



SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

the Beacon

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WHERE IS THAT BRAVE GOVERNMENT?

Mark Twain famously said, 'If voting made any difference they wouldn't let us do it – and there is a great deal to be said for this pearl of wisdom!'

Countries throughout the world are currently faced with elections and there are deep concerns about the inexorable move to the right with the politics of fascist ideology bubbling to the surface in many of them. This ideology targets those whose lives have been most impacted by the politics of greed and who view their impoverished status as the fault of more democratic leaders rather than understanding that it is the capitalist system itself that is responsible for their poverty. Their view is firmly endorsed by the privately owned media and world leaders, such as the President of the United States and his despotic allies, including Saudi Arabia, and other right wing leaders in so many countries who appeal to jingoistic views peddled by the powerful to the powerless.

Closer to home we have an imminent election in Victoria and federal elections in May 2019 (if the government lasts that long). What we are witnessing in both of these is the politics of desperation. Each party is rushing around the countryside selling extravagant and often badly thought-out policies in order to win votes rather than introducing carefully planned and executed policies during their term that meet the needs of the community: a hospital here, a rail-line there, a new or refurbished school somewhere else. Why were these programs, policies and needs not met in the process of governing rather than dangled to the voters as gifts to win votes? Why is there no central planning around these needs? Do we need ask this question?

In education, for example, there is a plethora of state schools (government schools) whose infrastructure is appalling, with teachers striving to shore up broken buildings and prevent leaks. Toilets and other important facilities are in urgent need of repair or replacement, while huge amounts of money are diverted to the private education system, which should not be the responsibility of government, and which in many cases have facilities and infrastructure that state schools can only dream about. It is all about votes!

Health is another example. If a hospital is required, or a community health centre, or more beds or programs for those suffering from mental illness or physical disability, then these should have been part of a planned program, not offered as a carrot to win votes.

More and more at both state and federal level we see a state of internal wars in Parliament, of decision-making that is unplanned, of programs that are ill thought out, of one-upmanship, of wasted taxes, of programs that serve a minority, as in public housing, instead of carefully planned programs that meet community needs. The people deserve better.

It's time we, the people stood up. It is time we said enough is enough. We do not want programs developed ad hoc. We do not want privatisation, we do not want a state school system struggling to survive. We do not want policies made on the run that more often than not suit a minority rather than a majority.

We do want less adversarial grandstanding. We do want carefully planned and executed programs that meet the needs of the people. We do want a compassionate, caring, progressive government at both state and federal level, intelligent enough to bring forward programs that will improve our lives, that will give priority to the majority not the few, and we want governments that listen to the people not the profiteers. Where is that brave government? 🕯

EDITORIAL



THE WHITE HELMETS: FAKE HUMANITARIAN ENTITY

The White Helmets, officially known as the Syrian Civil Defense, began operating in Syria in 2012 claiming to be 'humanitarian activists'. Within a year these self-styled 'humanitarians' had established themselves as a national hub for Syria's civil defence activities with 3,300 volunteers operating in more than 110 centres around the country. Lauded in the West as 'heroes' and 'saviours' who rescue survivors in the midst of a war without regard to religion or politics, their spiel is spelled out in their website: *'When a bomb rains down, the Syrian Civil Defense rush in to a place where public services no longer function. These unarmed volunteers risk their lives to help anyone in need – regardless of their religion or politics, these volunteers rescue workers and operate in the most dangerous place on earth.'* ... all of it bullshit of a high order.

The White Helmets are a fake outfit fronting for jihadists and terrorists. The name itself was 'appropriated' by a shadowy New York-based PR outfit called *The Syria Campaign*, which was 'incubated' by a larger marketing company called *Purpose*, while the original name was stolen from a genuine Argentinian rescue organisation, the *Cascos Blancos*. But over the years the White Helmets have managed to fool huge numbers of people, with Western countries giving them ever-larger amounts of money and publicity.

In 2016, *Time* magazine gave them top billing, followed by a Right Livelihood Award and with Netflix releasing a special documentary film about their activities. The mainstream media, including the UK's *Guardian* and *The Independent*, jumped on the bandwagon and called on the Nobel Committee to award them a Nobel Peace Prize. Nicholas Kristol of the *New York Times* (probably a relative of Irving Kristol, former leading light in the CIA-sponsored Congress for Cultural Freedom) has gushed over them for years. But there's been a backlash.

