



SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

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Silence gives Consent

*"All too often, when we see injustices, both great and small, we think, that's terrible, but we do nothing. We say nothing. We let other people fight their own battles. We remain silent because silence is easier. **Qui tacet consentire videtur** is Latin for "Silence gives consent". When we say nothing, when we do nothing, we are consenting to these trespasses against us."*

—Roxane Gay, *Bad Feminist*

EDITORIAL

As we begin 2018, what are the issues facing Australia and indeed the world? The two major issues are the prospect of further wars and the growing gap between the rich and the vast bulk of the population and the failure of governments to address these issues. Let's look at some facts beginning with a thumbnail of the country purported to be leader of the 'free world' and ourselves.

The US, the world's most powerful nation, is being led by a billionaire business buffoon who is racist, homophobic, sexist and war-mongering. Under his watch, with the catch cry 'I will make America great again', poverty in the US is growing apace while the wealthy continue to amass huge profits at the expense of the majority and new wars are sought.

Their official poverty rate is 13.5 per cent, based on the US Census Bureau's 2015 estimates. That year, an estimated 43.1 million Americans lived in poverty according to the official measure. The poverty rate was 14.3 per cent, while currently the richest 1% holds about 38% of all privately held wealth in the United States. The bottom 90% held 73% of all debt. According to the *New York Times*, the richest 1 per cent in the United States now owns more wealth than the bottom 90 per cent. In healthcare, the US ranks last compared to 10 other wealthy nations. Countries around the world splurged \$1.686 trillion on arms in 2016, a 0.4 per cent increase on 2015. The United States remained at the top of the military spending league last year with \$611 billion. That's 36 per cent of the global total and over three

times the amount spent by second-placed China. The military/industrial complex must be feeling very satisfied.

In our own country, diligently following Trump and his team, is our federal government. So how do we stack up in the poverty and war scenario? In October 2016, ACOSS released a new report revealing that poverty is growing in Australia, with an estimated 2.9 million people or 13.3% of all people living below the internationally accepted poverty line. It found that 731,300 or 17.4% of all children were living in poverty.

While we still have Medicare, thanks to the Whitlam government, successive governments have and continue to attack and undermine it and to promote private healthcare. With arms spending, Australia's defence force has spent more than \$10 billion on weapons and military equipment from the United States over the past four years, a government analysis has revealed.

Meanwhile, jobs, housing, healthcare and education are being defunded, privatisation is on the increase and basic services are fast moving out of the reach of low income workers. So, poverty is growing, arms spending is rising and the prospect of further war is on the horizon. Governments see the world as a chessboard, where they move the pieces to suit their disastrous agenda.

Will we make 2018 a year of protest action? If we don't, then things can only worsen. Churches, community groups, unions and individuals must make a commitment to fight back. ☹



On Remembrance Day what should we remember?

The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month was the time of the Armistice between WWI Allies and Germany in 1918.

World War I was fought from 28 July 1914 to 11 November 1918, mobilising 70 million military personnel.

Sixteen million died in this war – 9 million combatants and 7 million civilians.

After World War Two, Armistice Day was renamed Remembrance Day, to commemorate those who were killed in both world wars. Today the loss of Australian lives from all wars is commemorated on Remembrance Day.

Wars are still with us, fuelled by a global arms industry and competing international interests seeking resources and hegemony ... so the number to remember is still growing.

So, today, on November 11 we are invited to remember the dead in World War 1 and subsequent wars.

As a lifelong peace activist – but not a pacifist – I would like today to ask: **What are we told to remember and what should we remember?**

Remembrance Day is not simply an historical commemoration. It deals with historical events but it contains a clear political agenda and there is a profound dishonesty in what is said and what is not said.

I am sure that many of you saw reports of the re-enactment of the October 1917 Light Horse charge at Beersheba.

The flags flew, stirring music played, horses whinnied (and don't we love animals!) descendants in replica uniforms spoke proudly of their ancestors, some wept ...

Politicians spoke of the heroic fallen who changed the course of war...

All of this was true ... but what was unspoken, what was not said?

