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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

TERROURISM: The Religion of the 21st Century

EDITORIAL

What is terrorism? The Google definition is 'the unofficial or unauthorised use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims'. But what of official terrorism? It is the official, authorised use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims.

If you asked a Syrian, an Afghan, a Palestinian, a Libyan, an Iraqi or an African whether they would prefer to die from unofficial use of violence or a state form of violence, how do you think they would respond? Undoubtedly they would say, 'I don't want to die at all ... not from war from anyone or anywhere. I want my family to be able to live in peace and prosperity'.

Many people are dying from terrorism, either illicit or state-sanctioned, and both are rampant in our world today. Try to imagine the thunder of aircraft carrying lethal bombs, flying daily over your schools, your homes, your hospitals and your markets. Try to imagine seeing your loved ones dying, injured, shell-shocked, and unable to do anything about it. Or living under savage laws that deny your democratic rights and freedoms, or fleeing for your lives to anywhere, by any means, and being rejected or locked up in concentration camps simply because you wanted a safer and more secure life for your family. This is the reality of terrorism, both state sanctioned and non-state sanctioned, and it is happening to the people of the above nations daily and we are complicit in their suffering.

Times Magazine reported that the one hundred largest arms producers and military services contractors recorded \$395 billion in arms sales in 2012. Lockheed Martin, the largest arms seller, alone accounted for \$36 billion in

such sales during 2012 based on figures compiled by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

You don't have to be a Rhodes scholar to work out that wars are a lucrative form of income and that a period without war would seriously affect the bottom line of these companies.

Marilyn Waring, a former NZ politician and author of *Counting for Nothing* said, 'If a country develops an economic system that is based on how to pay for the war, and if the amounts of fixed capital investment that are apparent are tied up in armaments, and if that country is a major exporter of arms, and its industrial fabric is dependent on them, then it would be in that country's interests to ensure that it always had a market. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is clearly in the interests of the world's leading arms exporters to make sure that there is always a war going on somewhere'.

The United States plans to sell up to \$60 billion worth of military aircraft to Saudi Arabia, the US State Department announced on Wednesday in a move they said was designed to shore up a region overshadowed by Iran.

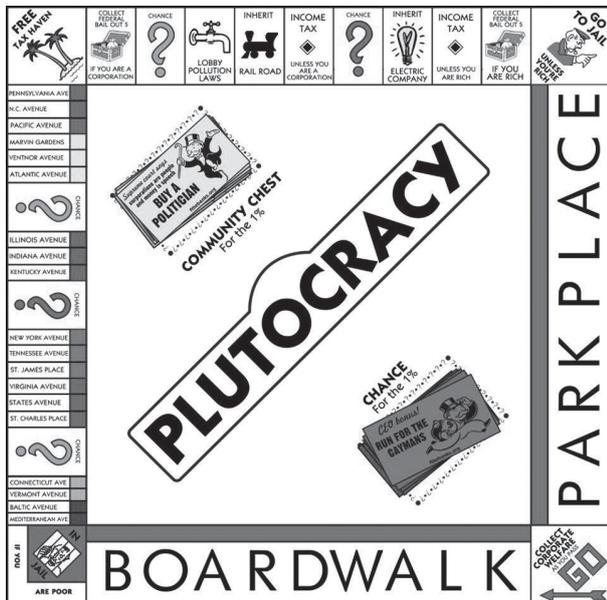
Our world will continue to suffer terrorism as long as we allow profit from war and the continuation of a system that not only tolerates but also benefits from human suffering.

When Western governments utilise their captive media to dupe their citizens into accepting the bombing and invasion of other sovereign nations, we all as thinking, democracy loving human beings have a responsibility to speak out. A failure to do so can only lead to the strengthening of this foul dual terrorist cloud that embraces us all.

So when you join your families this year to enjoy your legitimate right to a peaceful, safe and happy Christmas, spare a thought for those who still endure the daily threat of terror. †



SEASON'S
GREETINGS



THE ALTAR OF PLUTO

Australia and New Zealand Unitarian Universalist Conference 17–18 October 2015

Address by **Rev. Peter Ferguson**, Past President of Australia & New Zealand Unitarian Universalist Association (ANZUUA)

It is indeed an honour to address this conference on social justice.

At the close of his book *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England* Raymond V Holt warned that ‘as later generations painfully take up the work of striving to create a society in which the head is held high and the mind is free, they will wonder why those who came before them lost their nerve, and threw away the gains of centuries’.

Certainly it appears that Australia has frittered away many of the economic gains that Raymond Holt alluded to. Australia is second only to the USA in the race for individual wealth where the rich nearly always get richer to the detriment of everyone else.

Australia’s peak welfare body ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Services) reports that as of June this year the inequality between the richest and the poorest has actually widened, despite Australia’s run of a quarter of a century without a recession.

The richest 20% now earn around five times as much as those in the bottom 20%.

Dr Cassandra Goldie, chief executive of the report, pointed out that ‘The richest 20% saw their pay packets go up by 72% over the last 20 years, compared to a 16% rise for the bottom 10%’.

Recently the International Monetary Fund (IMF) alerted the Australian Government that if it is serious about economic growth, concentration of income and wealth at the top is bad for the economy.

The wages growth for the bottom has largely been through longer working hours, but at the top it’s been a straight up increase in pay.

She says, ‘We know that structures like negative gearing, capital gains arrangements, superannuation tax concessions, the tax loopholes that enable people to structure their financial arrangements at the higher end to minimise their effective tax into the general revenue, is a big problem for us’.

Professor Peter Whiteford of the ANU points out that the 20% of Australian households with the highest disposable

income are now about 5 times better off than the poorest 20%.

‘So what caused this change? The macro explanations are globalisation which undercuts wages in rich countries because working class jobs are exported; the other is that those whose education has enabled them to work with new technologies have benefited more.’