An online petition gathered 3.3 thousand signatures to *not give the Nobel Peace Prize to the White Helmets*, twice as many as those who supported them. During a concert last April, it was reported that former Pink Floyd frontman, Roger Waters, denounced the White Helmets from the stage, calling them a fake organisation that provides propaganda for 'jihadists and terrorists' and that listening to their propaganda would *'encourage our governments to start dropping bombs on the Syrian people'*. And Scott Ritter, a former chief weapons inspector for the UN in Iraq and author of *Target Iran: The Truth About the White House's Plans for Regime Change*, joined in the condemnation.

Investigative reporter Max Blumenthal ran a two-part expose titled *'How the White Helmets became international heroes while pushing US intervention and regime change in Syria'* and *'Inside the shadowy PR firm that's lobbying for regime change in Syria'*, and discovered that the White Helmets were created in Turkey by James Le Mesurier, a former British MI5 operative, that they are not independent but are funded by governments, getting more than \$US55 million from the British Foreign Office and \$US23 million from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), a known conduit for CIA funding, as well as receiving millions from Israel and Qatar.

The White Helmets are intensely political, only working in areas controlled by the armed opposition, mostly with US/NATO backed Nusra/al Qaida forces and ISIS. They occasionally carry weapons, always celebrate terrorist victories and assist in executions supporting the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad. The problem is that they are only one of Syria's many enemies entering the country using different names and disguises. And how easy it is for them to shove white helmets on their heads and become 'official', guaranteeing their safe passage out of the country.

Blumenthal writes that when US Defence Secretary James Mattis cited social media as proof of a chemical attack in Douma, near Damascus, he was referring to a video shot by these creeps, the same source used by the US State Department. When asked to explain why the US bombed Syria before inspectors from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) had produced a report, 'we have our own intelligence' was the reply, highlighting a disturbing and growing trend to use social media as a justification for war without a proper investigation, like Secretary of State Rex Tillerson who trumpeted that Assad, with the help of Russia, used Sarin gas against civilians. The world's media immediately ran with the story without checking the facts or asking who put them out, when all the information in the video came from the very same White Helmets and another dodgy outfit – the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

In the alleged chemical attack on Douma, the role of the White Helmets was called out by veteran Middle East journalist Robert Fisk in an article he wrote for *The Independent* called *'The search for truth in the rubble of Douma and One doctor's doubts over the chemical attacks'*. Fisk stated that he had managed to track down a Syrian doctor, Assim Rahaibani, who told him that he had spoken with fellow physicians who were on duty at the clinic on the night of the attack. Patients were brought in by *'jihadi gunmen of Jaish-el-Islam (the Army of Islam) in Douma'*; they said, and *the patients appeared to be 'overcome not by gas but by oxygen starvation in the rubbish-filled tunnels and basements in which they lived, on a night of wind and heavy shelling that stirred up a dust storm.'*

Rahaibani told Fisk: *'... on this night the wind and huge dust clouds began to come into the basements and cellars where people lived. People began to arrive here suffering from hypoxia – not gas poisoning.'* Fisk writes that there were many people he talked with amid the ruins of the town who said they had never believed in the gas stories that were usually put about by armed Islamist groups. These particular jihadis survived under a blizzard of shellfire by living in other people's homes and in vast, wide tunnels with underground roads carved through the living rock by prisoners with pickaxes on three levels beneath the town. Other reporters supported Fisk, even Pearson Sharp from *One America News*, a conservative Christian TV network and supporter of Donald Trump, who interviewed doctors and witnesses at the clinic. They also said there was no chemical attack and that strangers came into the clinic and shouted 'Gas!' and filmed the panicked reaction.

