

the BEACON

Journal of the
Melbourne Unitarian
Peace Memorial
Church

October 2016
Price \$2

SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

Over-governed and under-represented

The world's attention seems to be focused on a lacklustre US election with the choice between an unprincipled and not very bright billionaire and a woman committed to the policies of the multinational corporations and the war machine.

When you consider this is the choice for leader of the so-called 'Free World', it is a very scary proposition and an indication of the political, social and economic crisis in the United States. It is incumbent therefore on us all to look at the way in which we are governed in the world generally, and here in Australia specifically, and to assess what government means and how badly we are represented.

In the recent federal election called by Malcolm Turnbull, specifically to deal with what he considered to be a recalcitrant union, he was almost defeated and the false premise on which he called the election seems to have fallen off the radar. Indeed, not only was he almost defeated, he has been revealed to all as the emperor without clothes. He is a captive of the extreme right wing of his party and he helped bring us One Nation and similar reactionary elements of the lunatic right who get far more publicity than their ignorance and bigotry deserve and who now have the opportunity to influence the community.

In the US the only candidate who put forward an alternative to the sinking, stinking policies of reaction that seem to dominate both the Republicans and the Democrats was Sanders. He proposed policies that were not calling for revolution, but simply to tilt the economy more towards those who create the wealth: the working class of America.

Similarly in the UK, after years of the Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee of Labour and Tory, the 'New' Labour Party was born and sold out to the Establishment in order to gain and retain power. Tony Blair is now exposed as a sycophant of warmonger George Bush Jr, and the long-awaited Chilcott Report clearly exposes the criminal nature of the Blair government in joining the UK in the criminal and unsubstantiated need for a war in Iraq that has slaughtered millions and destabilised the Middle East.

Then came Jeremy Corbyn who, like Sanders, sought a fairer more participatory and democratic society. While he has massive support among the rank and file of his party, the 'Blairites' or 'New Labour' continues to work with the

Establishment and the controlled media to destroy his progressive plans for a more democratic and sharing society.

Voting does not shape our nation. We do not have a genuine democracy. What we have is a society controlled by rich and powerful elites. Voting gives the illusion of democracy: it makes us feel good and responsible, but the wealth of our nation continues to be distributed inequitably. We continue to go to war against innocent people who simply want what we want – peace, justice and equality.

Regardless of which major party is in government, we still have huge unemployment, under employment, poverty, homelessness, poor schools, lack of proper healthcare, suicides, overcrowded prisons, and worse, growing corruption in all areas of our society.

In Australia we do not yet have a Sanders or Corby in government or an opposition articulating a plan for a more just, more democratic, more participatory society. Our politicians in the main live in a very exclusive, overpaid and out-of-touch bubble.

Information comes to us from a very biased, very controlled media, with short sound bites and no real facts or analysis of events, issues or indeed anything of major importance.

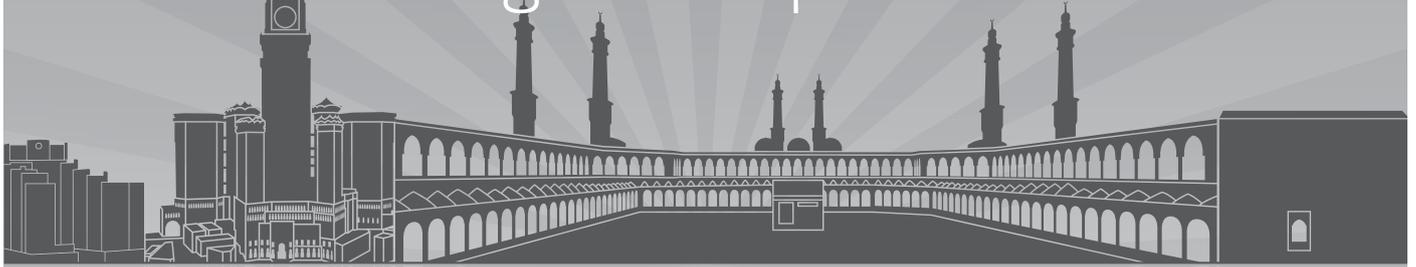
We need to wake up to what is happening around us and take action to defend our environment, our world, our nation, because if we don't there will be no future for our children and grandchildren.

EDITORIAL



The road to the watering place – the righteous path

BY **BILAL CLELAND**



American Muslim communities are experiencing a great upsurge of anti-Muslim propaganda and right-wing political activity, partly as a response to the Trump presidential campaign, the refugee crisis and as a response to events in war zones across the Muslim world. State legislatures are even passing special laws denouncing 'shariah' law. Much of the vitriol is aimed at preventing 'shariah' from ever being introduced to the USA, as though it is some sort of alien threat. The popular notion of shariah amongst such fearful opponents is that of the stoning of adulterers, the chopping off of the hands of thieves, the occasional crucifixion for certain crimes and the killing of non-believers. Such fears have of course been fed by the atrocities of deviant killing machines like ISIS, Boko Haram and other organisations which are mainly targeting Muslims. The letter, signed by over 120 international Islamic scholars to the ISIS leader in 2014, gives a good indication of how these groups deviate from Islam [www.lettertobaghdadi.com/]. *Huffington Post* reported on it 25 September 2014.

