



SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY the Beacon

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AFTER COVID: THE ECONOMY MUST SERVE THE PEOPLE



EDITORIAL

Economy: to produce and distribute food, water and other needs and goods primarily for preserving the human life.
— Oxford Languages

This dictionary definition has little in common with the 'economy' that federal government politicians and business leaders constantly talk about. In the neoliberal world 'the economy' is there to serve the monopolies and by doing so allows some of their largesse to 'trickle down' to the mass of the people. 'The economy', according to those who rule, apparently provides the primary reason for our existence: we exist to keep the wheels of industry rolling smoothly and in return provide lots of jobs for everyone. The truth of course is that the creation of good quality full-time jobs has not been happening for some time.

We all know that there is a constant fierce battle between those who employ and those who are employed to decide the share of the economy that will go to each. We also know that governments tend to throw their weight behind employers and deride and denigrate unions attempting to defend their members' right to a fairer share of the wealth they produce.

Courtesy of COVID, Australia has already experienced the greatest economic contraction since the Great Depression, according to the Reserve Bank of Australia, and has already lost 800,000 jobs and suffered a 7% reduction in take-home pay, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Yet as unemployment skyrocketed and COVID slashed working hours by a record 9.8 per cent, *business profits actually increased*. Why? Because business subsidies and tax cuts directly increased business profits. JobKeeper subsidies worth \$31.0 billion and Boosting Cash Flow for Employers worth \$16.0 billion and state governments added an additional \$3.6 billion to business income. The Morrison government insisted that JobKeeper was designed to enable businesses to keep their workers on by subsidising the cost of wages. This has not happened.

When we talk about the crisis of capitalism, we are talking about the failure of that economic system to provide job security, to provide affordable services, to ensure the safety of the environment, to house, educate, and maintain the democratic rights of all the people. Do we have to choose between the health of the people and the health of the economy? No, rather we need to ask who should the economy serve?

Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS, 2018) quite correctly says:

Excessive inequality in any society is harmful. When people with low incomes and wealth are left behind, they struggle to reach a socially acceptable living standard and to participate in society. These are Australia's real 'battlers'. When a minority of people accumulate income and wealth well above the rest of the population, this can lead to excessive concentration of power that becomes self-perpetuating, fraying the bonds of social cohesion and trust. Australia prides itself on its egalitarian traditions, where the extremes of neither poverty nor affluence (a 'bunyip aristocracy') are acceptable.

If we are to establish our own roadmap post coronavirus, we need to understand exactly what 'the economy' means to those who create the wealth and those who own it. To the corporates it means how can we manipulate the economy to ensure greater profitability. To government it means how can we ensure that the electorate sees us as the better managers and how can we best serve the corporates. To the people it means jobs, security and the need for a democratic distribution of affordable services to meet their needs. The COVID pandemic could be nature's way of responding to the destruction of the natural world. The economy must exist to serve the people. There is no alternative if the world is to survive.





Not in decades, perhaps never, has the attention of the people been spotlighted on what is happening as a result of the current worldwide pandemic.

This current global crisis results from the same source: the drive for control, power and profit internationally, for obscene spending on weapons of destruction (as illustrated by Dr Margaret Beavis), and on aggressive wars.

In my view, the exploitation, corruption and destruction around the world stems from capitalist priorities and the obscene decisions to protect capital. We need an alternative society.

Recently, Sasha Gillies-Lekakis brought us his personal experiences of life in a socialist country. There are no hungry people in Cuba, no one lacks medical care, education is free, there are no homeless on the streets, yet it is a country suffering savage economic sanctions imposed by the US and its allies. Why? Because this tiny nation chose and fought for a socialist system. Sanctions are simply another form of warfare imposed by capital on the people.

Sasha's was an inspiring talk based on what he personally observed and his interactions with the Cuban people. Cuba, despite these savage sanctions, carries out its socialist international responsibilities and its commitment to its people and people worldwide.

Why has Cuba been able to handle the pandemic so successfully? *The Conversation*, 15 April 2020, states:

Some countries seem to be weathering the coronavirus pandemic better than others. One

country that moved rapidly to deal with the emerging threat was Cuba.

