

# BEACON

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Unitarian Peace Memorial Church

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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY



## A Pile of Money for all the Wrong Reasons!

EDITORIAL

Governments can find money for all sorts of policies: for freeways, when we need public transport; for major sporting activities which make profit for a few and cost us millions; for concessions for big business that pays no taxes; for investigations into unions while turning a blind eye to corruption in monopolies, government departments and banks; for wars of aggression against other sovereign nations; and for the creation of stockpiles of weapons of destruction. But they can never seem to find enough money to provide for the needs of the people.

Governments can create huge monolithic empires like the Home Affairs Super Ministry and put in charge of this monolith probably the most hated, the most dogmatic and the most secretive minister in the Turnbull government. But it won't create a Ministry of Housing with the resources and the commitment to housing its people. After all, housing is the most basic of all human needs after food and water.

This new monolithic 'security' ministry has been much welcomed by the United States and the comments by the former US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper – whose position will now be replicated in Australia – said there was merit in Australia adopting a similar strategy.

'I do think there is merit in having somebody who can look at intelligence as an enterprise and decide on a

systematic basis where to make investments and where to make divestments,' he said. An enterprise, investments, divestments! So it is business and not simply keeping Australia safe!

As we watch our world move further and further towards the surveillance of its people, to the removal of democratic safeguards and to increased repressive legislation, we need to be aware of the almost subliminal message that is being pursued by those in power. The message is: 'If you want us to keep you safe, you have to sacrifice something, and that something is your freedom'. We need to be very sure that this freedom is worth sacrificing. You can't be free and a slave at the same time. When 'they' talk about freedom, it isn't our freedom they are referring to.

The message that terrorism is growing and coming closer is the excuse they provide for this repressive legislation and for the removal of basic democratic rights. But where is the analysis of why terrorism is occurring and proliferating? If there is an acute problem, it needs to be accurately assessed before a solution can be even considered.

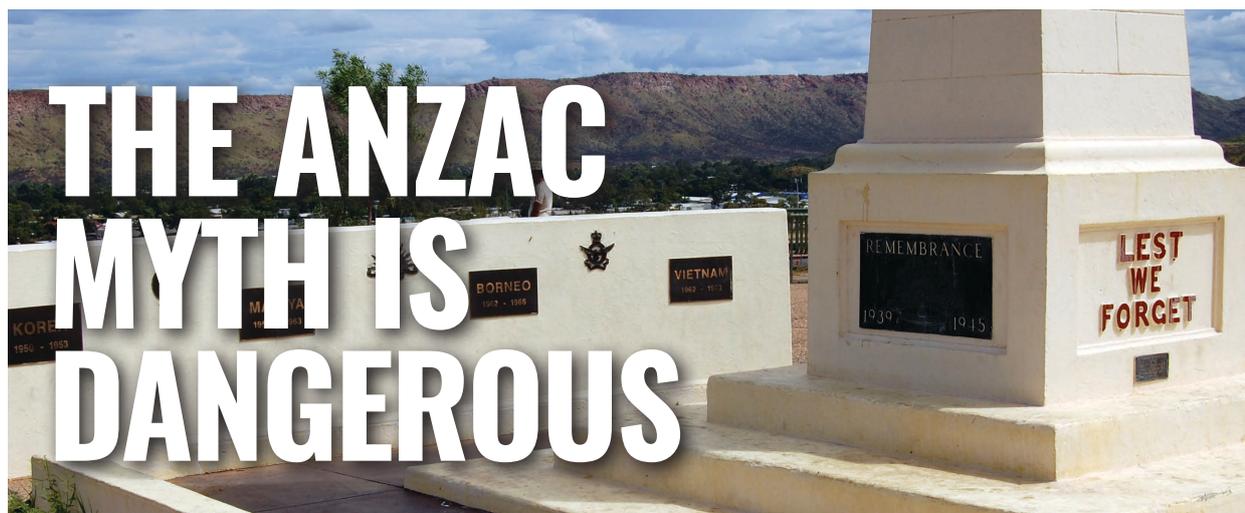
This acute problem is not being honestly analysed; it is being used as an excuse to control the population through power and fear. Power and fear are used to demonise people seeking asylum and the man most responsible for this now has overwhelming power through a super spy ministry. Is this what we want?