There is considerable confusion over just what is implied by the term 'shariah'. It is basically a set of principles, not a series of laws. These principles are derived from the Quran and the words of the Prophet Muhammad(s). All Islamic scholars agree upon the six principles of this righteous path – Shariah. They are:

1. **The right to the protection of life**
2. **The right to the protection of family**
3. **The right to the protection of education (intellect)**
4. **The right to the protection of property (access to resources)**
5. **The right to the protection of human dignity**
6. **The right to the protection of religion**

Detailed laws derived from the Quran and Sunnah were developed in the interpretive literature over the centuries. This is known as the *fiqh*. While the Quran and Sunnah are regarded as the foundation, the interpretations are not seen in the same light. They change over time and with location. A good outline on this matter is contained in an article by Sumbul Ali-Karmali, who has a degree in Islamic Law, 'Who's Afraid of Sharia' [*Huffington Post*, 3 September 2010]. 'The *fiqh* was meant to develop and change according to the time and place – it has internal methodologies for that to happen. It is not static, but flexible. No religion gets to be 1400 years old and

the second largest in the world unless it's flexible and adaptable.'

Part of this Islamic path to righteousness is respect for the religion of others, in accord with the Quranic verse 'Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: Whoever rejects Tagut [forces of Satan] and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And Allah hears and knows all things.' Baqarah 256

The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the World, binding on all who are part of his Ummah, put this into action at a very early period. These covenants recognised the diversity of the peoples and religions of the region and showed an acceptance of different religions and cultures that took many centuries to evolve in Europe [Morrow, John Andrew, *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with Christians of the World*, Angelico press/Sophia Perennis, USA, 2013].

Ignorant fear mongering around the issue of creeping shariah law is a political tactic being used by those groups wishing to incite hatred and division in the Australian community. They do not even seem to be aware of what it is or of the very basic fact that the Quran and Sunnah, the foundation of shariah, mandate Muslims to respect the law of the land in which they live.

Australia has not yet reached the level of public incitement against Muslims we witness in the USA but it may develop.

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A Trillion Dollars for Nuclear Weapons – Dangerous & Costly in So Many Ways

Seventy years after the US devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs, and 25 years after the end of the Cold War, the world still teeters on the brink of nuclear catastrophe. In addition to the rising military tensions with Russia and China, former Secretary of Defense William Perry is warning that the US nuclear weapons modernisation program makes nuclear war more likely than during the Cold War.

The detonation of even one nuclear weapon can kill millions of people, which explains why the International Commission of the Red Cross advocates the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. A study initiated by Physicians for Social Responsibility warns that an exchange of 50–100 or the world's more than 15,000 nuclear weapons could lead to the deaths of up to two billion people from the resulting global famine. And from ISIS to Al Qaeda and economic insecurity to climate change, nuclear weapons do nothing to protect us from the real threats we face.

Yet instead of pursuing negotiations for worldwide abolition of nuclear weapons, the US is planning a total overhaul of its nuclear weapons program, including new generations of nuclear warheads, bombers, land-based missiles, air-launched missiles and submarines. The projected price tag? About \$1 trillion over the next thirty years, or an average of \$30 billion a year until the middle of the 21st century!

Spending for nuclear weapons modernisation is obscene, legal but criminal. If even a tenth of the military's 7,200 nuclear weapons were used, the result would be nuclear winter, ending all life as we know it. As the survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bombings tell us 'Human beings and nuclear weapons cannot coexist.' The Pentagon and its political allies tell us that US warheads need to be refurbished, and the delivery systems needed

continued page 9

What's being modernised?

Despite President Obama's pledge not to create new nuclear weapons, beginning with the B-61-12 warhead, this is precisely what is happening. As former Secretary of Defense William Perry has testified, the ability to increase or decrease the devastating power of the new B-61 makes the weapons more usable, thus increasing the likelihood that nuclear wars will actually be fought.

New generations nuclear-armed missiles, submarines and bombers are being designed and constructed for nuclear warfighting. Estimates include:

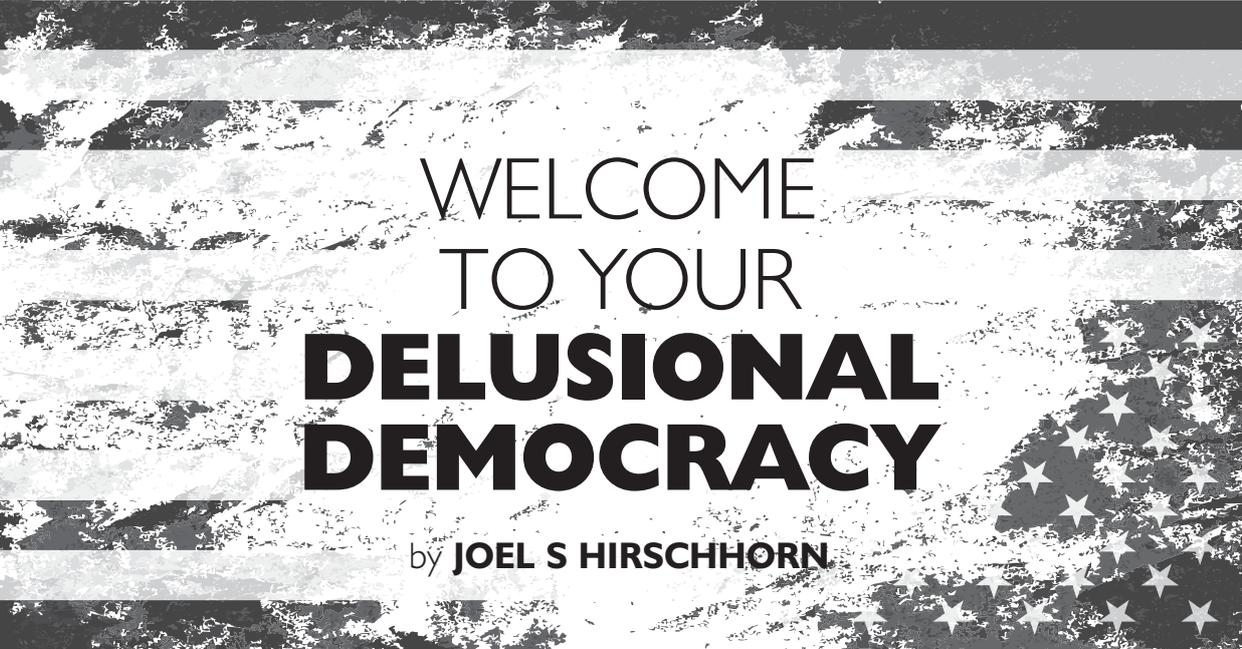
\$120 billion for new intercontinental ballistic missiles

\$102 billion for Ohio class submarines to carry and launch Trident missiles

\$100 billion for the B-22 bomber to succeed the B-2 bomber

\$270 billion to maintain the existing nuclear triad: bombers, missiles & submarines

And from Oak Ridge in Tennessee to Kansas City and Los Alamos, new weapons facilities are being built for the design and production of the nuclear arsenal and to underwrite the training of a new generation of nuclear weaponers.



WELCOME TO YOUR **DELUSIONAL DEMOCRACY**

by **JOEL S HIRSCHHORN**

13 September 2016 'Information Clearing House' – 'Counterpunch'

For some years I have used the term 'delusional democracy' to describe the condition of the US. It seemed obvious to me that the vast majority of Americans have deliberately chosen to fool themselves. They have been brainwashed to believe what no longer is true. Become convinced that you do not live in a true and terrific democracy, or that your democracy is the best in the world.

I stopped believing this myth many years ago. All the objective evidence I saw over fifty years of paying intense attention both as a citizen and someone who worked within the political system showed me that American democracy had steadily declined in quality, integrity and effectiveness. And now in this

2016 presidential race you have powerful and painful evidence that we are saddled with a delusional democracy. Thank Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump for opening your mind and eyes to reveal this revolting truth.

Delusional democracy refers to delusional Americans. So this year the key question for you to consider is whether you still choose to keep falsely believing that American democracy is worth being proud of. I just cannot see how Americans can accept these two major party presidential candidates as reflecting a first rate democracy. They are, in fact, a major embarrassment that should make every American, regardless of their political party loyalty or previous political beliefs, cringe at the ugly reality that these two presidential candidates are worthy of any respect, loyalty or votes.

How could it come to this? Two world class liars. Two of the most widely known untrusted and untrustable unpopular politicians ever produced here or anywhere.

Two sick narcissists in it for themselves, not the country.

The US political system produced this reality. A two-party duopoly serving the rich and powerful, corporate contributors and many special interests, but not the ordinary, general public is what we have had for a long time. What gave this nation awful economic inequality, destruction of good paying middle class jobs in manufacturing, and horrendous national debt also gave us these two losers. Can you settle into voting for the lesser of two evils, when each of the two evils makes you gag? Evil does not accurately describe these two options. Choose the lesser of two embarrassments, of two calamities, of two democracy destroyers.

Consider this way of thinking about this ugly reality. Once a democracy has become delusional, playing the game of being responsible citizen and voting no

longer makes sense. It is more like joining a criminal conspiracy to maintain the illusion that we have a legitimate democracy. Voting no longer is the path to have a revolution to restore American democracy. That is exactly where we have arrived. When most Americans have little respect and trust for Congress or just about

every other institution and most believe we are on the wrong track, then how can you still cling to the belief that voting is what you can and should do? When it comes to Trump and Hillary how can you still keep deluding yourself that you live in a legitimate democracy worth voting in?