For example, the land where the charge took place was home to 90% Arabs. Yet no Palestinians were invited to the re-enactment. Israeli flags were flown but the state of Israel did not exist at that time.

With the 1926 Balfour Declaration, the British colonial power promised Palestine, a land that was not theirs,

to the Zionist movement, ignoring the rights of the indigenous Palestinian people. This declaration paved the road to Palestinian dispossession and the systematic denial to this day of their right to self-determination.

But we are not encouraged to remember things like this.

There is often a profound dishonesty in the language of what is said in so much of Remembrance Day ceremonies:

It is said the soldiers of the First World War and subsequent wars make 'the *ultimate sacrifice*'. But actually they don't sacrifice themselves; politicians and generals *sacrifice* them. There is a stark difference.

Australian soldiers are described as '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 and of sacrifice, but we are almost never asked to remember the killing and the carnage inflicted on distant countries in our name.

In recent years war has become a dominant feature of Australian history. 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 false historical memories.

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

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.

This 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.

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.

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.

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.

However, we should never forget that this process also includes 40,000 years of Indigenous history with the final 200 years plus years 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.

Militarising our history helps create an environment conducive to war, making 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 in both human lives and billions of dollars.



PERHAPS IT IS EASIER TO REMEMBER THE FALLEN WITH A POPPY AND A PARADE THAN TO CONFRONT THE REALITY.

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.

The packaged version of the past is used to promote unquestioning respect for the military and acceptance of military action as an effective and legitimate way to solve problems. We are taught to see the military as a feasible and successful mode of conflict resolution.

Criticism is buried 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 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 in it must be supported.

There have been valiant peace movements in Europe and in Australia who campaigned for solutions that were better than war. They were arrested, demonised, swept aside by jingoism, simply ignored. Yet they were right.

But we are not invited to remember them – even when the same situation arose over Iraq, even when the same situation faces us today over the Korean Peninsula.

Criticising the myths is 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 – now \$87 million every single day – and criticism of our relationship with the US.

In Australia the decision to send young men and women to kill and be killed in war can be made by the Prime Minister alone.

We pride ourselves on being a democratic country, but as the events of 2014 and 2015 showed, a prime minister can still send Australian troops into action without democratic constraint, parliamentary debate, or public accountability.

The late former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser has written:

The way we went to war in 2003, as one of three members of the Coalition of the willing, with the United States and the United Kingdom, represented a betrayal of democratic standards and a betrayal of Australian values ...

The closeness of our relationship with the United States ... means that we no longer have an independent capacity to stay out of America's wars ... When those hard-hitting, three-service forces in Darwin are used to support a conflict in which America is involved, and when Pine Gap is used to target not only drones, but advanced American weapons systems, how can an Australian Prime Minister stand up in the Parliament and say Australia is going to pass this one by? The Prime Minister would not be believed. Australia could not stop America using those facilities ...

Very many Australians believe that it is essential and urgent that the power to declare war or to stay at peace be transferred from the Executive to Parliament.

But none of all this will be mentioned in official Remembrance Day ceremonies.

All of what I have said means no disrespect to soldiers who fought and died. They were told they had to defeat the Hun on the Western Front or the gooks in Vietnam or the rag heads in Iraq and Afghanistan. They obeyed and did their best in indescribably appalling situations.

The guilty are the ones who sent them, lied to them about why they were there, who sacrificed them for economic and political advantage.

On Armistice Day, the flags fly, the solemn music plays, the veterans, the widows and the grandchildren wear the medals and weep, the leaders speak of 'fallen heroes'. There are headstones and wreaths and memorials and speeches. They promise 'We will remember them'.

But we hear nothing about the wounded and maimed, the countless men stricken by shell shock, by post traumatic stress disorder, the disfigured men who were shunned; the rampant alcoholism and morphine addiction; the terrified kids and battered wives, and the suicides.

Perhaps it is easier to remember the fallen with a poppy and a parade than to confront the reality. Perhaps it is politically more expedient.