The following quote from Noam Chomsky sums up the role of governments in today's world and we ignore it at our peril:

*What remains of democracy is largely the right to choose among commodities. Business leaders have long explained the need to impose on the population a 'philosophy of futility' and 'lack of purpose in life' to 'concentrate human attention on the more superficial things that comprise much of fashionable consumption'. Deluged by such propaganda from infancy, people may then accept their meaningless and subordinate lives and forget ridiculous ideas about managing their own affairs. They abandon their fate to corporate managers and the PR industry, and, in the political realm, to the self described 'intelligent minorities' who administer power.*

–Noam Chomsky

DR HANNAH MIDDLETON



**Acknowledgement:** *We are meeting on land that was and is owned by tribes of the Kulin nation and pay respects to elders past and present. We express our gratitude for their care for the land over so many centuries and acknowledge that it always was and always will be Aboriginal land.*

**Acknowledgement:** *Drawn heavily on the work of many historians; particular debt to Marilyn Lake and Joan Beaumont, who have written so perceptively on these questions.*

The 1915 invasion of Turkey at Gallipoli by Britain and its allies was a disastrous failure.

The carnage was appalling. Turkish total losses were about 300,000. Estimates of the British and Dominion losses lie between 198,000 and 215,000, with something like 46,000 dead.

Eight thousand, seven hundred and nine Australians were killed in action or died of wounds or disease. Australians wounded and missing numbered 19,441.

From all this the ANZAC myth was crafted – a story which suggests that Australian soldiers possessed qualities including endurance, courage, ingenuity, good humour, larrikinism and mateship. The soldiers are perceived to have been stoical and laconic, irreverent in the face of authority, naturally egalitarian and disdainful of British class differences. The ANZAC myth also suggests that the Gallipoli campaign was the birth of Australian nationhood.

For the ruling elites, ANZAC is not simply an historical commemoration. Rather it has been and is being used to promote unquestioning respect for the military and acceptance of military action as an effective and legitimate way to solve problems. It is also used to suppress anti-war sentiment.

Today the world situation increasingly resembles the cauldron of tensions that dominated in the period prior to World War I. The US has launched non-stop wars and interventions over the past two-and-a-half decades in a bid to counter its economic decline through military means.

US President Trump has used 60 Cruise Tomahawk missiles to bomb a military airfield near Homs, Syria's third largest city. Neither Trump nor any US government

agency has presented a shred of proof that the Assad government used sarin nerve gas.

Trump has also sent warships to the Korean peninsula, threatening that the US is prepared to shoot down any North Korean missile launches.

Trump has ignited what could become a catastrophic escalation in our region that poses the threat of nuclear war.

And this is happening at a time when the majority of the world's nations are negotiating a United Nations treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons forever.

Shamefully the Australian government is boycotting the talks to 'ban the bomb' and is enthusiastically supporting Trump's aggressive and dangerous military actions.

Now, as perhaps never before, it is time to challenge the ANZAC myth.

## THE LANGUAGE OF THE MYTH

There is a profound dishonesty in what is said and what is not said about the Gallipoli invasion.

Of course the word 'invasion' is very rarely used – ANZAC is a sanitised narrative of the war. Australian soldiers of World War I are no longer depicted as superb fighters who prided themselves on being able to impale a German or a Turk on their bayonets.

Now they are 'the fallen'.

Ken Inglis writes:

*... soldiers of the Queen did not stagger or sink or topple or have bits blown off, but fell, to become not quite simply the dead but the fallen, who cleanly, heroically, sacrificially gave their lives in war.*

*And so, we came to speak not of precisely how they died (eviscerated, burnt, drowned in mud, of thirst and by bleeding out and screaming for their mothers in no man's land) but rather just that they "fell".*

We speak of those who fell. We do not speak of the fact that they were sent overseas to kill.

There is much talk of dying, or more commonly of sacrifice, there is little mention of killing and almost never any assessment of the carnage inflicted on distant countries in our name.

It is said that the soldiers paid 'the ultimate sacrifice'. But actually they didn't sacrifice themselves, officers sacrificed them. There is a stark difference.

The ANZAC myth speaks of 'heroes'. It says nothing about the 155,000 wounded and maimed, the countless men stricken by shell shock, the disfigured men who were shunned; the rampant alcoholism and morphine addiction; the terrified kids and battered wives, and the suicides.

There is an overwhelming silence in Australian commentary about the role of colonial troops at Gallipoli. They have been written out of history.

But alongside Anglo-Celtic ANZAC soldiers were thousands of Indigenous Australians, Maoris, Senegalese, Zouaves, Sikhs, Gurkhas and others, as well as a contingent of Zionists from Palestine who formed the Zion Mule Corps.