An important 2014 academic study of a huge number of policy actions found that 'economic elites and organised groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on US government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence. In other words,

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So this year the key question for you to consider is whether you still choose to keep falsely believing that American democracy is worth being proud of.

voting by citizens does not shape our nation. We do not have an authentic democracy. We have more of an oligarchy that is controlled by rich and powerful elites. Voting is a distraction, something to make you feel good and responsible. Of course, sometimes it looks like the general public gets what it wants. Yet 'they fairly often get the policies they favor ... only because those policies happen also to be preferred by the economically elite citizens who wield the actual influence.' The big conclusion: 'if policymaking is dominated by powerful business organisations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened.' This fits my model perfectly: we have a delusional democracy.

Here is what I think is the correct action this year. Boycott the presidential election. Do not vote for anyone for president. What does this accomplish? It would create incredible historic data on very low voter turnout for the presidential election. It would send a clear message to both major parties, the political establishment, the media, and the whole world that Americans have recognised the truth about our delusional democracy. This could spark true political revolution for the next presidential election. You ask, depending on what you now believe, but how can I live with that awful Trump or that awful Hillary getting elected president? So be it. It is more important to create conditions for major, true political reforms than to worry about an awful person in the White House. We need a good long game. Worry less about how a president may harm our nation and more about the critical need to recognise and fix our delusional democracy by taking back the power that the power elites have had for a long time.

There is a wonderful graph on Wikipedia showing US presidential election turnout over history. From about 1840 to 1900 it was varying around 75 per cent to 80 per cent. Then it declined steadily until about 1920, and from then to recent times it varied from around 50 per cent to 60 per cent. My main point is that you need

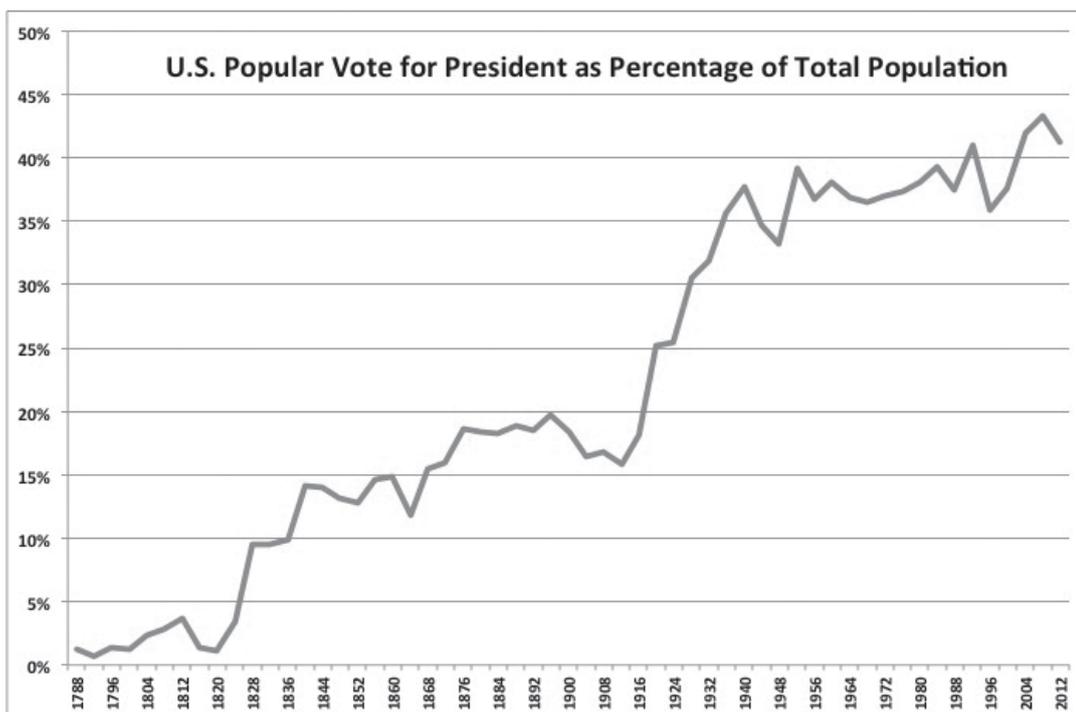
some imagination and think about the many impacts of reducing turnout to say 30 per cent. The whole world would interpret that as the rejection by Americans of their political system. It would be an incredible historic shock having the potential to remove the legitimacy and credibility of the current two-party duopoly. Our corrupt, delusional democracy would have received a bullet. Demand for truly reforming and fixing our political system would take on energy. Remember, the historic data showed this sharp decline in turnout happening once before. It can happen again, with your help. Boycott this presidential election.

Fixing our democracy is far more important than your vote this year. Yes, you may feel bad that the candidate you most hated won your state and maybe the Electoral College, or that you did not show support for a third party candidate. But you can and should feel good that you have non-voted against the status quo, broken political system. Feel great that you want to fix our delusional democracy.