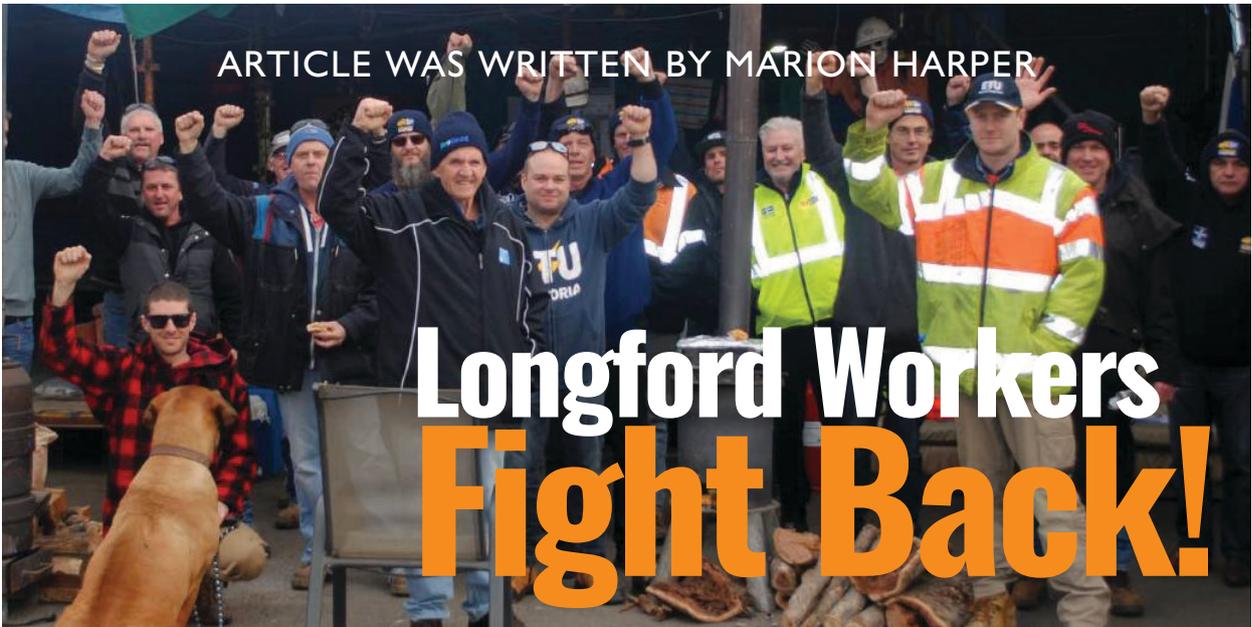
So we must ask on Remembrance Day ... **what should we remember?** 🕯

Did You Know? MPS AND THEIR PRIORITIES, GRAPHICALLY ILLUSTRATED!

These photographs relate to the British parliamentarians; I cannot imagine our lot would be any different!



Source: The Tap Blog



Last week I was privileged to attend a community protest in Longford by maintenance workers employed by ESSO, whose parent company, Exxon Mobil, is the 6th biggest company in the world: a company which last year paid no tax on their \$8.5 billion profit made in Australia from Australian workers and Australian resources. This company has cut the wages of more than 200 local maintenance workers by up to 30%, reduced annual leave, cut loadings and introduced unacceptable rosters with the potential to destroy family life.

The protest has entered its 200th day, with decent, hardworking men at this protest losing wages, sacrificing themselves and their families for a fundamental principle – the right to a decent living, for security and for a just work future for their children and grandchildren and for all working people.

The workers showed us where the company is flying in scab labour from around Australia in order to lower wages and conditions. This is despite their massive profits and their failure to pay taxes that should be providing housing, healthcare and hospitals for the Australian people.

What this experience highlighted is the now overwhelming and urgent need for a national campaign to fight back against the loss of conditions, of savage industrial laws, of outlawing the right to strike, to assemble and to protect workers' interests against the increased and greedy demands of employers. This is not just a problem for Longford workers, but for all employees in every industry in Australia whose work, income and conditions, all won by previous generations of unionists, are being undermined by savage and unjust industrial laws designed to ensure that the mega profits of capital are safeguarded. The Longford workers are shining a light on this need.