## SELLING THE MYTH

The ANZAC myth has become so dominant in today's political culture because it has been so heavily promoted by successive Australian governments, first by Hawke in the 1980s, continued by Keating and most heavily promoted by Howard.

There is no doubt that there has been a major and sustained investment by Australian governments in the commemoration of war: memorial building, battlefield pilgrimages and in the development of educational materials and activities aimed at socialising schoolchildren into the ANZAC myth.

Successive Labor and Liberal governments have funded an intense program highlighting the importance of our military history. Books, films and research projects have been subsidised. Old monuments have been refurbished, new ones created ... and much more.

A particularly worrying development has been the deliberate targeting of children. Schools across the country are bombarded with free material, including films, books, CDs and posters. Subsidies are provided for trips to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Essay competitions award winners with fully funded tours of European and Middle Eastern battlefields.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has provided material that teaches that our national values, national identity, and our development as a nation have been achieved through our military engagement in foreign wars.

The government is said to have spent about \$325 million on activities commemorating the centenary of World War I. A major exhibition is currently touring the country and is being heavily publicised.



# AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS OF WORLD WAR I ARE NO LONGER DEPICTED AS SUPERB FIGHTERS WHO PRIDED THEMSELVES ON BEING ABLE TO IMPALE A GERMAN OR A TURK ON THEIR BAYONETS.

## MILITARISING HISTORY

In recent years ANZAC has become the dominant force within Australian history, overshadowing everything else. Rather than recognising our role in conflict – so often as pawns of powerful empires – we have ignored it and transformed our participation into something much more palatable through the creation of a false historical memory in ANZAC.

Mark McKenna has written:

*It seems impossible to deny the broader militarisation of our history and culture: the surfeit of jingoistic military histories, the increasing tendency for military displays before football grand finals, the extension of the term ANZAC to encompass firefighters and sporting champions, the professionally stage-managed event of the dawn service at ANZAC Cove, the burgeoning popularity of battlefield tourism (particularly Gallipoli and the Kokoda Track), the ubiquitous newspaper supplements extolling the virtues of soldiers past and present, and the tendency of the media and both main political parties to view the death of the last World War I veterans as significant national moments.*

The ANZAC myth is a calculated and deliberate distortion of Australia history. The inevitable consequence of the campaign to celebrate Australia's war history is that all other aspects of our past are overshadowed and thereby diminished. Everything before 1915 disappears behind the ANZAC obsession.

In fact, events which have contributed to the formation of the Australian nation have predominantly taken place in peacetime – events including the ending of transportation in 1840, the Eureka Stockade in 1854, the first Australian Trade Union Congress in 1879, the publication of *The Man from Snowy River* in 1895, Federation on 9 May 1901, the Harvester minimum wage decision in 1907, and the suffrage movement with women's suffrage for state elections in all states and territories in 1911.

However, we should never forget that this process also includes 40,000 years of indigenous history with the final 200 years plus of the Frontier Wars, murder, dispossession, exclusion and impoverishment. This was clearly an event which was not peaceful and which had a profound impact on the Australian character.

## NATIONHOOD

The recent militaristic view of our past suggests that our nation was born, or was made, on the shores of Gallipoli, that our national identity was forged in overseas wars. This ANZAC version of our history conveys the appalling and false ideas that nations are made in war not in peace, on battlefields not in parliaments; that soldiers not statesmen are the nation's founders; that the bayonet is mightier than the pen.

But several historians have pointed out that the Australian Constitution was created by men who had never been to war, such as Alfred Deakin, Edmund Barton and Charles Kingston.

Contrary to the popular idea that Australian values were forged in military service, the majority of Australian nation-builders, including John Curtin and Robert Menzies, never served in war.

## FOSTERING WAR

The domination of our history by the ANZAC myth in recent years has created an environment conducive to war, has made it easier for Australian governments to commit to conflict and harder for critics to engage in a serious national debate.

The heroic image of the digger makes it easier to politically justify wars our powerful friend wants to wage and harder to question the costs of war. To challenge our involvement in wars is demonised as cowardly attacks on the men and women in the front line. The prestige of the armed forces shields the politicians from legitimate scrutiny.

The relentless focus on our military history reinforces war, violence and military solutions as key options to resolve international conflict. We are taught to see the military as a feasible and successful mode of conflict resolution.

## STIFLING DISSENT

The ANZAC myth stifles dissent, burying any criticisms beneath the compulsion to be patriotic and stand by our troops. It provides a means by which Australian governments neutralise dissent about any commitment to war.