Andrew Leigh, one of Australia’s foremost academic economists blames ‘The collapse of trade unions from half of the workforce to less than 20% and cuts in the top tax rates that have allowed the wealthy to keep more of their income.’

Richard Denniss of the Australia Institute agrees, but blames the neo-liberal economic theories that set out to increase inequality.

‘Something must be done about the superannuation system, which delivers huge tax-free returns to the richest among us, as well as the capital gains regimes that are inflating the real estate bubble.’

Inequality between those who have the most and those who have the least is rising in Australia and New Zealand.

We are among the wealthiest countries in the world, but there are many people and communities who are falling behind.

For instance, the minimum wage and unemployment benefits have failed to keep pace with the rise in average earnings, resulting in a divergence between low-income earners and the average employed Australian.

Until 30 years or so ago, New Zealand was one of the most egalitarian countries in the world although that equality didn’t extend to the Maori communities.

But from the mid-80s, the gap between the rich and the rest increased faster in New Zealand than anywhere else in the developed world.

In that time the average annual income of the top 1% has more than doubled from NZ\$158,000 to NZ\$337,000. By contrast the average disposable income for someone in the bottom 10% is lower now than in the 1980s.

The top 1% of adults own three times as much of New Zealand's wealth as the entire lower half put together!

So what can we do about it? The notion of social justice doesn't come to us naturally. After all we are animals. And our primary focus is the same as that for all other species – which is self-preservation.

Social justice is learned; it is something that is taught. It is a higher calling than our animal instincts dictate.

Like all, we defend our territory, our tribe, our young, and if we have the power, we extend our range of wealth even if it disadvantages other individuals and groups. There is no inborn sense of some greater good.

Moving on to asylum seekers, Australia is the only country in the world to mandate strict enforcement and detention.

In his essay 'Why Australia hates asylum seekers' Christos Tsiolkas writes:

'More than 85% of asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat are found to be genuine refugees, yet successive Australian governments continue to demonise them, we lock them up and stand idly by as they slowly go crazy or harm themselves.' We also refuse journalists the right to speak to them or name them. We farm them off to our impoverished, underdeveloped neighbours, rather than construct a humane and efficient system to process their claims for asylum.

Despite being one of the wealthiest nations, the present Federal Government has slashed the amount of foreign aid to just 0.3% of its gross domestic income – 32 cents for every \$100. Aid to African nations has been cut by 70%.

The Aboriginal people and the Maoris

We don't have to look very far to see that historically the more powerful inflict their will on those who are weaker than we are.

That is the shared history of Australia and New Zealand.

We disguise the reality by saying that our countries were 'discovered'. The truth is both Australia and New Zealand were already taken and occupied when our European ancestors stumbled on these lands. Over time the natives' land was taken from them and we claimed it as ours.

The immorality of the actions of the past can be seen today in virtually every corner of Australasia.

The moral test of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. This is not a religious concept, but a secular one.

For a nation to be healthy it must enjoy the cooperation of all its citizens.

Our countries, Australia and New Zealand, cannot be happy nations when an elite few do very well and many are struggling to make it. It belongs to our common sense that we ensure that our less well off are treated justly not only for their sakes, but also for our own and for our children.

The over representation of Aborigines in prison is possibly the ugliest and most urgent issue facing Australia.

We should all be shocked by the statistics showing a 57% rise in incarceration rates among Indigenous men, women and children over the past 15 years.

Nationally, Aboriginal Australians are fifteen times more likely to be jailed than non-Indigenous Australians. More than half of all Australians in juvenile detention are Aboriginal. The recidivism rate is 58% and 10–17 year olds are 24 times more likely to be jailed.

It is an easy option for the various state governments to be tough on crime – it gets lots of votes! It also gets prisons crammed beyond capacity with an extraordinary number of repeat offenders.

Our prisons have become schools for crime, especially when the inmates are impressionable teenagers and young men and women.

The cost of imprisonment in Australia and New Zealand works out at about \$100,000 per inmate per annum. It seems that much of the money spent on imprisonment could be used for rehabilitation and better still addressing the causes, which are low levels of education, poor employment opportunities, inadequate housing, endemic racism and most important perhaps exposure to abuse and violence in early childhood.

In New Zealand the prison population has doubled in the past twenty years and half of all prisoners are Maori even though they make up less than 15% of the population.

Similar to the Australian Aborigines, the Maori problems have their roots in soaring rates of child poverty, school dropout, unemployment and family breakdown.

In Maori society just about every young person has a relative who is locked up. The rates of recidivism are sky high with half of the offenders returning within two years of their release.

Maoris are less likely to receive cautions or bail and less likely to have good legal representation, and so on.

At every stage in the justice system the outcomes for Maoris are more severe than for those of the Pakehas.

Why has social justice for the first peoples been thrown into the too hard basket?

The effects of climate change and population growth

Another area of human rights has to do with our 2 million Pacific Island neighbours who face the prospect of displacement by rising sea levels as a result of climate change.

At this present time, however, international law makes no provision to cover people whose homelands become uninhabitable.

About 2 years ago, the application by Loane Teitiota from Kiribati for refugee status, was thrown out by the High

“
Is Australia really such a plutocracy? Our own research, using differing empirical methods, agrees with the conclusions reported in the Washington Post.

In fact, we put the figure closer to 80%, making Australia potentially on a par with Columbia.”

Court of New Zealand that ruled that refugee status must be based solely on the need for protection from political or other forms of persecution.

No doubt if his argument had prevailed, it would have carried huge implications for the millions of people who will be displaced in the coming generations.

Perhaps the Unitarian Universalists of Australia and New Zealand could work together to alter the scope of the international refugee conventions so that these people can be protected.

If they are not refugees, then what are they?