It was clear that this is not just an issue for the unions involved, or for the Longford workers taking a courageous stand in defence of workers' rights. This is an issue for the whole community, for the trade union movement, the ACTU, the Labor Party, churches, academics and workers in every industry. We all need

to be united against this blatant destruction of the rights of workers and their hard won conditions. It cannot and must not be tolerated.

We need an urgent campaign to recognise and protect the right to strike, the right of workers to withdraw their labour, the right to assemble and the right for workers to be strongly represented by their elected union officials.

In the marketplace or on the stock exchange, in the world's banks, where the rich and powerful play their manipulative money games, it is normal and accepted practice that they can withdraw their funds, manipulate the markets and destroy competitors. The question must therefore be raised: Where does the labour of workers fit in? What are their rights? Can they legally withdraw their labour? And if not, why not?

It cannot be disputed that labour is the source of all wealth. If workers withdrew their labour, there would be no building construction, no newspapers printed, no customer service, no power generated, no public transport, no hospitals, no ambulances, no fire fighters and the country would come to a halt. This is the importance of labour. It brings to mind the words of Dame Mary Gilmore, whose poem *The Union Man* says it all.

*One step to speak, one step to take,
A thousand men as one,
As like a wall least one should fall,
They stand till all is one.
A thousand men, no two alike,
and yet they stand as one.
While they so stand, no alien hand,
can bring them down undone.*

Without labour, the system would collapse. So what do workers have to sell? The only commodity workers have control over is their labour. In order to live, workers sell their labour to the employer for the highest return and they need to battle with capital to get the best return they can. This also gives them the right to withdraw the labour that belongs solely to them.

After Federation, workers learned that the most efficient way to obtain justice was to work together. Unions were

formed, collectively workers' strength was multiplied and their negotiations gained power. The trade union movement won many victories and improved the lives of workers and their families, not just in better wages and conditions, but in their broader lives, fighting for decent housing, healthcare and education.

In 1996, however, the conservative Howard government introduced the Workplace Relations Act that reduced workers' entitlements under awards and severely limited the unions' capacity to organise and pursue members' interests.

With the 1998 MUA dispute, workers and community fought back. The union movement stood together, and with community support, won a great victory against the employer and government attacks on the right to organise, the right to strike (withdraw labour), the right to picket and the right to be a union member.

In 1999 a second wave of anti-union legislation from the Howard government was defeated by a combination of union and community activity. 'Unions@work', adopted by the ACTU as a blueprint for renewal and rebuilding of the union movement, resulted in the following:

- The right of workers to form a union which elects its own independent representatives
- Awards to ensure that employers observe minimum wages and working conditions
- Equal pay
- Long service leave

- Pay loading for evenings, nights and weekends
- Paid public holidays
- Periodic wage increases
- Maternity/adoption/parental leave
- Annual leave and leave loading
- Protective clothing and equipment provided by the employer
- Occupational health and safety laws
- Compensation for injury
- Occupational superannuation
- The right to be given notice and to be consulted about changes at work (e.g. new technology, planned retrenchments, new working arrangements)
- Personal carers' leave.

Much of the above are either under attack or have been lost, and so the struggle between labour and capital in the capitalist system continues, but in this ugly period of neoliberalism there has been too much capitulation by the labour movement to the detriment of working people and their unions.

Militant talk will not resolve the problems facing Australian workers. Unions, trades, labour councils and the ACTU must walk the walk, and develop a fight back campaign before it is too late.

Congratulations to the Longford workers and their families for their 200th day of protest on behalf of the whole Australian workforce, and indeed, all Australians who value justice, fairness and equality. 🙏



As a new year dawns, everything is the same – The world bound into its history and struggles, as we ourselves are bound.

Yet it's also true that we stand at a threshold, the new year not yet shaped, leaving a great forming power in our hands:

what shall we do with this great gift of Time, this year?

May we remember that whatever justice, whatever peace and wholeness might bloom in our world in the new year, they will be brought about by the hands, hearts, and minds of ordinary people: frail and fallible, determined and courageous, who move forward together, shaping the world we dream of.

The new year offers new ground for the seeds of our vision. May we plant our dreams well, faithfully, and in joy.