Cuba has several advantages over many states, including free universal healthcare, the world's highest ratio of doctors to population, and positive health indicators, such as high life expectancy and low infant mortality. Many of its doctors have volunteered around the world, building up and supporting other countries' health systems while gaining experience in emergencies. A highly educated population and advanced medical research industry, including three laboratories equipped and staffed to run virus tests, are further strengths.

Also, with a centrally planned, state-controlled economy, Cuba's government can mobilise resources quickly. Its national emergency planning structure is connected with local organisations in every corner of the country.

This tiny socialist country, surrounded by enemies, continues to provide for its people. Why can't we? Because capitalism has never provided for its people. Any benefits we enjoy have been fought for by the people themselves. The capitalist system is based on power and profit. Since its inception, it has raided, colonised, exploited and terrorised not only other countries but the people of its own nations. Historical examples are clear and unambiguous, despite efforts to distort history.

No greater example of decisions made for power and profit exists than what occurred this very month in 1945 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the last *Beacon* editorial, we suggested the real reason for the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not to bring



ISN'T IT CLEAR THAT CAPITALISM ITSELF IS A PANDEMIC CONDEMNING MILLIONS TO LIVE AND DIE IN ABJECT POVERTY?

an end to the war, which was already in its dying stages, but to put the US in a dominant position to determine the course of the post-war world. And unbelievably immoral and cynical decisions colour policies to this day.

The US has conducted a large number of wars since, but they are no longer referred to as wars. They are a legal understanding of military force in the age of a single, global war: what the US calls the 'War on Terror'.

On 14 September 2001, the 'Authorisation for use of Military Force' was passed by the US Congress and gives the president of the United States broad power to fight terrorism around the world. It reads in part:

The President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determined planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harboured such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.

There is a pandemic of wars. How many of these 'non wars' would you say the United States and its allies are now fighting? The easy answer might just be – too many.

Timothy McGrath, *Global Post* journalist and lecturer, December 2014, said:

World War II was the last time Congress officially declared war. Since then, the conflicts we've called 'wars' – from Vietnam through to the second Iraq War – congressional

'authorizations of military force.' And more recently, beginning with the War Powers Act of 1973, presidential war powers have expanded so much that, according to the Congressional Research Service, it's no longer clear whether a president requires congressional authorization at all.

It should be of deep concern to us all that the US Secretary of State, Pompeo, said recently:

Securing our freedoms from the Chinese Communist Party is the mission of our time, and America is perfectly positioned to lead it because ... our nation was founded on the premise that all human beings possess certain rights that are unalienable. And it's our government's job to secure those rights. It's a simple and powerful truth. It's made us a beacon of freedom for people all around the world, including people inside of China...

This is the extraordinary mantra often repeated by US governments to justify their indefensible interference in other countries that possess vital natural resources, or those countries of strategic value, or those who practise a form of government unacceptable to the US.

It is my view that the world's people can no longer afford the pandemic of poverty, war and corruption created by greed and power. Around the world, poverty and exploitation affect more than one-third of the world's population. The World Bank on 17 October 2018 issued a statement saying that 3.4 billion people struggle to meet basic needs and nearly half the world lives on less than \$5.50 per day.

Compare this with a report from Rupert Neate in the *Guardian* on 14 November 2017:

The globe's richest 1% own half the world's wealth, according to Credit Suisse's global wealth report published on Tuesday. The increase in wealth among the already very rich led to the creation of 2.3 million new dollar millionaires over the past year, taking the total to 36 million. Credit Suisse said: These millionaires – who account for 0.7% of the world's adult population – control 46% of total global wealth that now stands at \$280 tn.

Isn't it clear that capitalism itself is a pandemic condemning millions to live and die in abject poverty?

Is it unreasonable to contend that such wealth for a few needs to be stopped and a system developed to ensure that every man, woman and child around the world receives enough income to allow them to lead a dignified, productive life? Is it unreasonable to argue that a system that encourages such wealth accumulation by denying the majority their democratic right to a secure, dignified life is no longer acceptable? And further, isn't it absolutely essential that we demand respect for our planet?