This climate change and ocean rising is no longer an 'if'. It is already too late to keep these islands above sea level. Studies show that the impacts of carbon dioxide and methane gases are essentially locked in for the next 1000 years.

Some experts believe that Australia and New Zealand are the Islanders' best hope.

It's actually not surprising that the effects of climate change have led to a growing sense of outrage in developing nations, many of which have contributed little to the pollution that is linked to rising temperatures and sea levels but will suffer the most from the consequences.

Bangladesh's leading climate scientist, Atiq Rahman: 'It's a matter of global justice. These migrants should have the right to move to the countries from which all these greenhouse gases are coming. Millions should be able to go to the United States.'

It is estimated that as many as 50 million Bangladeshis will flee the country by 2050 if sea levels rise as expected.

Some time ago an article in the *Medical Journal of Australia* warned that 'Aboriginal communities in the far north will be among the hardest hit by the effects of climate change, with higher rates of disease such as dengue fever and bacterial diarrhoea.

Elevated temperatures and severe heat waves will also become a major problem as the elderly with inadequate facilities cope with radically changing conditions.'

Unitarianism evolved from Christianity and has long been excluded from Councils of Churches for its heretical non-trinitarian views.

Another less well-known Unitarian heresy is the affirmation in its Seven Principles that we humans are simply a part of the interdependent web of existence. We do not believe we have been created in the image of God.

This earth is our only home and few of us believe in some kind of post-mortem existence.

Perhaps this is the reason why we are several shades of green and care about Mother Earth.

A prime example is the Great Barrier Reef that is under threat from climate change, water catchment pollution, as well as coastal developments as the human population expands.

Overpopulating Australia and New Zealand with humans is part of the ongoing discussion among our churches and fellowships.

Since European settlement our land animals have been wiped out at the rate of one to two species per decade.

Moving towards plutocracy

The final part of this address asks the question, could we be moving towards plutocracy i.e. rule by the rich and powerful?

Certainly when we look at the statistics it does seem that way. The gap between the haves and the have nots is greater now than it was during the Great Depression 80 years ago.

The seven richest Australians hold more wealth and assets than the 1.73 million in the bottom 20% of the population.

In August this year the *Washington Post* ran an article reporting that 65% of the richest people in Australia had amassed their wealth via political connections rather than via innovative businesses.

According to the quoted research, Australian residents are rewarded for their political connections about as much as Indonesia, India and Colombia in South America offering the biggest rewards.

Responding to this article, Paul Frijters, Professor of Economics at the University of Queensland and Gigi Foster, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of NSW:

'Research reveals a huge proportion of Australia's richest people amass their wealth via political connections rather than innovative businesses which is helping them at the expense of everyone else.

Is Australia really such a plutocracy? Our own research, using differing empirical methods, agrees with the conclusions reported in the *Washington Post*.

In fact, we put the figure closer to 80%, making Australia potentially on a par with Columbia.

This 80% of the wealthiest Australians have made their fortunes in property, mining, banking, superannuation and finance generally – all heavily regulated industries in which fortunes can be made by getting favourable property re-zonings, planning law exemptions, mining concessions, labour law exemptions, money creation powers and so on.

The end result is a few who get special favours, and a vast majority who are kept poorer and less educated than they should be.

The plutocrats are still winning, on both sides of politics.

Seeing what should be done is not the hard bit. The hard bit is the politics. Solutions, like those suggested will be bitterly resisted by the plutocrats who personally gain so much from keeping the population ignorant of their parasitic feastings'.

In contemporary Christianity the highest ideals are associated with God. Many of us find the connotations of supernatural realms more awkward these days. It makes us feel uncomfortable.

But once the mythical and metaphysical phrases are translated into ordinary language, they can be useful.

In the religious tradition, the gods represent the values that determine so much of our behaviour. And we ask are they worth serving?

Certainly not Pluto, the god of economic riches. Worshipping at the altar of Pluto can hinder us in the quest to be more fully human and living a kind and generous life.

I have been a minister for 55 years and have conducted thousands of funeral services. Never once have I heard a deceased person being praised for their wealth and material acquisitions. The eulogies are always about love, generosity and compassion.

We have named our species 'homo sapiens' meaning 'man the wise' but a life dedicated to the pursuit of wealth as the highest value is entirely unwise and downright foolish.

Hear the paraphrased words of Jesus Christ:

'A nation's life does not consist in the abundance of its resources and riches.'

'For what shall it profit an individual or a nation to gain the whole world and lose its soul?'

These words are not an appeal to our easy instincts but to the better angels of our nature: compassion, fairness and empathy for the poor.

I need to mention that Pluto was not only the god of riches but also of death.

So let us enjoy this conference as we renew our commitment to justice and in Raymond V Holt's words 'Strive to create a society in which all of us can hold our heads up high and have minds that are free.' †



Syría is winning. Despite ongoing bloodshed and serious economic pressure, Syria is advancing steadily towards a military and strategic victory that will transform the Middle East. There is clear evidence that Washington's plans – whether for 'regime change', for rendering the state dysfunctional or for dismembering the country on sectarian lines – have failed.

That failure will fatally wound the US dream, announced a decade ago by Bush junior, for a subservient 'New Middle East'. Syria's victory is a combination of coherent popular support for the national army, in the face of vicious sectarian Islamists (*takfiris*), firm backing by key allies, and fragmentation of the international forces lined up against them.

The economic hardships, including regular blackouts, are now worse but have not broken the Syrian people's will to resist. The government ensures basic foods are affordable and maintains education, health, sports, cultural and other services. A string of formerly hostile states and UN agencies are resuming their relations with Syria. An improved security situation, the recent big power agreement with Iran and other favourable diplomatic moves are all signs that the Axis of Resistance has strengthened.

