.

Others in WANA, at different times and in different circumstances, have also paid the price for resisting dominance. Gamal Nasser in Egypt, Hourri Boumediene in Algeria, Hafiz Assad in Syria, Yasser Arafat in Palestine (and other Palestinian freedom fighters), Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, had all at some point or other in their lives refused to yield to hegemonic power. Today, there are leaders like Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, Khalil Meshal in Palestine, and Bashar Assad in Syria who continue to resist Israeli power and US hegemony and are therefore targeted by Tel Aviv and Washington.

It is appropriate to observe at this juncture that resistance to US hegemony has had a longer and perhaps more tragic history in parts of Latin America. From Simon Bolivar and Jose Marti to Salvador Allende, Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa, these and other illustrious leaders have unflinchingly opposed attempts by the US elite to subjugate the people of Latin America and subordinate the continent to the whims and fancies of its northern neighbour. Indeed, today there is a new determination in Latin America to strengthen the independence of individual states and of the region as a whole through cooperation and collective action that is both innovative and dynamic.

There is no doubt at all that it is Iran's refusal to be subservient to the US, Israel and their allies, its readiness to resist, that has incensed the powers-that-be. It explains why they are going all out to emasculate the Iranian economy, manufacture mass disaffection with the government and, at the right moment, engineer a regime change. The excuse they are using for this manipulation is of course Iran's unproven nuclear weapons program. In the scenario that is unfolding before our eyes, there are shades of the build-up that led to the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein 2003. ■

END OF PART ONE

**Dr Chandra Muzaffar is President of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST) and Professor of Global Studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia.**

Malaysia 27 January 2012

# from our readers



## Dear Friends

So sorry about delay in payment. Thank you for knowing I would renew.

**L Gatewood, Vic**

## The Editor, Beacon

Enclosed my overdue subscription.

Thank you for your enjoyable publication.

**R & S Leavold, Vic**

## Dear Editor

Enclosed is my cheque for my subscription to the *Beacon* and a donation.

Sincere thanks for this year's collection of very interesting *Beacon* articles.

Season's greetings to you all.

Sincerely

**N Forrest, Qld**

## Israel – Will fall apart

Some years ago I was talking with a fellow I know about the Palestine problem and how it might be resolved. I said I thought that one day the state of Israel would end up falling apart under the strain of its own many contradictions. He dismissed the idea and said he didn't for a moment think that that would happen.

Israel is a settler state built on the dispossession, dispersal and occupation of the native population and their land. It is an abnormal state, full of numerous cultural, ethnic, religious and other divisions. What unites most of Israel's people is the fear of armed Palestinian revolt and the necessity to continually repress the Palestinian desires and struggles for their just rights. This has created anxiety and a fortress mentality among Israelis that rationalises and justifies their continued brutal occupation.

While the Palestinian people have every legal and moral right to resist the Israeli occupation by any means necessary, including armed struggle, I consider the present non-violent campaigns of civil, political and diplomatic struggle to be incredibly constructive. These peaceful forms of resistance,

the civil and human rights and the lull in armed opposition to Israeli policies have opened up a new dynamic.

In this period of calmer conditions between the oppressor and oppressed, the acute contradictions within Israeli society have come to the fore, with confrontations breaking out between Israeli moderates and militants, secular and religious extremists, the Israeli army and fanatical settlers, Israeli minorities and the main Zionist power structure, the wealthy and the deprived and women's liberties against sexist subjugation. Israel is a militaristic, dysfunctional society that is rotten to the core. The diverse and intense divisions inherent in this artificial state will see Israel wither and fall apart due to its own internal contradictions. This decaying process offers the real hope of a new beginning, an end to the occupation and the prospect of genuine peace with justice for the peoples of the region.

**Steven Katsineris, Vic**

## Dear Beacon

Thanks for your excellent journal. I have found it very useful as a basis for some of my letters to politicians e.g. the Australian government urging our support for reparations re Vietnam War victims of Agent Orange.

Best wishes

**C Whatmough, NSW  
(Kirribilli UU Fellowship)**

## Dear Editor

\$20 enclosed for renewal. As I turn 90 this year it may well be my final renewal. If so, I have enjoyed fraternising with like-minded people.

**B Yates**

## The Editor, Beacon

'War Drums over Iran' once again a powerful point: another Iraq, Libya, Egypt in the offing and each will garner more refugees for Australia.

America has been responsible for almost all of Australia's boat people arrivals: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia. The fear of communism or lust for oil has been the motivating factor and the resulting turmoil and upheaval forces the people to seek peace and security elsewhere. If Australia offers succour to these unfortunates so be it, but there will be many more to come.

Regards

**B Yates, NSW**

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**International Women’s Day 2012**

**Iran: the price of resistance**

**Do not be provoked by bigots**

**Brute forces: a year of rough justice**

**Unitarianism is an attitude of mind**

**The toxic link between compulsory superannuation, PPPs and infrastructure priorities**

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