– Kathleen McTigue, Director of UUCSJ

The UU College of Social Justice is a collaboration of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) and the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and is located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA.



‘A Royal Green Light’:

The Palace, The Governor-General and The Dismissal of the Whitlam Government

Professor Jenny Hocking is Gough Whitlam's biographer. **The Dismissal Dossier: Everything You Were Never Meant to Know About November 1975 – The Palace Connection** has just been published by Melbourne University Press.

The recent revelation of British involvement in the dismissal of the Whitlam government, demolishes some long-standing historical ‘truths’, notably that Buckingham Palace was in any way involved. Despite repeated public and parliamentary denials, it is now clear that British authorities pressed Kerr in person and through intermediaries on his ‘duty’ to protect the Queen, in a staggering breach of Australian sovereignty.

The dismissal of the Whitlam government by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, on 11 November 1975 was the culmination of months of political subterfuge, planned in secrecy and executed in deception. It created a deeply polarised history, marked as much by myth as fact, and rent by the same divisions as the dismissal itself. In the 42 years since, even its most basic facts that were once considered settled, have proved to be false.

Kerr always claimed that he acted alone, that the Palace did not know, that the Leader of the Opposition Malcolm Fraser did not know, that this was a solo act taken in solitude. As he wrote in his memoirs: ‘I made up my mind on my own part’. Kerr’s own archival papers have shown that this was simply untrue. In the months before the dismissal, Kerr confided in members of the High Court, legal academics, the Opposition and Prince Charles, drawing them into his thinking and planning, and creating a web of support for his action at the most senior levels.

In the decades since, the central pillars of the accepted history of the dismissal have crumbled and a different story, of collusion, deception and artifice, has emerged. It is now known that Kerr and Fraser were in secret communication in the weeks before the dismissal; that Kerr conferred for several months with the then High Court justice, Sir Anthony Mason, about his powers and that Mason drafted a letter of dismissal for Kerr; and we know that Kerr attended secret ‘tutorials’ with senior legal academics at the ANU months before the dismissal, at which the theme for discussion was the Governor-General’s discretionary powers, in particular the power to dismiss a government.

Kerr’s 1980 journal in his archives revealed that he told both Prince Charles and the Queen’s private secretary, Sir Martin Charteris, in September 1975 that

he was considering dismissing Whitlam. Charteris then wrote to Kerr about this prospect and Kerr noted in his papers, ‘Charteris’ advice to me on dismissal’. This communication between Charles, the Queen’s private secretary and the Governor-General, is politically and constitutionally shocking. It reveals the Palace to be in deep intrigue with Kerr in the weeks before the dismissal – unknown of course to the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam. It was to Kerr, a royal green light for continued deception of the Prime Minister – after all, the Palace was doing just that – and for the dismissal of the government.

With these documents from Kerr’s archives, first revealed in *Gough Whitlam: His Time* and on the record now for five years, speculation that the Palace was involved in the dismissal could no longer be rejected. Nevertheless, an ever-diminishing coterie – a mix of *NewsCorp* recidivists, Kerr protectors and monarchists, continue to deny as mere ‘conspiracy’ what is now undeniable – that the Queen and the Palace were involved in the dismissal.

The files of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), detailed in the latest edition of *The Dismissal Dossier: The Palace Connection – Everything You Were Never Meant to Know About November 1975*, contain extraordinary evidence of further British involvement, in the name of the Queen, in the Australian electoral process itself. The FCO and the British High Commission in Canberra discussed their intervention in Australian politics in the weeks before the dismissal. That they can intervene is never doubted in these discussions, the only question raised was one of timing: ‘Any intervention by us (in effect in Australian domestic politics) could have serious implications and both the nature and the timing thereof would need very careful consideration. Mr Whitlam, if he heard of it, would inevitably suspect the UK’s involvement. We should do nothing for the time being, except to continue to watch developments carefully’.

By late October 1975, as Whitlam moved to end the crisis over supply in the Senate by calling the half-Senate election which was due at that time, the FCO discussed a more specific intervention – ‘the question of our

possible involvement in the half-Senate election'. It is impossible to overstate the significance of these words, as with them the FCO had entered into the manifestly improper domain of British intervention in Australian politics, specifically in the half-Senate election.