The majority of the Australian people did not support Australia's involvement in the 2003 Iraq war, but



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once the commitment had been made, the Howard government made it difficult to critique the war on the grounds that the men and women deployed to fight it must be supported.

Criticising the ANZAC myth is indeed a serious thing for it is criticism of the evil and folly of war and of Australia's role as a pawn in international conflict. It is criticism of Australian defence policy and exorbitant defence spending and criticism of our relationship with the US.

Dissent threatens power structures that reinforce war and not peace and undermines our ability to act in our own best interests in foreign policy decisions. This is what is wrong with ANZAC and why today it is so dangerous.

And it is why we must all work to foster the alternative view. We need memorials to our heroes – women like Vida Goldstein, Adela Pankhurst and Pauline Mitchell.

There is a Peace Park in Marrickville and a plaque with the names of peace activists past and present at the gates of a community centre in Sydney. We need far more of these.

It is our responsibility to dissent from the ANZAC myth and to create a new national consensus that abhors war and honours peace and justice building. †

# Celia Sanchez: Icon of the Cuban Revolution (1920–1980)

**Celia Sanchez, a key revolutionary in the July 26 movement to overthrow Batista, and political and personal intimate of Fidel Castro for more than two decades**

Celia Sanchez is the missing actor in the Cuban revolution. Although not as well known in the English-speaking world as Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, Sanchez played a pivotal role in launching the revolution and protecting its aftermath. She is deeply revered in Cuba. Celia was born in 1920 in a small rural town in Oriente Province. Her father was a much-loved local doctor and admirer of Cuba's national hero, Jose Marti. The Sanchez family supported the Ortodoxo (Orthodox) Party, founded in 1947 to bring honest government to Cuba, but in March 1952, Fulgencio Batista seized power and rapidly transformed the island into a dictatorship based on terror and corruption. In 1953, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Marti's death, Dr Sanchez took daughter Celia up Cuba's highest mountain in the Sierra Maestra, Pico Turquino, to place a statue of Marti at its peak. A more explosive commemoration took place at the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba, historic cradle of Cuban independence, by Fidel Castro and a small band of militants. The attack failed and many died, but Fidel and brother Raul survived and went to Mexico, but never gave up the fight. In Mexico they met Che Guevara.

In December 1956, along with 81 other revolutionaries, Fidel sailed from Mexico in a leaky vessel called 'Granma', landed on the wrong beach and were attacked by Batista's soldiers. Fewer than 20 escaped into the nearby Sierra Maestra mountains. Celia was the first to make contact with Fidel after the botched landing at Las Coloradas beach and was a lifeline for the guerrilla fighters, recruiting a complex web of family members, friends and militants to smuggle much-needed supplies into the Sierra Maestra, providing food and coastal maps and charts of the region. She trained new combat troops to join the armed struggle in the mountains and created the Farmer's Militia, a network of Cuban farmers and landowners who supplied

resources in the revolution's early critical days, without which the rebels would probably not have survived.

In the early morning of 16 February 1957, after walking all night with a rebel guide, Celia met Fidel face to face for the very first time in the middle of a field and they were joined by Raul and rebel leader Frank Pais. Fidel and Celia became soul mates, a close relationship that lasted all her life. In 1957 Celia took up arms herself and became the first woman to join the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra. When it became clear how important Celia was to the success of the struggle, she became the most wanted woman in Cuba by Batista's henchmen. Her life was in constant danger, as they believed capturing her would substantially weaken the movement.

Following the success of the revolution, for the next 21 years Celia devoted herself to supporting the new government, creating projects that would support the growth and development of the Cuban economy, as well as enriching the lives of the Cuban people, from the creation of wildlife reserves and state parks to literacy programs. She formed the official archives of the revolution from documents she had collected, including vital hand-written messages, ensuring they were preserved for posterity. As time went by, her positions included those of secretary of both the presidency and Council of Ministers, member of the Central Committee and member of the National Assembly. Unofficially she continued to be the single most important person in Castro's life, serving as his conscience and alter ego.

Celia Sanchez died in Havana on 11 January 1980. Cubans were devastated, none more so than Fidel Castro. Celia exemplified the very best values of the Cuban revolution: selfless dedication to the people, courage in the face of grave danger and the desire to create a new socialist society. >



Born in 1920 in Manzanillo, Cuba, Celia grew up in a large family far removed from the poverty that afflicted most of the nation. Her socially aware physician father impressed on his five daughters the necessity to fight for a fairer world. As a company doctor, working at a sugar mill, he saw firsthand the inequalities in a colonial society and took his young adolescent daughter up Cuba's highest mountain in the Sierra Maestra, Pico Turquino, to place a bust of revolutionary martyr Jose Marti at its peak. The Sanchez family supported the Ortodoxo (Orthodox) Party, founded in 1947 to bring honest government and social reform to Cuba, but in March 1952 Fulgencio Batista seized power and rapidly transformed the island republic into a dictatorship based on terror and corruption.