Then there is the worldwide virus of corruption. We recently witnessed the appalling picture in Beirut of thousands of people dying, injured and losing their homes because of a corrupt government that has destroyed both their economy and their infrastructure. Lebanon is in a financial crisis, a

political crisis, a healthcare crisis, and a crisis of corruption. The people claim Lebanon's elite 'was taking the country to the edge of being broken'. This corruption is duplicated in various ways worldwide, including in Australia.

Around the world, hundreds of thousands of refugees, whose only crime is seeking a safer and more secure life for their families, are living in makeshift camps without adequate shelter, food or a future, and now we have the virus exacerbated by illegal and unacceptable wars waged for profit, power and control.

Television shows us images of people in India, including young children, scavenging among mountains of rubbish for anything to earn a dollar for food, yet the wealthy in India continue to lead lives of unparalleled luxury. It is estimated that two-thirds of people in India live in poverty:

68.8% of the Indian population lives on less than \$2 a day...This makes the Indian subcontinent one of the poorest countries in the world; women and children, the weakest members of Indian society suffer most. The top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the total national wealth. 73% of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1%, while 67 million Indians who comprise the poorest half of the population saw only a 1% increase in their wealth. Oxfam

Here in wealthy Australia, we daily witness reports of corruption, poverty, homelessness, housing poverty, and the selling off of public property to private investors resulting in unaffordable services and lower standards.

Nursing homes during this crisis starkly illustrate the truth of this. Privatisation has been an economic disaster for the people and a bonanza for the wealthy, and it has been supported by both major parties. Which brings us to the acute crisis resulting from the pandemic.

Like war, the pandemic has killed millions, destroyed livelihoods, subjected the masses to lockdowns, displacement and in those countries where healthcare is only for the wealthy, a lack of treatment and death. The pandemic has also allowed the most fascist leaders around the world to introduce fascist-style legislation to be used when the people try to defend themselves against the economic crisis that will intensify, as it has in Lebanon.

Post pandemic is now being discussed widely. What kind of society do we want? The debate about



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the future must not be captured by the 1% or their governments. The debate must be ours and how the future will look must be determined by the people.

We need to be preparing a manifesto of demand to end the pandemic that is capitalism and bring into being a society based on fairness, equality, a clean planet and social justice for all the world's people. 🕊

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

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



Defence spending isn't the way to make Australians more secure

Picture: Shutterstock

It appears Australia has learned little from the F-35 debacle.

Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has announced measures for community support in the coming months; we also need to consider Australia's priorities in the long term.

Government provisions during COVID-19 have been welcomed across the political spectrum. But serious concerns have been raised about how Australia will repay the debt.

Meanwhile, just before the Eden-Monaro byelection, it was announced Australia's military budget will continue to rapidly expand, totalling \$575 billion (more than double the announced \$275 billion) over the coming decade.

Australia's budget is not a magic pudding. The choices we make have major impacts on many people's lives.

Why is our burgeoning military budget sacrosanct? Why is there so little public debate about this massive budget expenditure? Are opposition politicians simply too scared to be labelled 'weak'? Is it actually making us more secure?

There is also a failure to adequately assess Australia's rapidly growing defence expenditure. Far too much of it has been wasted on inappropriate or poorly administered projects.

We could start by reviewing the controversial \$89 billion Attack class submarine contract. Globally we see rapidly changing technology, such as underwater drones, satellites and artificial intelligence. Yet the extraordinary cost of these subs, the first (optimistically) launching in 2035, is justified by the

literally incredible assurance that they will still be in service until 2080. The expert advisory panel advised against and the auditor general has been scathing, while even Defence has classified it as a 'high risk' project.

We have failed to learn from the F-35 jets debacle, which was deeply flawed, highly politicised, hugely delayed and extremely costly. Last year two recent Air Force chiefs asserted the Air Force's brand-new fighter is inadequate. This is strategically unacceptable and a waste of taxpayers' money.

The Coalition are supporting the weapons industry as a priority in Australia. The same government that refused subsidies to the manufacture of cars is now subsidising the manufacture of weapons. Again, there has been minimal public debate about this choice.

The Coalition has offered \$3.8 billion in loan guarantees (and also grants) to weapons companies. We are assured these billions will create jobs.