Let us just consider the enormity of what is being proposed here. This is not mere contemplation of British involvement in an Australian political matter of mutual national interest, this is the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office discussing *British* intervention in the Australian electoral process, specifically in the half-Senate election, which they knew that Whitlam was intending to call if supply was not passed since it had been unanimously approved as the government's end-point to the crisis from the outset.

On the day that supply was blocked in the Senate, the most senior bureaucrat in the FCO, the Permanent Under-Secretary (designate), Sir Michael Palliser, visited Kerr and confirmed that 'the Governor-General could be relied upon' to protect the Queen in any action he might take in relation to the supply crisis. Palliser sought and received, from Kerr and Sir Roden Cutler, 'comforting confirmation' that, 'Sir John Kerr could be relied upon' to protect the Queen.

This interest in protecting the Queen, whether from receiving conflicting advice or from becoming involved, is entirely and essentially a *British* interest. It has no place in, and should have played no role in, any decision by the Governor-General of Australia. Yet there is no doubt that it did. Kerr later wrote that in dismissing Whitlam he had met 'his duty to

the Monarch' by ensuring that she had 'not become involved in our crisis'. Kerr also told the British High Commissioner, just weeks after the dismissal that 'a factor which weighed very heavily on his mind had been the need to protect the Queen' – what 'need to protect the Queen'?

The Governor-General of Australia has no duty 'to protect the Queen'. The Governor-General's Oath of Office states that they will 'do right to all manner of people after the laws and usages of the Commonwealth of Australia' – in which a 'duty to the Queen' does not feature. The essence of a constitutional monarchy is that the Governor-General acts on the advice of the Prime Minister, not on the advice of or to protect the interests of the former colonial power. It is an unforgivable breach of our independence and our national sovereignty that British authorities approached the Governor-General at this critical time in our history – in pursuit of *their* duty, not ours, 'to protect the Queen'.

What this remnant expression of colonial power reflects is the fundamental incompatibility at the heart of Australia as a constitutional monarchy – between independent democratic government and an unarticulated residual power of the Crown. The disjuncture this intervention reveals, between protecting British self-interest and upholding Australian constitutional government, can never be resolved until Australia becomes a fully independent republic – with an Australian head of state. It's time. 🇺🇸

Source: John Menadue's blog *Pearls and Irritations*

A follow-up to this article will be published in the March 2018 Beacon.

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**CLARITY
AWARENESS
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ANALYSIS
HONESTY
SOCIAL
JUSTICE**

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Unnecessary Wars



In a letter written in August 1855 to his colleague John Bright, the great free trade liberal, Richard Cobden, expressed his hostility to Britain's involvement in the Crimean War. 'And yet I doubt', he observed, 'if there be a more reprehensible human act than to lead a nation into an unnecessary war'. Cobden clearly had in mind wars that could have been avoided and that were not the result of an immediate and direct threat to a nation's territory or interests.

Many of Australia's wars have been unnecessary wars or wars of choice, as they are often called. The new federation was born in the midst of one. In 1899 the six colonies had each sent contingents to the conflict in South Africa, and they coalesced into the national army on 1 March 1902, towards the end of a war marked by massive loss of civilian life and compounded by war crimes. Four times more civilians, and mainly children, died in British concentration camps than the Australians who died in Japanese prison camps during the Second World War. And yet in all the many hours of debate about the war, no one could seriously suggest the two small land-locked Boer republics were a threat to Australia.

But it was a portent that the Australian Army was born overseas fighting in an imperial war that had no direct relevance to national security. Since the middle of the 20th, war for us has become more common than peace. In the 78 years since the outbreak of the Second World War, we have been at war somewhere in the world for 60 years. We have been at war continually since 2001 and there is no end in sight to our involvement in the Middle East. Peter Leahy, the Director of the National Security Institute in Canberra, and former chief of the Army between 2002 and 2008, has declared on a number of occasions that we are likely to be engaged in conflict with radical Islam for a hundred years in what surely should be termed the tenth crusade. Meanwhile, brewing conflict with Iran and North Korea, with Islamists in the Philippines and tension with China over the South China Sea all point to potential future involvement. Australia is more adept at getting into wars than staying out of them. And, once engaged, we have difficulty ending the commitment.