A BBC journalist Riam Dalati tweeted that he was 'sick and tired of activists using corpses of the dead, especially of children, to stage emotive scenes for western consumption.' And then immediately deleted his tweet! But he was brought to account by former army officer and counter terrorism expert Charles Shoebridge: *'Yesterday a BBC journalist posted a rare admission that Syria rebels and activists are manipulating photos of dead Douma children for western media propaganda purposes. Today the BBC journalist has deleted his tweet, but for the record here is a screen shot of the event'*, which showed



ON THIS NIGHT THE WIND AND HUGE DUST CLOUDS BEGAN TO COME INTO THE BASEMENTS AND CELLARS WHERE PEOPLE LIVED. PEOPLE BEGAN TO ARRIVE HERE SUFFERING FROM HYPOXIA – NOT GAS POISONING.'

young victims of the Douma gas attack being propped into position by pro-rebel activists as if in a 'last embrace', creating and manipulating the content for our media.

Daily Mail journalist Peter Hitchens took the time to read the reports from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which stated that it had not visited the site of the alleged gas attack in Khan Sheikhon in April 2017, used as a pretext for an American missile attack, and had a firm policy of **never testing samples their own inspectors had not collected to ensure their integrity**. But the OPCW did get to the site of last April's supposed gas attack in Douma that received a blaze of publicity and concluded that: **'no organophosphorus nerve agents were detected'** and **nor did Russia or Syria block access to the site**. But once again, it was bombs away by the US of A.

Peter Hitchens also wrote about an extraordinary and extremely disturbing speech recently given in Westminster by Foreign Minister Alistair Burt who stated that Britain would go to war without waiting for facts and without recalling Parliament, clearly referring to plans being hatched in Washington to **'launch a massive attack'** on Damascus – and probably Iran – in response to an atrocity that has not even happened, but which the Americans claim to already have the 'evidence'.

These are extremely dangerous times, with racism, sexism, pathological lies and creeping fascism on the rise. Western capitalism cloaks itself in terms like 'parliamentary democracy', 'equal opportunity', 'checks and balances' and 'multiculturalism' to mask the ugly reality. As Norman Mailer wrote: *'One can have fascism in any form at all, through the Church, through sex, through social welfare, through state conservatism ... and via repressive legislation, police, and secret agencies'*. 🕯

'Fascism is not a philosophy but a murderous mode of deadening reality by smothering it with lies.'

AUSTRALIA'S CASUALISATION CRISIS

The Australian Unemployed Workers' Union (AUWU) works towards a future where everyone has the right to dignified social security and employment. We are all volunteer run, free to join, open to anybody, and we are non-partisan.

The bulk of our work falls into campaigning and advocacy. We are currently focused on the Senate Inquiry into the *jobactive* system.

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/JobActive2018

In order to receive an unemployment benefit, the government requires recipients to report to a job agency, which oversees a compliance regime of activities that is one of the most onerous put upon unemployed workers in the OECD. This is the essence of the *jobactive* system, which about 650,000 Australians are dealing with at any one time.

As a result of the financial incentives for job agencies, and of the power imbalance in the relationship between the Newstart recipient and their caseworker (who is often under-trained, overworked and under-resourced and has the power to suspend payments), relationships have a tendency to deteriorate from onerous into bullying.

People can contact our free advocacy services via our five-day per week hotline, email and website. Our services are overwhelmed by calls and emails from people who have had their payments cut off, are being forced into unsuitable activities, and have nowhere else to turn.

For example, we hear many stories of sole parents forced to go to Work for the Dole activities and leave their children unattended, young people told to do Work for the Dole rather than attend the training they prefer, people forced to attend multiple unnecessary

appointments, or people who have their payments cut off because they failed to attend an appointment due to illness.

It doesn't have to be this way. For thirty years between 1945 and 1975, successive governments maintained a full employment economy, and unemployment was kept below 2%. Long-term unemployment and underemployment simply did not exist.

Quite rightly during this full employment period, governments viewed unemployment as a result of its macroeconomic policies. Since then, as the result of an unjustified fear of inflation, governments have chosen to maintain a high unemployment rate. And in a further attack upon workers, even though there is currently an average of sixteen job seekers for every job vacancy, unemployment is seen as a failing of the individual.

THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF UNEMPLOYED WORKERS ARE LOCKED INTO A NO-WIN SITUATION AND PUNISHED FOR BEING UNEMPLOYED.

We believe that with the right political will we can have full employment again, along with a strong social safety net to help people unable to work. This is the vision the AUWU hopes to share with all workers, from school leavers to retired, from invisible and under-employed to carers and disabled. 🙏

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CHURCH BANKING DETAILS

BANK: ANZ
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TUNE IN!