Yet there is good research showing the same equivalent funding creates more than twice as many jobs in healthcare and education, and almost one and a half times more in renewable energy industries.

How have these political decisions been made? Australia's failure to be transparent about both donations and lobbying raises concerns about undue influence.

Defence contracts are opaque and often untendered; in the 2019 caretaker period alone \$42 billion in untendered contracts were issued to weapons companies. These companies have deep pockets for lobbying and donations.

The Centre for Public Integrity, comprising lawyers, ex-judges and integrity experts, has noted:

'There is ample evidence of the power of money in our political system. Currently there is no agency that can effectively investigate corruption allegations in federal politics and public service. A national integrity commission with strong powers and ability to hold public hearings is crucial to public trust.'

Could these funds be spent in a more effective way? With greater scrutiny and better choices, we could improve Australians' security in other ways. For example, recent cuts to DFAT staffing and Australia's diplomatic capacity ignore the role of skilled negotiation and conflict resolution in making our region more peaceful. Diplomacy underpins Australia's role as a middle power.

Given our long relationships with both China and the US we should be working to reduce tensions between them. Being dragged into a war between these two superpowers would be catastrophic.

What else could we do with this money? My personal list would include:

- Increase the Newstart allowance. In 2018 there were over 3 million Australians living below the poverty line, including 739,000 children, according to ACOSS. Sole parents were the hardest hit.
- Fix public housing. The most recent census in 2016 found 116,000 Australians were homeless. In 2018 a report from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute found \$5 billion annually is needed between now and 2036 to catch up on the vast backlog in social housing.
- Domestic violence remains a dire threat to many Australians. As well as affordable housing, legal aid is essential. Yet federal contributions to community legal services have been stripped back – so much so last year the Law Council stated: 'Hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts by successive Federal governments have pushed legal aid to the brink of collapse'.

These would be my choices. What would yours be?

We need more public debate about how much to spend on Defence, better scrutiny, transparency and accountability and discussion of alternatives.

When it comes to political choices, the public interest must come first. It has been good to see the financial support provided during the pandemic. But long-term underfunding of the important areas that genuinely make people safer must be challenged.


So, when politicians talk about making Australians more secure, we need to reflect on what 'security' really means.



WE NEED MORE PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT HOW MUCH TO SPEND ON DEFENCE, BETTER SCRUTINY, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY AND DISCUSSION OF ALTERNATIVES.

Extravagant weaponry makes for showy announcements, but real security is much more effectively provided by basic income, housing, legal aid, healthcare and education.

In addition, bolstering our diplomatic capacity and avoiding sparking a regional arms race must be priorities.

There is not much that is good emerging from this pandemic but alongside the many calls for action on climate change, prioritising genuine security would improve the lives of millions of Australians. 

Dr Margaret Beavis is vice-president of the Medical Association for Prevention of War, Australia.

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6841178/defence-spending-isnt-the-way-to-make-australians-more-secure/>

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photo: Shahbaz Khan



The role of Australia in the Filipino people's struggle against human rights violations

PART ONE

I will first briefly describe the situation in the Philippines, particularly the current human rights situation. Then I will discuss how and where Australia stands on this issue.

('Kalusugan, kabuhayan, kasarinlan, at karapatan!').
'Health, Livelihood, Sovereignty, and Rights'.

These are the calls of the Filipino people.

KALUSUGAN

– the right to health – a basic human right

The coronavirus arrived in the Philippines in January and was confirmed when two Chinese nationals died of the virus. The first one, a 38-year-old woman died on the 31 January and the second, a 44-year-old man died on the 1 February. They came from Wuhan and travelled to the Philippines through Hong Kong. But even after those incidents, Duterte allowed hundreds of Chinese visitors into the Philippines. The Philippines is a popular destination of the Chinese for gambling purposes since gambling is illegal in China.

When other countries had closed their borders as the epidemic became a pandemic, as early as February 2020, Duterte still refused to consider the coronavirus as a health concern, expressing it at first as 'a benign cold'. He even cracked a joke that he would just urinate on it and it would disappear. But as the crisis progressed, as the nation started to come to grief with the pandemic, as citizens clamoured for a government response to the crisis, Duterte was still not perturbed, damning anyone that contradicted his office. He only imposed restrictions in mid-March.