In so many other democracies the public create massive street protests and many times this kind of action produces political and government reforms. It has become clear that the street protest strategy has not and will not happen on a large enough scale to produce deep reforms in the US. Nor has forming new reform-oriented organisations done the job. It is far easier and more convenient for the vast majority of Americans to see the light and boycott this presidential election.

Vote for whatever else on your ballot is important to you. But boycott the presidential election. That non-vote is truly a message-vote and driving force for major political reforms. If you continue to believe that ordinary participation in elections will fix our nation, then you have not faced history and reality. You remain delusional.

Better to choose to make American democracy great again by standing up to a corrupt system.



Source: Wikipedia



FEATURE STORY

CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST (PART I)

BY JOAN COXSEDGE, POLITICAL ACTIVIST, ARTIST AND WRITER

Author: Thank God for the Revolution, Cold Tea for Brandy, Old Cuba, World Heritage, co-author Rooted in Secrecy

The international scene is heartbreakingly dreadful. The downward slide has turned into an avalanche of chaos, destruction and despair, especially in the Middle East where over 350 million people live in 15 nations, plus what's left of Palestine, with most of the inhabitants practising Islam in a variety of different sects. The borders of the region were first imposed by British and American imperialists when the Ottoman Empire broke up after WWI to ensure that no single strong Arab nation would emerge and that the oil would remain in Western hands.

As High Commissioner from 1920 to 1923, Sir Percy Cox presided over the birth of modern Iraq when he drew red lines on a map – said to be the climax of his career – but he left a fledgling nation fraught with political, ethnic and religious problems which have bedevilled Iraq and the Middle East ever since. When the Brits left in 1932 after installing a monarchy, the country was a shambles and it took until 1958 before Iraq shook off the last remnants of foreign control when the British-installed Hashemite regime of King Faisal II – cousin of Jordan's King Hussein – was overthrown in a bloody coup.

In 1926 France carved Lebanon out of Syria – which it had seized from the Ottoman Turks for the precise purpose of creating a pro-Western enclave in the eastern Mediterranean. In 1943 France granted the country independence, where the presidency would go to a Maronite Christian, the post of PM would go to a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of the National Assembly to a Shi-ite Muslim. And so on throughout the ranks. Lebanon's

fragile internal political balance was further strained by the influx of 120,000 refugees from Palestine in 1948, driven from their homes following the establishment of Israel.

In 1958 Arab nationalist forces threatened to topple the archaic system and the US sent in the Marines, continuing to interfere whenever its interests were threatened. Today, the fate of the Palestinians, now half-a-million, remains unresolved, being denied Lebanese citizenship or any political representation. Their displacement is the key regional factor that draws Lebanon's neighbours, Syria and Israel, into Lebanon's internal struggles.

In 1951 in Iran, Mossadegh was appointed premier. A fierce nationalist, Mossadegh called for the nationalisation of the oil fields, which brought him into conflict with Iran's pro-Western elites and the Shah, who had dismissed Mossadegh but was forced to reinstate him after massive public riots. And then in 1953, the CIA, fearing Iran was moving into the Soviet orbit, orchestrated a coup helped by pro-Shah forces. The Shah quickly returned to power



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If you lift up the rock of American foreign policy since that time, out crawls a litany of horrors, invasions, bombings, overthrowing governments, suppressing movements for social change, assassinating political leaders, perverting elections, manipulating unions and manufacturing ‘news’ and so on. It’s the only nation that has dropped nuclear bombs and sells and uses depleted uranium.

and immediately signed over 40% of Iran’s oil fields to US companies and became one of

America’s most trusted allies and a very brutal leader. Mossadeq died under house arrest in 1967 and in 1978 the Shah was toppled from power and replaced by the ayatollahs.

To better understand how we’ve reached such a diabolical state of affairs, we need to go back a few years earlier to the end of WW2 when Britain was broke and Europe was broken and incapable of defending their extensive international interests. The US stepped into the breach imposing its religion, anti-communism, onto the world. Almost immediately, the Americans started their Cold War campaign that got very hot at times. Fundamental rights were qualified and the American Republic was replaced by the National Security State.

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political leaders, perverting elections, manipulating unions and manufacturing ‘news’ and so on. It’s the only nation that has dropped nuclear bombs and sells and uses depleted uranium. During that time, the US bombed 21 countries deliberately and claims it bombed Pakistan, Macedonia and Bulgaria by mistake.

For the past 25 years, the US, Britain, France and some others, with Australia tagging along behind, have laid waste to a span of territory stretching several thousands of miles from North Africa to Central Asia, where a huge number of the region’s people have been killed and maimed, left homeless and desperate, and have fled anywhere they can, creating an avalanche of refugees.

But when I visited Iraq in 1981 with a trade union delegation, it was secular and strong, full of turquoise-tiled domes and minarets with reminders of its ancient

past in 10,000 archeological sites. In Nineveh and Ur, writing and literature flourished when the West lived in the Dark Ages. We walked in the Suq with its labyrinth of arcades and narrow streets, where coppersmiths beat out designs and bins overflowed with aromatic spices and herbs. We visited the 13th-century Mustansiriya School, a widely renowned seat of learning, and listened to poetry and Arabic music in the central hall of the Khan Murjan, a beautiful 600-year-old inn with crenellated arches of brick and perforated windows.