You wouldn't know much of this by reading the Western media, which has lied persistently about the character of the conflict and developments in the crisis. Key features

of that deception have been to hide NATO's backing for the *takfiri* groups, yet trumpet their advances and ignore the Syrian Army rollbacks. In fact, these Western-backed terrorists have made no real strategic advance since a flood of foreign fighters helped them take parts of northern Aleppo, back in mid-2012.

In my second visit to Syria during the crisis, in July 2015, I could see how security had improved around the major cities. In my first visit in December 2013, although NATO's throat-cutters had been ejected from much of Homs and Qsayr, they were in the ancient village of Maloula and along the Qalamoun Mountains, as well as attacking the road south to Sweida. This year we were able to travel freely by road from Sweida to Damascus to Homs to Latakia, with just one minor detour around Harasta. In late 2013 there was daily mortaring of eastern Damascus; this year it was far less common. The army seems to control 90% of the heavily populated areas.

FACT CHECK ONE: there never were any 'moderate rebels'. A genuine political reform movement was displaced by a Saudi-backed Islamist insurrection, through March–April 2011. The character of the armed conflict has always been a confrontation between an authoritarian but pluralist and socially inclusive state, and Saudi-style sectarian Islamists, acting as proxy armies for the big powers.

FACT CHECK TWO: almost all the atrocities blamed on the Syrian Army have been committed by Western-backed gangs, as part of their strategy to attract deeper Western intervention. That includes the discredited chemical weapons claims and the collateral damage claims of the so-called 'barrel bombing'. US journalist Nir Rosen wrote back in 2012, 'Every day the opposition gives a death toll, usually without any explanation. Many of those reported killed are in fact dead opposition fighters but described in reports as innocent civilians killed by security forces'.

FACT CHECK THREE: while there is a terrorist 'presence' in large parts of Syria, neither Daesh/ISIL nor any other armed group 'controls' much of the populated Syrian territory. Western agencies (such as Janes and ISW) regularly confuse presence with control. Notwithstanding the Daesh/ISIL offensives in Daraa, Idlib and Eastern Homs, the heavily populated areas of Syria are under noticeably stronger army control than they were in 2013. Only a few areas have been held by Daesh for months or years. In any sustained confrontation, the Army generally wins; but it is under pressure, and not infrequently makes a tactical retreat, because it is fighting on dozens of fronts.

Despite years of mass terrorism and Western sanctions the Syrian state is functioning surprisingly well. In July 2015 our group visited large sports centres, schools and hospitals. Millions of Syrian children attend school and hundreds of thousands still study in mostly fee-free universities.

Security procedures have become 'normal'. Frequent army checkpoints are met with remarkable patience. Syrians know they are there for their security, especially against the car and truck bombs used by the Islamists. Soldiers are efficient but human, often exchanging friendly chat with the people. Most families have members in the Army and many have lost loved ones. Syrians do not endure curfews or cower from soldiers, as so many did under the US-backed dictatorships of Chile and El Salvador, in the past.

Damascus holds the greater part of the six million internally displaced people and, with a little help from the UNHCR, the government and army are the main ones organising their care. The Western media only tells you about the refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan, facilities mostly controlled by the armed groups.

The 'regime attacking civilians' or 'indiscriminately' bombing civilian areas only has a basis in the Islamist

propaganda on which much of the Western media relies. The fact that, after three years, Syrian planes and artillery have not flattened hold-out areas like Jobar, Douma and parts of northern Aleppo, gives the lie to claims against the Army. You can be almost certain that the next time Western media say 'civilians' are being killed by 'indiscriminate' Syrian government bombing, it is the Islamist sources themselves who are under attack.

Regional states see what is coming, and have begun to rebuild ties with Syria. Washington still pushes its chemical weapons lies (in face of the independent evidence), but lost its stomach for any major escalation back in late 2013, after the confrontation with Russia. There is still much sabre rattling, but it is noteworthy that Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), enemies of Syria just a little while back, are now normalising their diplomatic relations with Damascus.

Washington's recent agreement with Iran is an important development, as the Islamic Republic remains the most important regional ally of secular Syria and a firm opponent of Saudi-style Islamists. Affirmation of Iran's role in the region upsets the Saudis and Israel, but bodes well for Syria. All commentators see a diplomatic jockeying for position after the Iran deal and – despite Iran's recent exclusion from a meeting between Russian, US and Saudi foreign ministers – there can be little doubt that Iran's hand has been strengthened in regional affairs.

Syria is winning because the Syrian people have backed their army against sectarian provocations, mostly fighting their own battles against NATO and Gulf monarchy-sponsored multinational terrorism. Syrians, including most devout Sunni Muslims, will never accept the head-chopping, vicious and sectarian perversion of Islam promoted by the Gulf monarchies.

Syria's victory will have wider implications. It spells an end to Washington's roller coaster of 'regime change' across the region, from Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya. Out of the death and misery caused by this dirty war we are seeing the emergence of a stronger 'Axis of Resistance'. Syria's victory will also be that of Iran and of the Lebanese Resistance, led by Hezbollah. Further, the conflict has helped build significant measures of cooperation with Iraq. The gradual incorporation of Baghdad into this Axis will seal the humiliating defeat of plans for a US-Israeli-Saudi dominated 'New Middle East'. This regional unity comes at a terrible cost, but it is coming, nonetheless. †

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3 November 2015 'Information Clearing House' – 'Common Dreams' – There are 60 million refugees in the world, the same number as were refugees at the end of WW II.

On 31 October, in an unprecedented joint warning, the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross called for 'states to stop conflicts, respect international law and aid refugees'. Criticising the global response to the refugee crisis, Ban Ki-moon said, 'In the face of blatant inhumanity, the world has responded with disturbing paralysis.'

Despite the 'unprecedented' warning, it has not received enough news coverage (a Google search turned up one hit on a news story in the *Guardian UK* and a post at *Common Dreams*) compared to the many hits any celebrity scandal generates. The chill goes down my spine when I think it's like the world inaction when Hitler was exterminating Jews across Europe.