THE UNITARIAN HALF-HOUR
EVERY SATURDAY AT 10.30 AM
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Walk together in respect

We have a choice in Australia.

We can succumb to the increasingly shrill voices of greed, intolerance, bigotry and division or we can rally together to walk forward in respect.

With more than 300 languages spoken in our homes, over 100 religions and more than 300 different ancestries, the 2016 Census highlights Australia's rich cultural diversity. This wide variety of backgrounds, together with the many cultures of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, has helped to create a uniquely Australian identity.

Our diversity is a unique strength that should be protected. It should be embraced and celebrated. It enriches us and keeps us safe from the sectarian and ethnic divisions that cause such pain and violence in other countries.

Here, all are free to flourish within the confines of the common law that allows all of us to raise our children in safety, offering them the opportunity to be happy, healthy participants in our society.

We certainly do not live in some sort of Utopia where life's struggles have disappeared. But we are better placed than most to deal with them.

Let's focus on how we can support those that need it rather than dividing into camps throwing rocks at each other.

Let's learn from those who have witnessed the greatest change in their homeland.

We seek to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

Do we care enough to join them in walking together to make Australia a better place? Can we show the same generosity and forgiveness, the same nurturing of the environment and custodial obligation to future generations?

I hope so – generosity of spirit, forgiveness, and pulling together are Australian qualities worth fighting for. 🙏

Source: The Australian Independent Media Network

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.

What's wrong with privatisation? PART 1



... POLITICIANS TALKED UP THE IDEA THAT DEREGULATION AND PRIVATISATION SHOULD BE USED TO CREATE 'FREE MARKETS' AND PROMOTE COMPETITION AND EFFICIENCY.

For the last ten years of their long lives, my parents Dot and Bill Watts relied heavily on the City of Greater Geelong for home and community care. My parents had retired in their late sixties to Ocean Grove on the surf coast. My mother died at 84 and my father at 92, both in 2008. They lived well and in their own home until my mother died at home and then my father died a month later in hospital. Over the last eight years or so of their life together, Geelong Council's HACC program provided Dot and Bill with weekly cleaning, which my parents looked forward to, not least of all for the company and the cups of tea and biscuits they shared with a succession of wonderful women; they also got monthly gardening and general home

tidying, and then in the last few years, as Dot's dislike for cooking really kicked in, they agreed to take in meals-on-wheels which provided them with healthy, nutritious and affordable meals. Finally, as they grew increasingly frail, both got support with their personal hygiene, such as showering, which my father seemed to enjoy a lot.

What they got was care, offered with both sensitivity and a regard for their dignity and their wishes. It helped that it was a service that was also affordable – and that many of their friends and neighbours were also looked after by the HACC program. I have no doubt it extended the physical and emotional quality and scale of my parents' lives immeasurably.

In some ways HACC was a late add-on to the old idea that governments should own things, should invest in people, should regulate various markets so as to ensure people could own their own homes and should provide basic services ... all in the name of promoting the public good. Back in the 1980s, higher education was free. Back in the 1980s, governments owned banks, shipping companies, oil refineries, brickworks, pipeworks, flourmills, fishing trawlers, timberyards, butter factories and clothing manufacturers. Then, as Michael Pusey put it, a 'nation-building state changed its mind' as politicians talked up the idea that deregulation and privatisation should be used to create 'free markets' and promote competition and efficiency.

Decades later we confront another 'bright idea', that we privatise HACC, an idea promoted by the Productivity Commission and by a succession of Australian governments involving the Labor and Coalition parties.

As you'll recollect, the Home and Community Care (HACC) program was established under the *Home and Community Care Act 1985*. It was a joint Australian Commonwealth (Federal) and state/territory government program run in collaboration with local governments around the country. It provided support to all frail older people, younger people with disabilities and their carers.

The program was designed to help people like my parents stay at home and prevent inappropriate or premature admission into residential care. The HACC program was jointly funded by the Australian Government and the state and territory governments. The state and territory governments were responsible for managing the program, while the Australian Government maintained a broad strategic role. The Home and Community Care (HACC) program, which provided low-level services to enable an older or disabled person to stay at home, was a small but important part of the 'aged care' program. In 2011, over one million older Australians (and their carers) each year got Australian government-subsidised services, with more than half receiving low-intensity support through the Home and Community Care (HACC) program.