When we were there, Iraqis enjoyed a high standard of living, with free healthcare, free education and public welfare. More than 70 per cent lived in cities and took their modern interlinked infrastructure for granted. Shia and Sunni lived next door to each other and married each other and Saddam's deputy, Tariq Aziz, was a Christian. Women were fashionably dressed, attended universities and held some of the highest offices in the land, becoming engineers, pilots, doctors, lawyers and teachers. Many worked in factories. The official doctrine of the Ba'ath Party stated that women should have full equality with men.

We travelled freely throughout the country, even spending time up north in the troubled Kurdish region where we could see the distant mountains of Turkey. One night in Irbil in the east, we heard the sounds of gunfire and were told that Iraq had gone to war with its neighbour Iran. Saddam Hussein had launched what he hoped would be an easy victory over a disorganised enemy, but by its end, nearly eight years later, both countries were deeply traumatised. Iran, with a population of 50 million to Iraq's 17 million, mobilised to defend its revolution and by the summer of 1982 Iraq was on the defensive and remained so until 1988. The death toll, overall, was a shocking one million for Iran and up to half-a-million for Iraq.

Border clashes had taken place sporadically early in 1980, and with Iran's armed forces weakened by purges, Saddam had hoped to replace the deposed shah as regional strongman. Over time, he enjoyed the discreet support of the West, with the US supplying covert intelligence and huge quantities of weapons. A 1994 US Senate report documented that these included anthrax and botulism agents, which were supplied by a US company, licensed by the US Commerce Department and approved by the US State Department. Washington wanted both countries to bleed, but it feared Iran more. Its support for Iraq was linked to its long-standing policy of controlling Middle East oil, described by Washington as a 'stupendous source of strategic power and one of the greatest material prizes in world history'.

When Iraqi troops marched into Kuwait in August 1990, US strategy changed overnight, but not for the officially stated reasons. It had nothing to do with Saddam's 'invasion' – he'd done it before with US support – and not because he was 'developing' unconventional weapons – he'd used them before with US help – and not because he'd committed atrocities in Kuwait. But by seizing Kuwait's oil wells, Saddam threatened US control over this most valuable asset and because he aspired to the leadership of the Arab world against Israel and 'threatened' 'moderate' regimes, he had become too big for his boots and had to be cut down like Diem in Vietnam, Noriega in Panama and Milosevic in the former Yugoslavia.

White House cowboys cranked up their anti-Saddam propaganda claiming he was a 'major threat to the region' so they could restructure the entire region and above all, consolidate US control over the oil-rich Persian Gulf. This was spelled out when the US oil company testified to the US Congress that a pipeline through Afghanistan was crucial to move Caspian Basin oil to the Indian Ocean. For good measure, the US also stated Saddam was about to invade Saudi Arabia and made a mint out of that lie, selling the Saudis \$US21 billion of military hardware to defend their corrupt despotic throne. Weeks later, the Saudis said: 'Whoops, sorry we made a mistake. Iraq never intended to invade our country'. Too late to avoid the carnage.

Despite huge protests around the world, the US and its allies went to war on the basis of another lie, that they were 'liberating' Kuwait, as if it was a real country with real freedoms when for 200 years it had been run by the corrupt, brutal al-Sabah clique. A few facts slipped out. We learned that Saddam Hussein had been given the green light to invade Kuwait by US Ambassador April Glaspie and that a PR outfit called Hill and Knowlton was paid more than \$US11 million to act for the 'Citizens for Free Kuwait' – a phony mob to blitz the media on the 'need' for war.