Is this WW III?

I don't know what the criteria of WW III would be, but when I sat down to make a list of current factors that could be considered, this is what I came up with and it's not looking too good:

- Multiple confrontations between the US and Russia on more than one front (Ukraine and Syria)
- Ongoing confrontations between the US and China in the South China Sea
- A renewed nuclear arms race in which all nuclear nations are modernising their nuclear arsenals instead of fulfilling treaty obligations to disarm
- Politically unacknowledged failure of all US war policies in the Middle East and across Asia; universal

continued pretence by the US military and political elites that more war will fix the disasters

- The global arms trade in which the US accounts for three-quarters of the global arms market
- Global military expenditure is \$1.711 trillion, the global arms trade is \$100 billion/annually, AND military spending in the Middle East in 2014 rose by 75% to \$173 billion
- Japan has scotched its peace constitution
- The refugee crisis shows no sign of abating and every sign of growing and continuing to be ill-managed by the global community complete with terrible percolations of hatred towards the refugees in nations experiencing the influx
- Economic belligerence by wealthier nations towards less wealthy nations (one example: EU towards Greece, there are many other examples of rich nations bleeding poor ones)
- Nations and mass populations remain stubbornly indifferent to the series of crises with few exceptions
- Climate change is happening, seas are forecast now to rise up to 3 feet and probably more (even as much as 10 feet in a century or two) and upcoming Paris talks are widely expected to fail
- There is continued suppression of dissent by surveillance, persecution of whistle-blowers and journalists with repressive police tactics used at protests around the world.

The conflicts driving people to hit the road or the seas are not going to be solved by any nations dropping more bombs, putting 'boots on the ground' or arming one or more sides.

Unfortunately, the US bears the most responsibility for the current crises as the 'greatest purveyor of violence

in the world' – as true today as when Martin Luther King said it in 1967. At the same time, US peace organisations are all struggling to raise needed funds to continue our efforts – marginalised though we are. This is a substantial problem that needs to be resolved. To solve these crises we need to bring the wars to a close.

If we are so inured to the suffering endured by our fellow human beings that we do not address the current refugee crisis, we are in great danger. Human empathy is a road to transformative change – that which we would not want to happen to ourselves is something we must work to prevent happening to our fellow brothers and sisters.

This goes for wars as well as addressing climate change to our greatest collective ability.

When we fail in our responsibilities to this fundamental aspect of our being human is when hatred ascends and wars spiral out of control. Is this the current moment and if so what are we going to do about it? †

Thea Paneth signed the WRL pledge long ago, was a 'rank and file' clam in 1977 and works for peace and justice in Arlington, Massachusetts as a member of the United for Justice with Peace coalition.

BOB KATTER NAILS IT:

We Are Being Deceived About the FTA with China



Bob Katter is a man I've never paid much attention to. He's on the other side of the country and might as well be on the other side of the planet as far as I'm concerned. But when a friend sent me the link to Katter's speech in Parliament last week on the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement I sat up and took notice. It's a gem. It sparkled. You need to see it.

Here it is:

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (17:50): I feel sorry for the members of the government, I really do. They get a brief and they have got to get up and tell us how wonderful the free trade deal is and how it is going to save the world. I was in this place and saw the then Prime Minister stand up and lead the clapping for Andrew Robb on the free trade deal with China and I thought, 'Maybe I know nothing about politics, but if this is getting you votes I am a Martian astronaut!' Four weeks later he was thrown out a window.

You think you are deceiving the people of Australia. You are not. When they hear 'free trade deal', they hate you. Understand that, because I might not be an expert in a number of fields, but after 41 years of straight wins in pretty hostile territory, I can tell you that I know a little tiny bit about politics. I sat at the feet of the great master, Bjelke-Petersen. So if you are not interested in governing the country, if you are not interested in helping your country, maybe you might just think about your survival.

I feel sorry for the LNP. They somehow think that Australia is this big, huge country and that it can produce a magnificent amount of agricultural production. It most certainly can produce a lot more than it is producing. But

it is not a big, huge agricultural country at all. There is 53 per cent of Australia that is designated as desert and 23 per cent is designated as Indigenous lands. Since the governments of Australia will not give title deed to those lands, they are sterilised. That is 76 per cent gone. There is seven per cent that is national parks. So, if you take out that 83 per cent, there ain't a lot left.

The concept that huge areas of land will produce huge areas of food – sorry, that is wrong. There are a few thousand hectares, maybe 30,000 hectares, of land that is producing about a quarter of Australia's beef production. They are called lot feeders. Basically the cattle do not wander around chewing grass. That is not the way beef is produced anymore in America or in Europe or in Australia. It is done in lot feeders. So you have a different concept altogether, where you do not need huge areas of land. Your competitive advantage is in that lot feeder. That is where the action comes. You have a competitive advantage in that area.

Somehow they think, 'There are millions of people in South-East Asia, and we're going to be able to sell all this food to them.' Mr Deputy Speaker, I would refer you to the statistics. In fact, there is a pretty good chance that we will be importing food from those countries. Let me be very specific. When I stood up in this place 15 years ago and said that this market fundamentalism, this free market rubbish, will destroy your country, I said that Australia could become a net importer of food. Every 10 years, the imports increase at 103 per cent and the exports increase at 21 per cent. You do not have to be Albert Einstein to figure out that the graphs will soon cross.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you must understand that, if every Chinese city had two 20-storey buildings with tanks on each storey, then they could produce all of the protein requirements for China. They do not have to buy any of our beef. They do not have to buy any of our seafood product. In fact, if you look at a graph of the increase in seafood production in China, if you extrapolate that graph on for about 30 or 40 years, in theory all of the world's protein would be coming out of the prawn and fish farms in China.