In 2014–15, over 812,000 people aged 65 years and over (50 years and over for Indigenous Australians) used Home and Community Care (HACC) services. In

2014–15, 13% of Australian federal government aged care expenditure was on the Home and Community Care (HACC) program.

However, in 2011, Australia's Productivity Commission reported that the HACC system was 'complex and difficult' to navigate with 'considerable discontinuity' between the levels of private co-contributions paid for HACC services. They made a recommendation to consolidate the many assessment processes currently undertaken by HACC providers and Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACATs).

In April 2012 the Gillard Labor government, in response to the Productivity Commission report, published a package of so-called reforms, *Living Longer, Living Better*. The *Living Longer, Living Better* 'reforms' passed into legislation in June 2013. The Labor government claimed that these 'reforms' would deliver 'a less regulated, more consumer-driven and market-based aged care system'. It was claimed that it would also provide more support and care at home, additional home and residential care places, a focus on greater consumer choice and control, and greater recognition of diversity and support to carers. In future it seemed that community care packages were to be delivered under a consumer-directed care (CDC) model from July 2015.

From July 2015 the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program was consolidated into the *Commonwealth Home Support Program* (CHSP) with funding of around AU\$1.64 billion. The theory of this is that consumer-directed care is intended to give service users 'greater choice by allowing them to decide what types of care and services they access and how the services are delivered'. CDC has already been in use for home care packages since 2013 and its intention is to allow greater transparency about what funding is available under a home care package of care and how that money is spent, through an individualised budget and a monthly statement. From February 2017 the funding for 'a Home Care package will be allocated directly to the end user.'

As a teacher, I get my students to focus on just three questions: So let me ask these three questions that really matter:

WHAT IS ACTUALLY GOING ON?

HOW DO WE BEST UNDERSTAND OR EXPLAIN WHAT IS HAPPENING?

CAN WE DO BETTER?

This is what is actually happening. What is actually going on is the effort of a political class that is besotted with a neoliberal project, a delusional and deeply toxic policy commitment to privatisation. Neoliberals say they want to shrink government, increase the role played by markets in most aspects of life, and promote individual freedom and competition so as to create an efficient and fair society.

That's what they say. What they actually do is quite different, as I'll suggest shortly. As Richard Denniss, the chief economist at the Australia Institute has recently said, 'The era of "economic rationalism", small government and blind faith in market forces is dead'. However, I am afraid that as Mark Twain famously once said, after reading his obituary in a local newspaper, *'The report of my death was an exaggeration'*. Indeed as Denniss goes on to acknowledge, 'Even as a corpse the idea that what is good for business is good for the country [still] has so much rhetorical and political power ...'



WHAT IS PRIVATISATION?

PRIVATISATION IS NOT ONE POLICY. THERE ARE AT LEAST SIX KINDS OF PRIVATISATION.

1. Governments get rid of vital welfare and justice functions that they hand over to private for-profit companies and not-for-profit charities, such as employment services, disability services and home and community care.
2. Governments at all levels have sold off valuable assets, such as Commonwealth and state banks, Telstra, electricity, gas and water utilities that had long been provided by governments as a public service, along with public transport systems such as rail, tram and bus services and even the odd airline such as QANTAS.
3. Governments have also decided to stop investing directly in basic physical infrastructure and services. Governments have introduced so-called 'public-private' partnerships to provide basic infrastructure, such as freeways, bridges, tunnels – and even prisons.
4. Governments have also deregulated various markets, such as the labour market or the banking and finance systems, arguing that they are creating free markets and are committed to competition, will impose discipline, increase economic growth, employment and accountability, and so forth.
5. Cutting public investment to basic public services, such as public education and health and asking schools, universities and hospitals, for example, to believe that they are now operating in education or the healthcare market, run like businesses, sell their services, advertise and introduce the language and behaviour of corporate managers and use fake data/metrics to show how the 'new markets' and 'competition works', suggesting they're actually doing better (like customer satisfaction surveys).
6. Finally, governments have introduced the user-pays principle. In the case of education, this has meant requiring young people to take on mountains of debt to pay for their post-secondary education. The comprehensive failure of vocational education privatisation is now universally recognised and it won't be long before the disaster it has achieved in higher education is also revealed.