There is no mass testing. To have a test, one has to pay between P2,000 to P10,000 depending on the centre doing the testing. In public hospitals it is cheaper, but results take much longer, sometimes

weeks. The majority of the people cannot afford the cost of the COVID-19 test. With the lockdown, and with companies forced to close, the scale of demand for survival has increased as many Filipinos have lost their livelihoods.

So, people are calling for free mass testing and PPE for frontliners, as many of them have succumbed to the pandemic. People are calling for health services to be provided to everyone. The budget had been cut considerably and funds diverted to maintain the police and military presence in this time of calamity. Only the military has been mobilised in dealing with the crisis rather than health services. The present stage of engagement is not with the health crisis but for control of the community.

KABUHAYAN

– the right to a livelihood

President Duterte imposed a very harsh lockdown on the whole of Luzon on the 16 March under the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) measures. Under this lockdown, public transport was halted, and many businesses not allowed to operate. People had to stay home unless for essential errands or to go to work. Schools were also closed.

The lockdown was imposed without proper preparation and safeguards for the people, especially the poor. For example, more than 600,000 jeepney drivers, whose only means of living is driving jeepneys, have been deprived of an income once the lockdown was imposed. Jeepneys are the main and cheapest means of transportation in the Philippines, both in urban and rural areas. With the jeepneys banned from running, the drivers lost their only source of income and are unable to support their families.

Without jeepneys many workers are unable to go to work. Many families have not received any support from the government at all, and for those that have the amount is minuscule. According to the IBON Foundation, a not-for-profit education and research organisation, from March each family received between P48.00 (\$1.40) to P127.00 (\$3.74) per day. The poverty line set by the government (already very low) is P355.00 (\$10.45) per day. So, the amount that each family receives is not even half the daily amount required to survive.

Under lockdown many Filipinos who had already been living hand-to-mouth have lost their means of livelihood. People are starving. Many of those venturing out to look for a job or food have ended up arrested and jailed. Some jeepney drivers have turned to begging on the streets and they too end up being arrested and jailed. According to reports, there were more people being arrested and thrown into jail than people being tested for the virus up until the end of May.

Community organisations initiated various support projects such as distributing food packs. But the Philippine government does not want local community organisations to do this. Instead, the police have stopped several community groups from distributing food to the needy and volunteers were jailed even if they had all the required permits. Those that were arrested needed to post bail of between P8,000 to P20,000 per head to be released. Nevertheless, community groups had become creative in their welfare services to avoid being stopped and arrested, especially in the provinces where there was less of a police presence.

KARAPATAN

– the right of sovereignty

Kasarinlan, the third call of the people – the right of sovereignty, the right of the people to independence, the right to their own space and the right to enjoy and benefit from the riches of their land

The West Philippine Sea, or the South China Sea, has been on the news recently with Australia and the United States putting this on the agenda for the visit to the US by the Minister for DFAT, Marise Payne and the Minister for Defence, Linda Reynolds. Among the objectives of the discussions was to ensure that the West Philippine Sea is not controlled by China, that the US and Australian trade can pass through freely and to limit the influence of China in the Asia-Pacific region.

China has claimed the area that is within the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and has built a base with an airport and a landing runway. This is in spite of the ruling by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) that China has no rights to the area.

China has ignored the ruling of the UNCLOS and the Philippines, under the Duterte administration, has abandoned its right and given China free rein in the area.

The United States, that has lost its total control of the South China Sea wants to regain its assumed control. Thus the US Pivot to Asia has become the thrust of US military hegemonic policy.

Australia also wants a part in it. Australia, being deputy of the imperialist US in the Asia-Pacific realm, and

with extensive economic and territorial interests, has supported the fascist Duterte government. Australia has troops in the southern islands of the Philippines, has extensive mining prospects in the region, and has advisers in the Philippine military. Australia is also training military officers that have become butchers, contrary to what they purported to portray of ensuring adherence to human rights through military expediencies.