I am fascinated by how this is going to help Australia. The last speaker, the member for Lyne, touted the beef industry. I do not know if he knows anything about it. I rather doubt that he does, but he touted the beef industry. Well, let us have a look at what this free trade deal does for the beef industry. We sell our beef at the present moment at \$2 a kilogram. If you look at the average price, it is a lot less than that, but I will take \$2 a kilogram. Its 10 per cent tariff has been abolished, so that is a 20c advantage we get. The beef sells over there for \$32 a kilogram. Those are the figures that have been given to me. But now the Australians are going to have a terrific advantage of 20c, so it is \$31.80 now. Jeez, that

strike. These men and their families went hungry. What happened when they got arbitration was that the miners said, 'We're bringing the coolies in from China. Ha, ha. Take that, Buster Brown; take that.' And the cane plantations said, 'We're bringing the Kanaks in to be cane cutters, so take that, Buster Brown; take that.'

So the first member for Kennedy stood up in this place and courageously fought to create the Labor Party – and the people who sit here on \$200,000 or \$300,000 a year, enjoying the benefits from the creation of that labour movement, sit here and betray every principle that was put forward by those people. Charlie McDonald would turn in his grave. But I am proud to say that the people of Kennedy are still represented by people who are not sell-outs, who are not under the control of the big plantation owners or the big mining companies. No. We are under the control of the people of our area. That is who we are under the control of and proud to say it. This opens the door that the Charlie McDonalds died for. The ALP today sold them out – lock, stock and barrel. There is not a trade unionist in Australia who is not looking at the ground and being ashamed of his association with the labour movement.

“ The honourable member there, Mr Brough, laughed at me. People have laughed at me ever since I came into this place and started talking about this. I want it on record that he laughed at me, because the history books will pass judgement upon him. They will say: ‘Who are the people who destroyed this country?’ We have to buy everything from overseas. Where are we going to get the money to buy all our petrol, to buy all our motor cars, to buy everything in our houses and to buy the clothes on our backs?

will lead to a huge increase in the benefits for the beef producers of Australia! A difference between \$32 and \$31.80, and the Member of Parliament who sits beside me here, the member for Lyne, seriously touted that as something that is going to help the beef industry? Why doesn't he do his homework? Why does he just take the drivel that comes from the frontbench? And the drivel that comes from the frontbench is dictated by the giant corporations that bankroll the mainstream parties.

Having dealt with the LNP, we will move on now to the ALP. If ever there was a day on which 'Red Ted' Theodore would turn in his grave and the founders of the labour movement would spit upon the people that sit in this House and call themselves Labor members, today is the day. When I walk out of this place, there is a magnificent portrait of a bloke called Charlie McDonald. Charlie McDonald was the first member for Kennedy, and every time I go out I salute Charlie. Six of Charlie's first seven speeches in this place were railing against the importation of foreign labour. Well, this document opens the door to it. This man went out and helped form the Labor Party, the labour movement, of Australia. They fought and died, literally – there were three shearers shot dead at the strike, where *Waltzing Matilda* was written a couple of months later – and the entire executive of the AWU were jailed for three years with hard labour for having a

Let me become very specific. I am fascinated. I am just a poor, humble, simple Cloncurry boy. Clearly, these wunderkinds – over here and over there – have decided to have free markets. The honourable member over there, Mr Brough, is making faces; he thinks it's funny! I will tell you how funny it is, my friend. You have to buy everything from overseas. The last whitegoods factory, which is at Orange, closes this year. So you have to buy all your whitegoods from overseas. About 40 per cent of the steel in your house – the roofing on it, the reinforcing steel for your floor – comes from overseas. About 40 per cent of your cement comes from overseas. All your whitegoods and all the motor cars in your garage will come from overseas, next year. The clothes you wear will all come from overseas. Your footwear will all come from overseas. The petrol you put in your car comes from overseas. Everything we buy comes from overseas. Where are we going to get the money to buy all of these things?

The honourable member there, Mr Brough, laughed at me. People have laughed at me ever since I came into this place and started talking about this. I want it on record that he laughed at me, because the history books will pass judgement upon him. They will say: 'Who are the people who destroyed this country?' We have to buy everything

from overseas. Where are we going to get the money to buy all our petrol, to buy all our motor cars, to buy everything in our houses and to buy the clothes on our backs?

Let me turn to food – and people in this place laugh at me about this. This country is now a net importer of pork. It is a net importer of seafood. It is a net importer of fruit and vegetables. It is only a matter of time. As I said, it is 103 per cent every 10 years, the last time I looked, and a 21 per cent increase in exports every 10 years. Inevitably – as the sun rises – we will become a net importer of food. You cannot eat live cattle or unprocessed grain, but if you take those two commodities out we are getting pretty close, in fact, to being a net importer of food. People in this place have laughed at me, but the people of Australia are passing judgement upon them, already, as we talk.

Where are we going to get this money from? We have only two things now that we export, and everyone knows that they are iron ore and coal. I am not here to denigrate those industries. In fact, I pray every night of my life to the good Lord that it does not come to pass, the continuation of what we are suffering in the thermal coal industry. But I would not like to be backing myself in, and I will not go into the problems of the thermal coal industry. What you have is what you have, in iron ore.

The country has to buy everything from overseas – and all they have to buy it with is iron ore and coal. A little bit of gold. Of course, aluminium is doomed. Aluminium is electricity. It came to Australia when we had the cheapest electricity in the world, in Queensland. Australia now has the second highest electricity charges in the world.

So it will be bye-bye aluminium. It will be bye-bye all mineral processing, because it all depends upon – and I am sick and tired, in this place, of hearing ‘It’s high wages that are killing us!’ Wages look pretty bloody small when compared with the cost of mineral processing, which is the cost of electricity.