Is there any end in sight to our overseas adventures? Surely we have to concede that there is something aberrant about Australia's history of warfare. By any measure we are a particularly belligerent country. And we do it all with a clear conscience. It is almost as if we feel we have an international social licence to involve ourselves in conflicts, many of them at least in part civil wars, in countries which we know little about and which present no demonstrable threat to our territory.

Most of the world's small- and medium-sized countries do not behave like Australia. They may be involved in

conflict close to home but few of them engage in wars that are far away. In fact, if they did send their troops, their planes and ships off on overseas expeditions as often as we do, the world would be an even more chaotic place than it is at present.

Many things need to be taken into account to explain our propensity for wars fought far away. Our institutions present few obstacles to a government bent on war. We have inherited from Britain the tradition that the Crown retains the war-making powers. And in practice the fateful decision can be made by the Prime Minister and party discipline ensures that government members acquiesce. There is not even any obligation to allow a debate in the Parliament. In contemporary Australia, oppositions are less likely to provide critical dissent when matters of security are involved than in relation to any other matter of public importance.

The same overall acquiescence is apparent when the war comes to an end. The second Gulf War is a case in point. The overall assessment now is that it was an illegal war but, more to the point, a strategic disaster, the ill consequences of which are still unfolding. The criticism in Britain and the United States has been unrelenting. Bush, and especially Blair, has experienced a complete loss of credibility. John Howard on the other hand has been the subject of almost no criticism at all. And he has expressed neither remorse nor regret for his involvement in the great tragedy visited on the people of Iraq. And this points to a more general problem.

Australian governments can go to war with little to restrain them and then, in retrospect, there is little public assessment of whether the engagement was prudent or productive. There is rarely any introspection about the morality of the nation's behaviour. We don't even pursue with any vigour the most pragmatic questions of all – was it worth it? what was achieved? how did the nation benefit? Of all the activities of government, war seems to be the one that is least scrutinised. Do we ever subject it to cost-benefit analysis? Do we count the cost in material and human terms?

Our attitude to war is bound up with the cult of the digger, the conviction that the nation was born at Gallipoli, that war has been the defining national experience. These ideas have been inescapable during the cavalcade of

commemoration which we have experienced since 2014. They are promoted with variety and vigour and lavishly funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the War Memorial. But the strange thing is that, with the intense concentration on war, the focus is entirely on how the Australians fought, not why they fought. There is much talk about tactics, far less about strategy. We like to remember our wars with the politics extracted. With the entire emphasis on individual sacrifice and heroism, questions about the point of the conflict or the morality of our entanglement appear to be disrespectful and in poor taste.

One of the most telling illustrations of our attitude to war came in a press release by Senator David Johnson in September 2013. He had just been installed as Minister for Defence in the new Abbott government. It was his first public statement and presumably reflected ideas which were current in both the government and his department. He declared that he wanted the military 'to be battle ready for future conflicts in the unstable Middle East and South Asia'. After 14 years of involvement in overseas conflicts from East Timor to Afghanistan, the ADF 'had a strong fighting momentum that should not be lost'. He explained that he planned 'to maintain and augment our readiness for future fights'. He outlined one of the reasons why, explaining that 'operationally we're starting to come down in Afghanistan so we've got to maintain some interest for the troops.'

This is the transcript of the International Day of Peace Lecture, St John's Cathedral, Brisbane, 21 September 2017. Henry Reynolds is an eminent Australian historian who has focused on frontier conflict between indigenous people and European settlers, and has written many books on that subject. His latest book is Unnecessary Wars.

This was quite astonishing. The new minister wanted a new war to maintain the ADF's fighting momentum. Fourteen years of conflict overseas had not created a desire for peace but whetted the appetite for more war which would maintain some interest for the troops. It wasn't clear where the new war might be but most likely somewhere in the Middle East or South Asia. Johnson's assumptions were breathtaking. Australia, he assumed, had an unquestionable moral right to find a convenient war wherever and whenever it chose. And he clearly believed he would have the government and the community at his back.