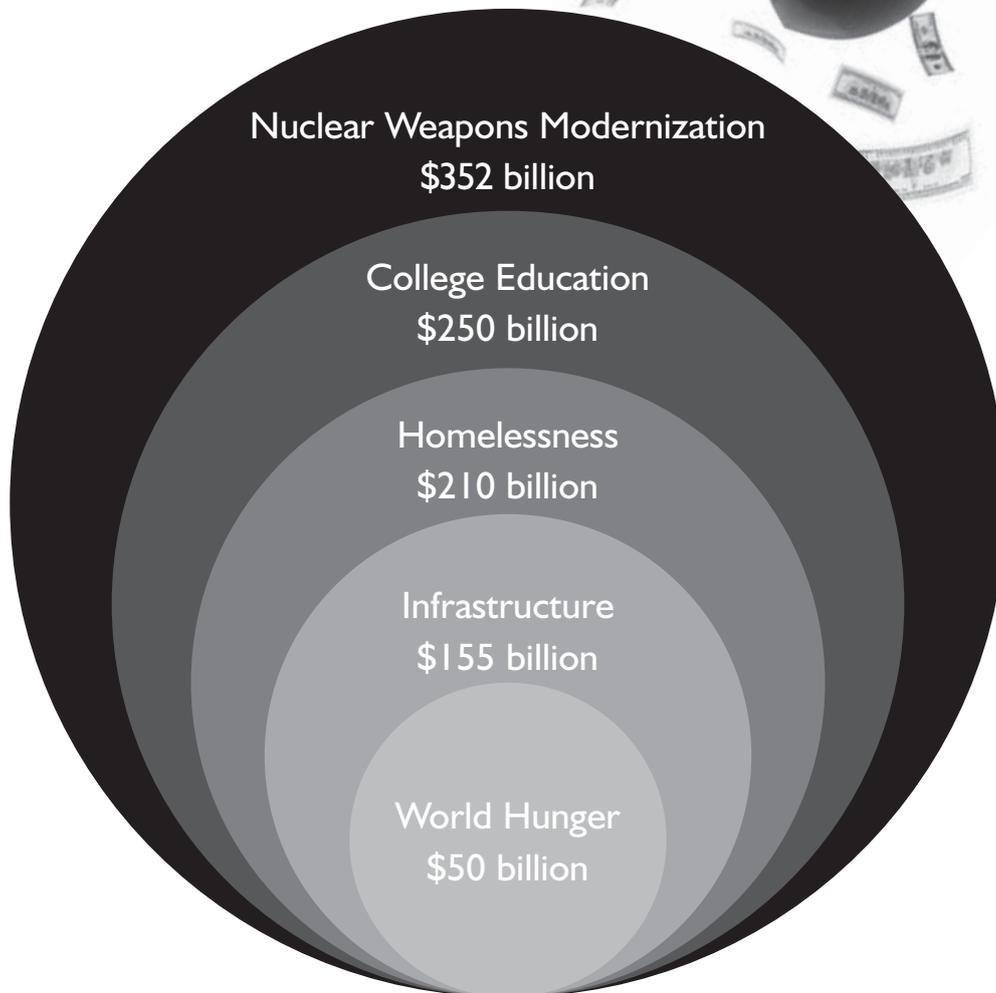
Hill and Knowlton's head openly boasted about the success of his 'press kit' in influencing hundreds of millions of people. And many of the videos shown on TV as 'news' were simply exaggerated sales propaganda put out by the arms manufacturers to their clients. In today's 'New World order' where giant corporate interests rule our lives and public relations agencies determine foreign policy, manipulation by highly paid spin doctors and wordsmiths has become the norm and it has become increasingly difficult for ordinary people to sort out the truth from the lies.

END PART ONE

TUNE INTO THE UNITARIAN HALF HOUR
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TEN YEARS OF SPENDING

Which problems do you want to solve?



to launch them (missiles, bombers and submarines) need to be updated and replaced.

Yet, even if we accept the flawed logic of deterrence and mutual assured destruction (MAD) this spending is a boondoggle, a windfall for the military industrial complex. In fact, under the Pentagon's stockpile stewardship program, all non-nuclear components of these weapons are checked and replaced as needed. And the Pentagon's JASON project reports that the nuclear components will remain stable for at least 50–60 years!

Under pressure from the military-industrial-Congressional complex, including the nuclear weapons laboratories, wasteful and dangerous nuclear weapons modernisation is moving forward, diverting our limited financial resources from addressing the needs of the hungry, the homeless, and those who can't afford healthcare. A quarter of the

projected spending for modernisation could provide free college education, for all who are qualified in America, for a decade. Spending to contain and reverse climate change and to repair the nation's crumbling infrastructure would meet essential needs while creating jobs and providing greater economic opportunity and security.

The cost to average Americans:

In addition to the risk of nuclear annihilation and the failure to fund essential human needs, there is an additional personal cost: about \$3,125 per person or \$12,500 for a family of four. Here in Massachusetts, this amounts to more than \$20 billion, enough to rebuild the MBTA and \$13 billion left over for housing, schooling, and fixing our roads, bridges and election financing.

Don't mourn. Organise! —



TAX 'REFORM' AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

by GAETANO GRECO

After all taxation is supposed to be an instrument of income distribution from the rich to the rest of us. That's how governments fund hospitals, education, transport and the welfare state to ameliorate the excesses of wealth accumulation in capitalist societies.

The GST instead is a regressive tax as medium low income earners proportionally pay more than the rich. But it's astounding that some top accounting firm partners using Orwellian double speak try to make us believe that increasing the GST is fair on everyone. They are intellectually dishonest and doing the bidding for their corporate clients.

If our political class and commentators were serious about putting all options on the table to create a fairer taxation system, we should be discussing how to make corporations pay their fair share or introducing a wealth tax as suggested by Piketty.

If our politicians were really game we should be looking at implementing a Transaction Tax or Tobin Tax. Imagine a tax on all transactions electronically collected by our big banks. There would be no loop holes for thieving corporate lawyers and accountants to avoid or evade tax for handsome consultancy fees. What could be fairer than that?

Do we have the stomach to broaden the debate to create a fairer tax system for a fairer society?