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It is due to the incompetence of the people in this place and of state governments who have taken electricity charges up 400 per cent in 10 years.

It is due to the incompetence of the people in this place and of state governments who have taken electricity charges up 400 per cent in 10 years. That is what your free markets and privatisation have done: 400 per cent increase, in electricity charges, in 10 years. For 10 years before that, in Queensland, there was no increase at all. For 10 years before privatisation and a deregulation of the pricing mechanism we had no movement in price at all. My case rests. It dooms aluminium and it dooms mineral processing, so you are left with iron ore and coal. The income from iron ore and coal – maybe \$150,000 million or whatever it is – is not enough to meet our imports. It is nowhere near enough.

You are living in a country that is going broke at 100 miles an hour. You cannot buy everything from overseas when you have nothing to sell overseas. The people in this place with their market fundamentalism, their fanaticism, have imposed upon Australia a regime that no other country on earth has to suffer under. Every other farmer on earth gets 40 per cent of his income from the government. Our poor farmers get six per cent. I conclude on that note. So much for your free trade.

Source: *The Australia Independent Media Network*

The Sunday address at our Australia and New Zealand Unitarian Universalist Association Conference, held in Melbourne October 2015, was delivered by Dr Helen Szoke, CEO of Oxfam Australia. Its length precluded it being included in *Beacon*, so we will have it printed. If you would like a copy of this stimulating and informative address, please contact the church office and it will be sent out to you.

NEW Unitarian E-Newsletter

The Melbourne Unitarian Church has decided to move into the digital world by launching an **E-Newsletter** every two to three months that will bring you up-to-date information and comment from home and around the world. If you would like to be part of our exciting E-Newsletter, please send an email to us at admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au and we will add you to our growing database. If, on receipt or at any point you decide you no longer wish to receive the newsletter, you can easily unsubscribe.



RADIOACTIVE RACISM IN THE WILD WEST

By Mia Pepper

You'd be forgiven for thinking Western Australia was the Wild West. The announcement from the WA government that it planned to close 150 Aboriginal remote communities came hot on the heels of plans to gut the Aboriginal Heritage Act.

The changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act have two main objectives: one is to make it easier for Aboriginal heritage sites on the Aboriginal Heritage Register to be delisted; the other is to make it harder to get Aboriginal heritage sites listed in the first place. One of the key factors in a site getting and staying on the register is proving an ongoing connection to the site – a logistical factor made much harder if people are being forcibly removed from remote communities.

Pastor Geoffrey Stokes, a Wongutha man from Kalgoorlie, was out hunting one day near Mt Margaret when he encountered a mining company, Darlex, literally about to dig into a cave – an Aboriginal heritage site. This particular site had been lodged with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs by the Goldfields Land and Sea Council 23 years earlier – but had not been officially registered. The company was about to destroy the site without having gained permission or consulting with the Aboriginal custodians and had no requirements to do so because the site did not appear on the register. On inquiries made to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) about this site, it was revealed that something like 10,000 sites have been lodged but never registered.

This is how the system works. Traditional owners can lodge a site with the DAA and the Department may or may not register it – depending on how busy they are over a period of about two decades. Once it is registered, a mining company can then apply to destroy it anyway, but rest assured that if it's registered you'll be consulted about the site's impending doom. However, if you don't visit the site regularly, under a changed Aboriginal Heritage Act, it's likely to be deregistered aka no one is coming to talk to you before they destroy your heritage.

I'm reminded of being at a mining conference in WA where the then Minister for Mines and Petroleum gave a keynote presentation. He ended by inviting everyone to stay around for a raffle – 'the prize is a free Aboriginal Heritage clearance.' The miners roared with laughter. The Minister re-used the joke when calling the raffle –

allowing us to record this sick joke about the religion and culture of Australia's first people. When played back to him in Parliament, he scoffed and said it was taken out of context.

Mulga Rocks

Just around the corner from Mt Margaret is Mulga Rocks – the site of the latest uranium mine proposal by a company that has recently changed its name to Vimy Resources. Vimy is like an all-star cast with a former Fortescue Metals Group executive as director, a former Liberal MP on the board of directors and generously funded by Twiggy Forrest. Vimy recently submitted a scoping study for Mulga Rocks, which is near Kalgoorlie and adjacent to the Queen Victoria Springs – an A-Class Nature Reserve.

In submissions made to the scoping study, the DAA provided comment in response to the proposal saying the company should minimise impact to Aboriginal heritage, should consult with the DAA and the Central Desert Native Title Service, and suggesting that some sites may 'still be under the protection' of the not-yet-gutted Aboriginal Heritage Act. The company responded: 'No Native Title Groups claim the areas and no traditional owners undertake any traditional activities in the area.'

That comment was based on a 1982 'study' by an American anthropologist – using a dubious methodology. The anthropologist just asked around in the nearest town (150 km away), a process that identified at least one family who used to go out, and no further inquiries were made about that family. The family survived and live in the area but are yet to be consulted. Neighbouring communities and interested communities are yet to be consulted and the company refuses to consult, stating the project won't impact anyone so there's no need.

The closest community to the proposed Mulga Rocks mine is called Coonana and it has been on the government's hit list of communities to close down for many years. Slowly but surely the WA government has cut all funding to the community, which is now virtually a ghost town. Coonana is a refugee community – people who have been moved from community to community over generations. Known as the Spinifex people, they came across the border from South Australia following the nuclear weapons tests at Maralinga and Emu Field in the 1950s. The government

used to kick Aboriginal people hitching a free ride west off the train, but then had a bright idea: give Aboriginal people a free ride west and get them off the atomic bomb testing sites permanently. The dislocation that began during the atomic bomb tests is very much alive today.