On 26 July 1953, Fidel Castro and a small band of militants attempted to spark a national uprising by seizing the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba, historical cradle of Cuban independence. The attack failed and many of Fidel Castro's colleagues were killed or later executed, but Fidel survived and was released from prison several years later, going into exile in Mexico but never giving up the fight. Sailing from Mexico in a leaky vessel called 'Granma', he and 81 other revolutionaries, including brother Raul and Che Guevara, went aground on 2 December 1956 at Playa de los Colorados and were attacked by Batista's troops. Fewer than 20 of the original group escaped to the nearby Sierra Maestra mountains. Sanchez had planned to meet the group but had been arrested in nearby Campechuela.

At this early stage of his eventually successful revolution, Castro was given vital support by Sanchez. She provided coastal charts and maps of the region and after the tiny remnants of Castro's group reached the relative safety of the mountains, she brought in food and other necessities and established a network of friendly local peasants that enabled the guerrillas to live off the land. After walking all night with a rebel guide, in the early morning of 16 February 1957, Sanchez and Castro met for the first time in the middle of a field. Celia's code names were 'Aly' and 'Norma', a meeting of minds that marked the beginning of an association that lasted for 23 years, to the day that Celia died. The pair was joined by fellow rebels Frank Pais and Fidel's brother Raul and for safety reasons moved to a nearby cane field. It was abundantly clear that Fidel was attracted to Celia, not only physically but intellectually. She was intelligent and practical and able to argue the finer points of politics, and even weaponry, of which she had expert knowledge.

Sanchez returned to the rebels' mountain retreat several times before permanently joining them and becoming an indispensable part of Castro's life, taking on the role of his personal manager and soul mate. She became his shadow, displaying an endurance equal to anyone. She brought order to his life and saved many of Castro's documents, including vital handwritten messages, preserving them for posterity. Concerned with his physical safety, and convinced his survival was crucial to the success of the revolution she took steps to keep him from personally leading attacks on the enemy. When their prisoners (Batista's soldiers) wrote home, it was Sanchez who saw that a few pesos were slipped in with the letters and when the guerrillas ate in a peasant's home, she discreetly passed the family a few pesos on their departure. †

The best way to take control over a people and control them utterly is to take a little of their freedom at a time, to erode their rights by a thousand tiny and almost imperceptible reductions. In this way the people will not see those rights and freedoms being removed until past the point at which those changes can be reversed.

—Adolf Hitler

## DYING WITH DIGNITY

The Inquiry into End of Life Choices made recommendations to the Victorian Parliament to pass legislation for voluntary assisted dying laws. Now we need to make sure that our voices are heard and that politicians understand that it is time to give Victorians end-of-life choice, control and compassion!

Take action to let your MP know how important Voluntary Assisted Dying laws are.

Updated details [www.dwdv.org.au](http://www.dwdv.org.au)



# Poverty and Poor Health

Anti-Poverty Network meeting participants display an open letter to the Federal Government.

On World Health Day, the following Joint Statement was released by the Anti-Poverty Network SA and Public Health Association of Australia.

World Health Day, Friday 7 April, presents a timely opportunity to address the gross inadequacy of the Newstart Allowance, which severely impacts the physical and mental health of the 800,000 Australians receiving the payment.

While none of Australia's welfare payments are generous, it is alarming that Newstart, at \$267 per week (roughly \$13,800 per year), is over \$160 per week (roughly \$8,000 per year) below the poverty line. It has not been raised in real terms since 1994.

Australia ranks second-worst in the developed world for poverty rates among the unemployed. Fifty-two per cent of Newstart recipients live in poverty.

Newstart has fallen dramatically behind the rest of the community. It is now less than 18 per cent of the average wage and less than 41 per cent of the minimum wage. Living off Newstart can affect physical and mental wellbeing in many ways. It reduces:

- access to fresh fruit and vegetables and to regular, nutritious meals; the capacity to afford dental care and some medicines; the ability to heat or cool the home during cold or hot weather.

It also creates:

- intense stress about expenses, bills, and rent, which affects cognitive, emotional, and physical functioning; stigma and other negative attitudes towards Newstart recipients; isolation and loneliness from being unable to fully participate in community life and social support networks.