The government and opposition are again pretending to talk about tax 'reform'.

While both are saying that all options need to be considered, the debate has already been narrowly and conveniently defined within a neo-economic liberal framework. The government on the one hand is sneakily limiting the debate to either broadening and/or increasing the GST to 15% while the opposition is thinking of tinkering at the margins so that it can simply balance the budget.

Very few are making the link between years of massive tax evasion and the growing gap between the rich and the working poor in Australia and globally. Addressing social inequality should be at the centre of any tax reform debate if we want to create a fairer society.

Just recently we learnt how large multinationals pay little or no taxes while their nerdy multi billionaire owners big note themselves as social and environmental philanthropic heroes. Shouldn't they just pay their fair share and let our democratic governments decide on how to best spend it.

DID YOU KNOW...

The World's Oldest University was Established by a Muslim Woman

The Islamic religion has long been characterised as backward and misogynistic. This characterisation is misleading, however, and there are many examples throughout history that have shown the opposite to be true. One of them is the University of al-Karaouine, founded by Fatima al-Fihri, the daughter of a rich merchant. At the university, subjects like rhetoric and astronomy were taught, alongside religious studies. By some accounts, this was the first school that handed out academic degrees.

from our readers



Dear Sir

I enclose a small cheque to renew my subscription to the *Beacon*, plus a small donation.

I nearly decided not to renew, despite the interesting facts and opinions usually found in it.

My doubts centred around the fact that your articles are written with such a strong left-wing political bias that there is very little sympathetic consideration given to any views that might not coincide with yours and virtually nothing in the way of critical discussion of important issues.

I was admonished by your board a few years ago by referring to the phrase 'loony left' in describing your paper. Nevertheless I am sure that this is how you are seen – and therefore dismissed and not subscribed to or read – by many intelligent people who might otherwise be significantly interested in a lot of what you have to say.

I suspect, though I could be wrong, that your circulation is not as high as you would like for this reason and also that in regard to many of your readers at least it is a case of preaching to the converted.

I have a few suggestions which I might offer some time if you would like to hear them.

Yours faithfully

R Brummitt, SA

Our church is a public and usable asset with portable seating and excellent conference, meeting and function facilities. We welcome its use by those who support our motto 'Seek the Truth and Serve Humanity'. Interested individuals or groups can contact the church office – we would be delighted to speak to you. A donation is payable.

Increase our circulation:

Nominate potential subscribers for three free monthly copies without ongoing obligation! (Try before you buy.)

Dear Mr Brummitt

Thank you for renewing your *Beacon* sub and your claim that you nearly didn't subscribe 'despite the interesting facts and opinions usually found in it,' and thank you for even including a donation to the ongoing work of *Beacon*.

If we recall correctly, your last objection to us was based on our printing the view that there existed deep corruption both in government and across many institutions of our society. As a result of your objection, we printed three short articles demonstrating that corruption. Hopefully, you would now have to acknowledge that, as with most of *Beacon's* assessments, this has been amply and inarguably demonstrated.

Given that you find the 'facts and opinions interesting', perhaps we can safely assume that what you object to is the editorial opinion.

If this is correct, perhaps you would like to pinpoint one that you found 'loony left' or 'lacking in sympathetic consideration' and we could discuss it. The phrase 'loony left' is often applied to those who print unpalatable truths. It is used to castigate people who express a view alien to that of the mass media and the government of the day. Right wing views, which usually reflect the ideas of the few against the many, are rarely criticised.

Our late, very respected minister, Rev. Victor James, often had such labels applied to him. It didn't deter him from 'seeking and speaking the truth' and hopefully it won't deter the Melbourne church from continuing to do the same.

As for *Beacon* circulation, of course it is never as high as we would like. We would like every Australian to read it but given the size of our church we believe that over 500 paid subscribers and one hundred and fifty to two hundred copies taken and distributed around organisations is not bad. We doubt any other church has this number subscribing to their journal.

We would welcome our readers' assistance in growing the number of those reading *Beacon*. In this day and age, our truths are sorely needed.

Regarding your offer of 'a few suggestions' to help our work, we are always happy to listen to such suggestions and providing they conform to the work of our church which is based on 'reason', seeking the truth and a commitment to a better world, we welcome them. We also welcome other *Beacon* readers' comments and would like to see this debate widened.

**Warmest best wishes.
Beacon Editorial Board**

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

Traditional owners of the Kulin Nation, past Warriors, Elders past and present.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Over-governed and under-represented

The road to the watering place – The righteous path

A trillion dollars for nuclear weapons – dangerous and costly in so many ways

Welcome to your delusional democracy

Crisis in the Middle East (Part I)

Tax ‘reform’ and social inequality

Beacon Editorial Board

Peter Abrehart

Marion Harper

Donna Sensi

Julie Stafford

The Editorial opinions expressed are those of the Editorial Board.

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MELBOURNE UNITARIAN PEACE MEMORIAL CHURCH

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Monthly journal of the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church
Est. 1852

Registered by Australia Post

Post Print Approved
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