But it wasn't the statement alone which was so disturbing. As far as I could tell, it passed without comment. There was no examination of what had been said, no anxious exegesis. No other political figure questioned the Minister's priorities or his hunger for further conflict.

In the C19th there were many Australians who assumed that Australia would be a peaceful nation removed from the troubles of the old world. In this century we seek out war and celebrate our history of belligerence. Are we fated in this century to be perpetually at war? At the time of the Vietnam War, the American poet Robert Lowell wrote about his concern for the nation's children and grandchildren who he feared would:

*Fall in small wars on the heel
of small wars – until the end
of time to police the earth.*

ASYLUM INSIGHT

WEEKLY MEDIA WRAP - 1 DECEMBER 2017

The situation on Manus Island for asylum seekers who were removed from the decommissioned detention centre continues in Australian media and has been reported on in international media. In an open letter signed by 18 current and former heads of peak medical bodies and royal colleges of medicine, clinicians said they were 'deeply concerned' about the ongoing physical and mental health of the men removed from the detention centre on Manus Island. The group have offered to provide health checks to men in need of medical care and called on the Australian Government to facilitate their travel to Papua New Guinea.

Immigration minister Peter Dutton reportedly did not accept requests from Australia's peak medical body, the Australian Medical Association, to send a team to assess the health of refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island. Médecins Sans Frontières was also not permitted access to the accommodation and medical clinic, despite having been approved entry by PNG's immigration department.

Christian leaders demonstrated in Sydney to protest against Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island. This protest follows a day after thousands of people gathered across Australia to call for the Australian Government to end offshore detention.

Around 10 case management staff from the company JDA Wokman who were contracted to work with

refugees on Manus Island were told to leave the island after a protest at one of the refugee accommodation centres. Manus Province's police commander said the protest was by landowners linked to the company Peren Investments.

Around 70 refugees currently on Nauru, mainly single men from Pakistan and Afghanistan and some single women, were reportedly accepted for resettlement in the United States. Up to 90 refugees are expected to be accepted in this round of resettlement offers.

This week the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination undertook a two-day review of Australia, asking government representatives to explain progress in promoting racial equality and tackling racism, which included the situation of asylum seekers and refugees amongst other topics.

In international news, Pope Francis visited Myanmar and Bangladesh this week. Pope Francis acknowledged Bangladesh in extending humanitarian care to more than 600,000 Rohingya refugees who have crossed the border in recent months, but he was criticised for not adequately raising awareness of the crisis while in Myanmar. Myanmar and Bangladesh signed a memorandum of understanding for the return home of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who fled to Bangladesh. 🕯

from our readers



DEAR BEACON

A splendid journal! Thank you.

G Barrett, Vic

Thank you for interesting and thought-provoking articles.

I look forward to my copy each month.

A McKenzie, Vic

DEAR BEACON

Newcastle Branch of the Union of Australian Women would like to thank you for all the wonderful issues of *The Beacon* which have brought so many social justice issues to the fore; can't wait for 2018.

Please find our subscription for next year.

Yours in peace and friendship

L Forbes, UAW, NSW

DEAR BEACON

I look forward to reading the interesting articles. Keep up the good work.

N Forest, Qld

THE EDITOR, THE BEACON

Please find attached my cheque for \$50, which is my \$10 subscription plus \$40 donation. I am sorry for the delay in sending this, but it is sent with best wishes for the New Year and the hope that you may continue the good work that you do, informing us all on what is going on around the world in these very dangerous times.

Yours sincerely

S Bains, NSW

A UNITARIAN DOXOLOGY

Our philosophy consists of those actions, purposes and experiences that are humanly significant. Nothing human is alien to a Unitarian. It includes labour, art, science, philosophy, love, friendship – all that is in its degree expressive of intelligently satisfying human living.

We seek the fulfilment of life in the here and now – this is the explanation of our social passion.

We do not deny the possibility of realities as yet undiscovered, but rather we insist that the way to determine the existence and value of any and all realities is by means of intelligent inquiry and by the assessment of their relevance to human needs.

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