The Philippines is strategic in the geographical position in Asia. The Philippines is the gateway from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean. It is a gateway to India and beyond. The Philippine position has been the most important and contested bastion of security for the region of Southeast Asia. With the coming of imperialist China, the Philippines has become a pawn in not only controlling the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean but controlling the Pacific fringe. The Philippines is the sandwich in the vast oceans of the Pacific and the South China seas.

KARAPATAN

– people's basic rights

The 4th call of the Filipino people is Karapatan – people's basic rights that have been eroded with the passing of the Anti-Terror Law

The Anti-Terror Law was signed by Duterte on the 3 July. But even before this law came into effect, the human rights situation in the Philippines was already deplorable. The killings under Duterte's war on drugs may have reduced when the pandemic hit, but the attacks on human rights workers and advocates, environment defenders, union leaders, community leaders, and activists, continued. Legal organisations and individuals who are critical of the government are red-tagged and vilified. They are tagged as supporters or members of the Communist Party of the Philippines or the New People's Army, the armed branch of the revolutionary movement, and they are called terrorists.

The offices of civil society organisations are raided without any warrant and anyone found in the offices is arrested and detained. Almost all the leaders of progressive organisations have received threats via texts sent by an anonymous person. Sometimes they are even approached by the military and threatened. In some provinces, posters bearing the photos of leaders of progressive organisations labelling them as NPA, recruiters of NPA, or as terrorists are circulated and posted in public areas. This kind of black propaganda places a person and his/her family in a very dangerous situation. Almost all those activists who were extrajudicially killed were red-tagged and labelled NPA or terrorists prior to their demise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the situation in the Philippines. Duterte and the military have used it as justification for militarising the community and suppressing dissent. The people are prevented from leaving their homes, especially in the provinces, without a permit. Furthermore, permits are only issued for limited errands and specific purposes. But the military is free to roam cities and towns.

The targets of the Duterte government for red-tagging and vilification are not limited to the Philippines. On the 4 February this year, four Philippine military

officers headed by Major General Parlade, the head of Southern Luzon Command, visited Australia. These military personnel are officers of the National Task Force – to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) created by the government with the aim to be rid of the CPP and NPA by the end of Duterte's term in 2022. They conducted what they called a 'Peace Briefing', apparently to inform the Filipino community leaders here in Australia of the 'peace initiatives' of the Duterte government. They conducted briefings in Sydney, Canberra and in Melbourne.

Through the Philippine Embassy and the Consulate here in Melbourne, they sent invitations to community leaders. From our different organisations, eleven of us attended. The hall was packed with about a hundred Filipino community leaders. Major General Parlade gave a PowerPoint presentation. that was nothing

about the activities of the government to promote peace in the area but rather was propaganda to malign the pro-people's organisations working for the rights and welfare of migrant Filipinos overseas.

It showed progressive organisations such as ILPS and Filipino organisations here including Migrante, Gabriela and Anakbayan. The presentation pictured these organisations as terrorist and/or supporting terrorism in the Philippines.

Parlade stated that these organisations were gathering support here in Australia and included fundraising to support terrorism in the Philippines. The presentation also named Len Cooper, Peter Murphy, Gill Boehringer and Sister Patricia Fox as Australians supporting terrorism in the Philippines. All four Australians are now banned from entering the Philippines. (end of part one)



BY BILAL CLELAND

RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE A HEALTH RISK?

On 6 August 2020 there were 13,469 COVID-19 infections in Victoria and there had been a total of 170 deaths. For all Australia there had been 255 deaths.

Residential aged care in Victoria accounted for 848 infections and 143 deaths. As can be seen, there is a very high proportion of deaths in residential aged care.

In aged home care there were 32 cases of infection of which only 4 had died.

'A third of COVID-19 deaths in Australia so far have occurred in aged care homes', according to Rick Morton [25–31 July 2020 *Saturday Paper*].

It would seem a fairly basic preventative practice to place COVID-19 cases into hospital care, but this is apparently not done. Hospitals have been refusing to take patients.

'The *Saturday Paper* has learnt that on Wednesday a non-profit nursing home in Melbourne attempted to have one of its COVID-19-positive residents moved to a hospital. The hospital refused, as they are allowed to do.'