Privatising HACC is part of a long history of bipartisan support by so-called Labor and so-called conservative governments for what we used to call 'economic rationalism' and now call 'neoliberalism'.

Privatising HACC is just a part of a long-term policy framework introduced first under the Whitlam government on an experimental basis and then really set loose by the Hawke-Keating Labor governments between 1983–1997, and added to on a continuing basis by both so-called Labor and so-called conservative governments. The rhetoric consistently adopted by both Labor and Coalition governments has talked up the value of a more 'market-based, consumer-driven aged care system'. In 2015, for example, Senator Fifield said, 'The move to open up competition in the home care sector will lead to enhanced quality, innovation and service delivery'.

None of this is true. Neoliberalism (and privatisation) is both a failed and a fraudulent policy: it doesn't actually deliver what its advocates say it will produce ... such as smaller government, or cheaper, more efficient services or more competition or more economic growth. Far worse is that it is a toxic policy that causes serious social, economic and political harms. As Damien Cahill and Phillip Toner say in their excellent new book, privatisation and deregulation have reduced the quality of vocational and education training at the cost of massive waste and malfeasance. It has increased the costs of electricity to households and businesses, it has encouraged massive losses and fraud in the banking and finance sectors, it has promoted growing income and wealth inequality and sponsored the rapid increase in house prices leading to a crisis of affordability over the last decade. 🕯️ END OF PART ONE



AN ANCIENT LIE

‘Every ambitious would-be empire clarions it abroad that she is conquering the world to bring it peace, security and freedom, and is sacrificing her sons only for the most noble and humanitarian purposes. That is a lie, and it is an ancient lie, yet generations still rise and believe it! ...

If America ever does seek Empire, and most nations do, then planned reforms in our domestic life will be abandoned, States Rights will be abolished – in order to impose a centralized government upon us for the purpose of internal repudiation of freedom, and adventures abroad.

The American Dream will then die – on battlefields all over the world – and a nation conceived in liberty will destroy liberty for Americans and impose tyranny on subject nations.’

GEORGE S BOUTWELL (1818–1905) American statesman, Secretary of the Treasury under President Ulysses S Grant, Governor of Massachusetts, Senator and Representative from Massachusetts

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.

Our religious emotions are therefore expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social wellbeing.

UK – EFFECTS OF NEOLIBERALISM

BY MARION HARPER

Councils in the UK are a little like state governments here ... they administer infrastructure, such as housing, schools, hospitals, etc., but neoliberalism has impacted their councils as it has impacted our services here. Local government in England has not been knocked down, but it is on the ropes. They have seen their central government funding halved in the era of neoliberalism and austerity and they are now on the verge of financial breaking point.

Relentless budget cuts amid rising levels of poverty have put great strain on the ability of local authorities to provide essential services – particularly social care. The British conservative government has been accused of deliberately devolving the pain of austerity onto local councils to divert attention from their policies. Some key statistics:

- The government spending watchdog has reported a 49.1% real-terms reduction in government funding for local authorities in the eight years since 2010.
- It estimates that if local authorities keep draining their reserves at the current rate, one in 10 will have exhausted them in just three years' time.
- In 2010–11, English councils were spending £23.2bn on adult social care and £21.2bn on other services in today's money. By 2016–17, that had fallen to £22.5bn and £14.8bn respectively.
- An analysis by the Local Government Association (LGA) reveals that, overall, councils will have suffered a 77 per cent decrease in government funding between 2015/16.

With austerity, more than a third fewer households have a weekly waste collection and the number of libraries has fallen by more than 10 per cent. Due to unavoidable reductions in home to school travel, some 20,000 less pupils receive free travel to local schools. Many older people are simply being denied the care they need. It is claimed that 'Unless there is additional investment into local services and local government, councils will be in an impossible position and more will follow Northamptonshire County Council into bankruptcy'.

However Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the British Labour Party, and his manifesto of renationalising, restoring and reinstating much of the social infrastructure has been subject to a concerted effort by the media, the conservative government and both British and foreign

big business to prevent his election, and if he does get elected, to prevent the implementation of his program.