**Public Health Association of Australia CEO Michael Moore said:**

It is critical that the health effects caused by the extremely low rate of the Newstart allowance are recognised and addressed through a significant increase in payments to recipients of at least \$100 per week, not only to mitigate these effects but to prevent the downward spiral into further poverty which they inevitably result in.

The inadequacy of Newstart and its associated negative health impacts on recipients and their families is a clear illustration of why it is so important for policy makers to incorporate the social determinants of health into their decision-making processes.

**Anti-Poverty Network SA spokesperson, Pas Forgione, said:**

Even in a rich country, being poor has consequences. Whether it is the emotional harm of being disconnected from friends and family and excluded from community life, because you cannot afford to drive or catch public transport. Or having to skip meals, or not always being able to afford the most nutritious food. Or the fatigue and ill health that comes from constant stress about one's finances. The data tells us surviving on Newstart is harmful – and unemployed people themselves tell us this.

**An ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Service) survey of 600 Newstart recipients in 2015 reported:**

- 40 per cent are unable to pay their bills on time or see a dentist
- 46 per cent are only able to afford second-hand clothes most of the time
- 50 per cent are unable to raise \$2,000 in the event of an emergency
- 50 per cent are turning off heating and cooling to save money
- 32 per cent skipped meals in the previous year
- 25 per cent are suffering from 'housing crisis' – spending more than half their income on rent
- 20 per cent do not have enough money for essentials like housing, food, and electricity.

Making matters worse, there are not enough jobs – 11 job seekers for every job, according to ABS – meaning unemployment is no longer a short burst of pain but a long period of deprivation. With growing numbers of sole parents and people with a disability now on Newstart (27 per cent of recipients have a diagnosed disability), thanks to changes to other payments, it is even more important that those living on Newstart receive a significant, long overdue raise.

There is growing support for increasing Newstart. Major welfare organisations have long called for at least a \$50 per week increase, joined by trade unions, and more recently BCA (Business Council of Australia), along with international accounting firm KPMG.

It is the strong recommendation of Anti-Poverty Network SA and Public Health Association of Australia that Newstart allowance is increased by at least \$100 per week, to enhance the health and wellbeing of recipients, with the payment ultimately reaching the poverty line. †

Source Adelaide Voices June–August 2017

## Australian Humanist of the Year award presentation to Dr Rodney Syme

Rodney Syme, retired medical doctor, urologist and advocate for medically assisted dying for 20 years, has helped scores of people die peacefully – people whose suffering has become unbearable to them. He takes on governments, the law and the medical profession. Most recently he won his challenge of an order by the Medical Board of Australia to prohibit him from doing anything that has the primary purpose of ending a person's life. The case in question was a 71-year-old man dying of tongue and lung cancer whose life, the man said, was as miserable as hell. The Medical Board argued that the assistance in dying was a departure from accepted standards and presented a significant risk to that person.

Dr Syme did what any good humanist or rationalist would – he unpacked the arguments. Doctors do help patients to die all the time. And he is certain that this man has thought deeply about his death and knows what is in store. And of course the real 'risk' for this dying man was that he would have to endure the long, drawn out and stupefying dying process in palliative care, instead of a dignified, thoughtful death, controlled by him and at a time of his choosing. The AAT agreed:

*The tribunal is satisfied that the holistic approach adopted by Dr Syme is entirely focused upon supporting the patient in life rather than pre-empting the patient's death.*

He does what Peter Singer challenged us to do yesterday – to overcome the evolutionary imperative to be concerned only about our own welfare and that of our kin. Dr Syme responds to the needs of complete strangers. This country's failure to allow doctors to assist dying patients to die on their own terms is a

classic case of a belief system trumping the autonomy of individuals. Although 80% of the population consistently say that this is a right that they want, the belief that only someone's god can determine life or death continues to paralyse parliaments throughout the nation.

The law that would put Dr Syme in jail for 5 years for assisting people to die is an ass and everybody knows it. The homicide squad, that is supposed to police it, was given a full confession by Rodney and dared by him to lay charges. They conducted an investigation of sorts and concluded there was insufficient evidence. Andrew Denton said of him: It's a rare man who breaks the law in full public view, risking his liberty in order to help those the law leaves to suffer.

Dr Syme is nothing if not generous and courageous but he is also strategic and one of the best campaigners I know. Actually, the motive in his confession was for charges to be laid so it would become a test case that might lead to a change in the law.