'St Basil's Homes for the Aged in the Melbourne suburb of Fawkner told *Neos Kosmos* a week ago that it had requested all COVID-19 residents be moved to hospital but was denied. On July 22, everyone who had worked at the home "during early July" was ordered to quarantine. By Thursday this week, at least 73 cases had been linked to the home.'

Devastation in residential aged care

The whole Western world, the EU, the UK and the USA, has been marked by the devastation wreaked upon those in aged care. In Italy we were told of 'The "silent massacre" in Italy's nursing homes' [20 April 2020 *Politico*].

'Exact figures on the number of people who have died of COVID-19 in Italy's nursing homes are extremely hard to come by, partly because there is no

centralized system to record them, unlike in hospitals. A recent national survey carried out by Italian authorities suggested that 8.4 per cent of nursing home residents have died since the beginning of the outbreak.'

In Spain, 'Newly released emails from Madrid's right-wing government show how authorities instructed care homes not to take elderly coronavirus patients to hospitals. The result was one of Europe's highest death tolls [28 June 2020 *The Wire*].

The United Kingdom did not learn from these mistakes.

'According to the data there have been 66,000 deaths of care home residents in England and Wales between 2 March and 12 June this year, compared to just under 37,000 deaths last year' – as reported by the BBC [6 July 2020 *Aged Care Insite*].

Then we saw the horror of the uncontrolled pandemic amongst the aged under inadequate leadership in the USA. Nina A Kohn, professor of law at Syracuse University, wrote: 'The pandemic exposed a painful truth: America doesn't care about old people. We speak of the elderly as expendable, then fail to protect them' [8 May 2020 *Politico*].

Florida is one of the worst hot spots for deaths and infections in the USA, but Republican Governor Ron DeSantis is considering reopening nursing homes to visitors. It is obvious that this will result in even more infections [4 August 2020 *Newsweek*].

It was so bad that it could be claimed that Americans had no respect for human life, even that of their own people.

One very clear message has been delivered by this pandemic to the governments and people of the formerly self-proclaimed leaders of the West.

If you condemn your aged people to residential death camps, your hypocrisy on human rights has been exposed.

It has been lost forever.



US snapback from humiliation

American President Donald Trump has darkly warned of something big this week, vowing to apply 'snapback' international sanctions on Iran. It would be a drastic move and likely to further isolate Washington in the eyes of the world.

But the real snapback is Washington's fury after the United States was subjected to a humiliating diplomatic defeat at the UN security council last week.

A proposal by the US for the United Nations to extend an arms embargo on Iran was decisively rejected by the security council comprised of five permanent members and 11 non-permanent members. Russia and China voted against the resolution while even American allies Britain and France abstained, along with nine others.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo slammed the rejection as 'inexcusable'. Then the day after the defeat, President Trump expressed his chagrin by saying he would not be attending a summit proposed by Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Iran and Middle East security.

Moreover, Trump issued a threatening vow to push ahead with the US forcing the UN to reimpose sanctions on Iran.

'Well we knew what the vote [at the security council] was going to be but we'll be doing a snapback, you'll be watching it next week,' Trump reportedly said Saturday while taking a break from his weekend golfing.

The legal argument by the US side is tenuous at best, if not ridiculous. Washington claims it is still a participant in the 2015 international nuclear accord along with Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany and Iran. That is in spite of the fact that the Trump administration pulled out of the accord in May 2018.

The US position amounts to wanting its cake and eating it. Washington doesn't want to work the nuclear deal, having repudiated it as the 'worst ever', but at the same time, it wants to use provisions contained in the accord for snapping back sanctions on Iran. That snapback idea, as noted above, is impelled by the humiliating defeat the US suffered at the security council in not being able to extend an arms embargo on Iran.

Originally imposed by the UN on Iran in 2007, the embargo is due to expire in October as part of the nuclear accord, which was signed in July 2015 and endorsed by the UN security council. Washington wants to extend the arms restrictions on Iran even though Iran's compliance with the nuclear deal has earned it the right to have the embargo lifted.