This is what Corbyn said in the foreword to his manifesto:

A big part of being the leader of a political party is that you meet people across the country and hear a wide range of views and ideas about the future. For me, it's been a reminder that our country is a place of dynamic, generous and creative people with massive potential. But I've also heard something far less positive, something that motivates us in the Labour Party to work for the kind of real change set out in this manifesto. It is a growing sense of anxiety and frustration.

Faced with falling living standards, growing job insecurity and shrinking public services, people are under increasing strain. Young people are held back by debt and the cost of housing. Whole families are being held back from the life they have worked towards. I'm constantly told of these pressures in the workplace. Faced with constant cuts and interference, our police, nurses, doctors, teachers and council staff are held back from delivering the public services they signed up to. Workers are held back by falling real pay and job security. Our entrepreneurs and managers are being held back from growing their business. If you are increasingly asked to do more with less, then you are not alone.

Every election is a choice. What makes this election different is that the choice is starker than ever before. You can choose more of the same: the rich getting richer, more children in poverty, our NHS failing and our schools and social care in crisis. Or you can vote for the party that has a plan to change all of this.

Britain is the fifth richest country in the world. But that means little when many people don't share in that wealth. Many feel the system is rigged against them. And this manifesto sets out exactly what can be done about it.

Labour will invest in the cutting-edge jobs and industries of the future that can improve everybody's lives. Which is why this manifesto outlines a fully costed programme to upgrade our economy. From childcare to transport, housing to lifelong learning, Labour understands how a successful economy depends on services that support us all.

It is a good program and one that meets people's needs but the establishment works feverishly to undermine it. ☹️

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

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

from our readers



DEAR ALL

Many thanks for the *Beacon* and I enclose a cheque to renew my membership and a donation.

I thought you were going to take a stand there at one stage on the seriousness of climate change, the corruption of the two-and-a-half major parties, and get behind a push to green our future voting. Only a massive change in voting direction will make any difference at all at this stage and at all levels: state, council and national.

Unfortunately greening a vote requires greater complexity of thought (the importance of environment, social justice, a sustainable economy and governance with dignity and integrity). It is easier for most people to keep to money for the Liberal/National Parties and socialism for Labor, or jobs (hours) and growth in the current lingo for the trio.

I liken the stance to that of women in the society: despite evidence to the contrary for the past three decades in qualifications, experience and skills, they are seen as never as good as men in the roles. The same with green groups and true independent candidates who embrace broader agendas, who are more skilled and knowledgeable in social and environmental areas and who bring compassion and conscientiousness to their roles – they are just dismissed by prejudice as not equal or superior to the suited set of predominantly white males.

Change is so difficult to achieve but a radical (evidence and/or solutions-based thinking and action) or left wing (socialist) dynamic will be the only platforms to counter the corporate, capitalist totalitarianism that is currently suffocating our societies, culture, thinking and attitudes.

K MacKay, Vic

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Beacon

The response of some Jewish supporters of Israel to articles on the continuing Gaza massacre is very disappointing to many of us.

There has been a sustained attempt to link criticism of Israeli policies to the poison of anti-Semitism. Accusations of using the mediaeval blood libel and blaming Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus have been levelled at Muslim writers, including myself, for being very critical of Israeli behaviour. Of course these are both ancient Christian-based slanders with no foundation in Islamic theology.

It is very important for all of the opponents of racism to resist this attempt to confound criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism as it cheapens the very concept. It makes it easier for Nazis and their supporters to try to hide under the growing cynicism that is becoming associated with the charge of anti-Semitism.

There is no doubt that Nazi ideology is being given a shot in the arm from the white supremacy movement rising in the USA and Europe. That makes it all the more important to take a strong stand on anti-Semitism and on Islamophobia with which it is associated. Criticism of Israel is not anti-Semitic, just as criticising Saudi Arabia or Iran cannot be confounded with Islamophobia.

The *Beacon* has always taken a strong stand on the issues of racism and fascism and I look forward to its continuing in that role.

Yours sincerely

Bilal Cleland, Vic

DEAR EDITOR

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K Coupe, Vic

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