Dr Rodney Syme is a deeply ethical and thoughtful man, which is why he has come through the many skirmishes with an outmoded belief system with his integrity unscathed. It seems likely that the Victoria parliament will be the first (after the NT) to finally change this ass of a law, from which some of us in this room will benefit. And this will be in very large part due to the humanity of Rodney Syme.

**Lyn Allison**, 2008 for AHOY, was the main chairperson at the Australian Humanist Convention. She presented Dr Rodney Syme with his AHOY award at the Gala Dinner, Saturday 8 April, held at the Ibis Hotel.

### AHOY CITATION

## Dr Rodney Syme

medical practitioner

In recognition of his compassionate advocacy for the legalisation of voluntary assisted dying in Victoria and around Australia, sometimes at great professional risk, and for expressing fundamental Humanist values whilst doing so.

# AN ECONOMY FOR THE 99%

Australian Fact Sheet  
January 2017

**PART ONE**



**OXFAM**  
Australia

Oxfam's new report *An Economy for the 99%* (January 2017) highlights the extreme level of global wealth inequality, where just 8 of the richest men, in some of the richest parts of the world, have more wealth than half of the global population (3.6 billion people). Whilst the difference in wealth between people in different countries remains extreme, the growing gap between the rich and the poor within the same countries – including in Australia – is also alarming.

## WEALTH INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

The latest data from Credit Suisse shows that wealth in Australia is concentrated in the hands of a few: the top 1% have over 22% of total Australian wealth.

**And, the top 1% own more wealth than the bottom 70% of Australians combined.**

The two richest billionaires in Australia, who are part of the top 1%, own more than US \$16 billion between them, which is more than the combined wealth of the poorest 20% of the Australian population.<sup>1</sup>

As Figure 1 shows, the people in the poorest half of the Australian population have little or no combined net wealth, with around 6% of national wealth between them.

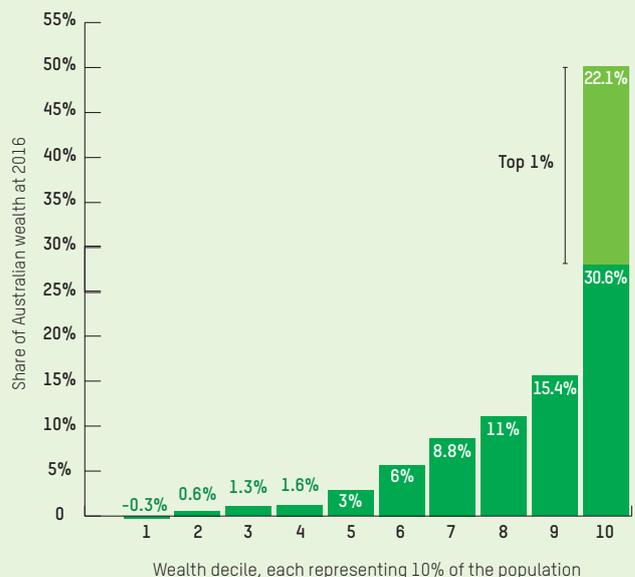


Figure 1 – Australian wealth distribution in 2016  
Source: Credit Suisse (2016), 'Global Wealth Databook 2016'

# from our readers

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## DEAR EDITOR

Thanks for your stimulating read each month.

**K Tims, Vic**

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## DEAR EDITOR

Thank you for your mind challenging articles each month. Yours is a great contribution to democracy.

**J Haslem, Tasmania**

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## DEAR EDITOR

Many thanks for all your team's research.

Best wishes

**A & J Bagnall, NZ**

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## THE EDITOR

Please renew my subscription for a further 12 months. It has been informative and educational.

Thanks

**G Stolarski, Vic**

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## DEAR SIR

Please find enclosed cheque for \$25 being for subscription (concession \$10) and donation (\$15.00).

Thank you for being there. The *Beacon* is needed now more than ever.

**P Bamforth, NSW**

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## DEAR EDITOR

Please find enclosed a cheque for \$50 to cover my subscription to the *Beacon*, which is due July 2017, plus a small donation.

Keep up the good work and the fight for a just and equal society.

Thanks

**R Andrews, NSW**

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## DEAR EDITOR

Sorry for the delay. Money order for 2 years @ pensioner rate and any leftover as a donation.

Great paper, great articles.

Regards

**P Dawson, Vic**

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## Flawed Amnesty Syria Report – seeking the truth and serving humanity?