Washington's line of reasoning is illogical and rife with double standards. It is parallel-universe stuff. You know it is whenever super-hawk warmonger John Bolton admits there are no legal grounds for the US position.

The nuclear deal – formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – continues to be widely recognised as a diplomatic achievement for ensuring nuclear non-proliferation. Iran has been in full compliance with onerous restrictions on its nuclear program. Where the deal has failed is in delivering substantive relief from economic sanctions imposed on Iran. Washington has used every manoeuvre to maximise pressure on Tehran in an attempt to sabotage the JCPOA.

Lamentably, European members have not been strong enough in standing up to Washington's bullying and threats of secondary sanctions. The lack of European resolve – unlike the more forthright support from Russia and China – has understandably undermined Iran's confidence in the nuclear accord.

But the tyrannical bullying from Washington has gone too far. The embarrassing, spectacular defeat at the UN security council last week demonstrates that the US is increasingly viewed as a rogue state. It is also a demonstration of how much its global power has waned.

Digging itself deeper into a hole it has already dug, the Trump administration is blaring threats of forcing the UN into toeing Washington's illogical line for applying a sanctions 'snapback' on Iran.

It's not a good idea to pursue a policy on a whim of bruised ego and imperial hubris. That's what the US is doing with regard to Iran and the rest of the world. Sooner or later, the delusions and deceptions pile up in a crescendo of absurdity whereby even normally dutiful allies can no longer go along with the perverse pretence of the United States as a law-abiding democratic nation. Its power, frenetically and desperately, relies more and more on coercion and diktat. And those days are numbered. 

Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in newspaper journalism. He is also a musician and songwriter. For nearly 20 years, he worked as an editor and writer in major news media organisations, including The Mirror, Irish Times and Independent.

from our readers



TO THE EDITORIAL BOARD

A health system in need of change

Regretfully, the coronavirus continues to kill more people and to physically, psychologically and economically traumatise billions on our planet. In Australia, and particularly in Victoria, there is currently an average of 20 deaths daily and more than 200 cases to date, most of those in the privately owned homes for the aged. The Stage 4 measures have slowed down the rate of explosion, but the virus flames are spreading to country Victoria and interstate.

And whilst it is human to feel the pain, to talk and write about this catastrophe, to seek explanations and demand accountability from those responsible, and to also express a heartfelt thank you to nursing and medical staff, professionals and volunteers and so many others in the health services who fight the virus on the frontlines, our first duty is what we are doing not just to patch up things but how to radically change the health system itself. It is a system that has been declared guilty by ordinary people, prominent medical professionals and scientists, The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's Interim Report, the NSW judicial Ruby Princess investigation, and the evidence before a Victorian judicial and parliamentary committee into aged homes and the use of security guards in quarantine hotels.

The federal and state health systems have been found inadequate and unprepared to face the crisis, not by mistake or even omission (though these factors have contributed) but because of government policies, which in essence programmed the aged people's homes and aged care in general not for older people to live well and longer, but apparently how to finish off with them and their pensions. One may very well say that this is cruel and inhumane. Yes it is, but compassion and humanity is lost in the pursuit for profit, or in the inability or weakness of even some well-meaning authorities to deal with the root of this evil – the health and lives of people being in most cases in the hands of profit-hungry, milking cow individuals and 'institutions'.

Yet public health and aged care must in fact become the nation's most important service: publicly owned and managed, well-funded, freely accessible and multilingual, with well trained and well paid staff. This should be a major strategic objective on the way to a new people-friendly normal, along with immediate progressive reforms and strict implementation of protective measures.

Australia is not a poor country. It has all the human and material resources to achieve this. The much hoped for changes will not come about with wishes and appeals but through individual and collective action. Those who die and suffer are fellow citizens, friends and relatives. They are the ones who created the nation's wealth, but for a few to enjoy. Working class and ethnic minority organisations whose members are carrying the heaviest of all burdens should vigorously demand and campaign for such beneficial radical changes.

George Zangalis,
Vice President Fair Go For Pensioners Coalition, Vic

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MELBOURNE UNITARIAN PEACE MEMORIAL CHURCH

110 Grey Street, East Melbourne 3002

Email: admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au

Website: www.melbourneunitarian.org.au

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