I read Rick Sterling's article, reprinted in *Beacon* of June 2017, three times because at first reading I did not trust my knowledge of English (I'm German). But in the end I could not but shake my head about Mr Sterling's crude AI-bashing. To which benefit may this article be? In any case to the benefit of those 'glorious state leaders' like Muammar al-Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Baschar al-Assad (and in the near future probably Recep Tayyip Erdogan).

I am in no doubt that even a well-renowned human rights organisation like Amnesty International (AI) makes mistakes in its reports or is taken by false information. But did Mr Sterling at any time realise how difficult it is to receive reliable information from a region drowned in war and chaos? Did he ever talk to e.g. Syrian refugees (as I do, nearly every day)? These wars are – not only, but also – wars about who holds the 'truth'.

I could have understood if Mr Sterling had bashed the US, the NATO, Russia, and Iran which fight for their interests and influence in the Near East. I know that European governments did not play at all an honest role in this region for more than a century. (The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 was one of the beginnings of arbitrary frontiers in the Near East leading to endless struggles and wars fired mainly by strategic and oil interests of Western countries.) But bashing AI of all things is clearly the wrong way to 'seek the truth and serve humanity'. It means making a conspiracy plot not helpful for either of these aims.

The author neglects e.g. that the Assad clan has erected a dictatorship in Syria keeping control over everybody by an omnipresent secret service (we still remember 'our' German Democratic Republic very well!); he neglects that 'over 100.000 Syrian Army and National Defence soldiers have been killed' not only 'defending their country', but also killing their own compatriots (ask a few refugees!); he neglects that '90% of civilians rushed into government-controlled areas' – not because they liked the government so much, but because this seemed to be the lesser evil, compared to the Islamic State (ask a few refugees!). And he neglects that the 'Western media in general' do not exist at all as a homogeneous whole.

As an Unitarian, I am deeply sad and disappointed that this shoddy article has been reprinted in a Unitarian journal – it does in no way justice to the slogan of the *Beacon* subtitle.

**Micha Ramm, Ravensburg (Germany)**

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### DEAR MICHA

Our friends at the Melbourne Unitarian Church have asked me to reply to your letter.

Regarding your questions:

- You are correct that it's difficult to get reliable information about Syria. That's why I went there in spring 2014 and fall 2015 and also why I keep contact with Syrian friends and closely follow the news.
- Yes, I have spoken with Syrian refugees, both internally displaced and refugees residing in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. We did not ask their political opinions because they are in a very precarious situation and will be motivated to say whatever they think you want to hear. I believe that applies to refugees in Europe as well as Canada. I have a good friend in Alberta Canada who is helping Syrian refugees and he confirms this. I have another Syrian friend, also in Alberta, who confirms that some of the refugees were a part of the armed opposition. My point is that you need to take what you are hearing from Syrians in Germany with a grain of salt.
- Many people are not aware that the vast majority of displaced Syrians are inside Syria. Increasing numbers of refugees are returning home since the militants have been expelled from Aleppo, Homs and other regions. That story is here:

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2017/6/595612454/unhcr-seeing-significant-returns-internally-displaced-amid-syrias-continuing.html>

Regarding your other comments:

- I appreciate that many good people work for and support Amnesty, and Amnesty does good work in many places. Unfortunately that does not apply in Syria. My article was not to 'bash Amnesty'. The purpose was to expose exaggerations and false claims in the AI report attacking the Syrian government. Please look into my specific criticisms and let me know if you think what I think is inaccurate.
- I believe facts show that Western media and the big NGOs have been largely united in demonising the Syrian government and ignoring the violation of international law by foreign governments which have funded, weaponised and paid the salaries of foreign and domestic mercenaries in Syria.
- It's not for us to say who should or should not lead Syria. That is for the Syrian people.

Australian Tim Anderson has written an excellent book with references to the role of Amnesty. It's called *The Dirty War on Syria*.

Other sources of information to consider come from people such as Syria's Grand Mufti Hassoun (Sunni Muslim leader), Mother Agnes Mariam, Father Gregorios Laham, Father Andrew Ashdown and Dr Nabil Antaki. They can be found by searching the internet.

In closing, I realise that it's upsetting to hear a person or organisation you love to be criticised. However, it's much worse to see innocent people under attack, suffering hugely and being demonised when they defend themselves. I believe my criticisms of the AI report on Syria are accurate.

Best

**Rick Sterling**

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- Poverty and poor health**
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## MELBOURNE UNITARIAN PEACE MEMORIAL CHURCH

110 Grey Street, East Melbourne 3002  
Email: [admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au](mailto:admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au)  
Website: [www.melbourneunitarian.org.au](http://www.melbourneunitarian.org.au)

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