The starving of services at Coonana should sound alarm bells about what this government is capable of doing. At Oombulgurri in the Kimberley, the strategy was to demolish houses: no resettlement, no alternative housing, nothing. As the country tries to heal from centuries of displacement and bad government policy, this government is creating another generation of displaced people.

The changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act are due to be debated in the WA Parliament in August/September 2015. The plans to shut 150 remote Aboriginal communities are much more secretive – the Premier Colin Barnett has promised consultation but refused an invitation from the Kimberley Land Council to join a joint Land Councils meeting about the closures in early 2015. Proposals to use royalties' money from the mining industry to meet the funding shortfall have been quashed by the Premier. As the mining boom crashes and the government's focus is on supporting industry rather than communities, we are expecting further attacks on communities and culture to make it easier and cheaper for mining companies to get projects off the ground.

Discrepancies

In addition to proposed changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act, the WA government has released a draft Heritage Bill 2015, covering the protection of all WA heritage sites except Aboriginal sites of significance.

Prof. Ben Smith, from the University of WA, and a spokesperson for the Australian Archaeological Association (AAA), told the ABC on August 13 that the discrepancies and contradictions between the two proposed sets of changes were 'untenable'. He noted that in the new Heritage Bill, the decision to add or remove

a site will remain with the minister for heritage, while in revisions to the Aboriginal Heritage Act the decision will be left with a senior public servant. 'We have a watering down of the Aboriginal Heritage Act,' Smith said, 'whereas we have continued the strength of non-Aboriginal preservation.'

The AAA also raised concerns about a 'tiered approach' to fines for those who damage sites. Smith said under proposed changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act, an individual found to be damaging an Aboriginal site on their first offence will face a fine of up to \$100,000. If a corporate body is found to have damaged a registered Aboriginal site, in the first instance they will be fined up to \$500,000, with the maximum penalty of \$1 million only levelled for repeat offenders. In contrast, the Heritage Act doesn't make provision for first and second fines – if an individual or a body corporate damages a piece of non-Indigenous state heritage, they instantly face a \$1 million fine.

Smith said: 'Why would we want a tiered structure? If you damage any piece of Aboriginal heritage, you are committing a crime of great seriousness, just as if you damage any piece of Australia heritage. Why is one subject to a lesser process? It's extraordinary in an international context. How will these be perceived by UNESCO?'

Phil Czerwinski, chair of the WA Association of Consulting Archaeologists, said all heritage sites should be treated equally. 'We seem to want to protect white fella heritage better than we want to protect black fella heritage,' he said.

A petition against changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act is posted at: [http://aboriginalheritagewa.com/category/latest-news/Mia Pepper is the Nuclear Free Campaigner at Conservation Council WA, and Deputy Chair of the Mineral Policy Institute](http://aboriginalheritagewa.com/category/latest-news/Mia%20Pepper%20is%20the%20Nuclear%20Free%20Campaigner%20at%20Conservation%20Council%20WA,%20and%20Deputy%20Chair%20of%20the%20Mineral%20Policy%20Institute).

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USURY: UNDERMINING OF DEMOCRACY

By Iain Brown

Although we Unitarians have diverse beliefs about religion we do definitely share our commitment to the values of Justice and Truth. I put it to you that our commitment to Truth means that we have a duty to try as hard as we can to understand what is going on in the world so that we can act effectively for the Justice we cherish. Without Truth there is no reliable Justice. Religious teachers have always pronounced on the ethics of money lending.

The Torah of the ancient Jewish Bible is often concerned with it and so Christians too have been in the past.

For if thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury (Exodus 22, 25–27).

Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury. Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury (Deuteronomy 23, 19–20).

And if thy brother be waxen poor and fallen into decay with thee; then shalt thou relieve him: yea, though he be stranger or a sojourner that he may live with thee.

And thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury nor lend him thy victuals for increase (Leviticus 25, 35–37).

Indeed in Ezekiel Chapter 18 the Jewish prophet reached such a pitch of condemnation that he ranked the taking of usury alongside robbery and adultery. I quote, *being a robber and a shedder of blood, an oppressor of the poor and a*

defiler of his neighbour's wife and Ezekiel concludes, I quote again, He shall surely die and his blood be upon him. These Hebrew teachers and prophets were only following the centuries-long, almost universal, prohibition of usury, of the charging of interest, to be found in the Laws of the Medes and the Persians and in the tablets of the ancient Sumerians centuries before them.

The medieval Catholic Church also condemned usury. Wikipedia notes, and I quote very loosely, that the Medieval Christian theology of interest payment began with the First Council of Nicaea in 325, which forbade clergy from engaging in usury. Later ecumenical councils extended this regulation to the laity. The great gathering of Lateran III decreed that persons who accepted interest on loans could receive neither the sacraments nor Christian burial. Pope Clement V made the belief in the right to usury, heresy in 1311, and he abolished all secular legislation that allowed it. Pope Sixtus V condemned the practice of charging interest as 'detestable to God and man, damned by the sacred canons and contrary to Christian charity.' Fire and Brimstone indeed!

So what happened then between then and now? By the 16th century, and probably since before the Crusades, the merchants of Northern Italy, particularly of Venice, had been fitting out ships with goods for trade with the Levant and in that same 16th century further west both the Scots and the English were sending out ships to trade into the Baltic and across the Atlantic. The system in those days worked very like the venture capitalism of California's Silicon Valley today. A group of the rich would club together to fit out a ship, employ a captain and crew and take a chance on it finding good trading conditions. When, and if, the ship came in and the traded goods were sold off with profit, the shareholders were paid off in proportion to their original potential losses. The merchants grew rich and the city ports rich with them.

The first stock exchanges where these shares in the profits of trading through individual ships could be bought and sold were certainly operating informally in Northern Italy by the 14th century and the bankers of Lombardy, notably the Jewish Rothschild family, were already lending out and charging interest. Jewish ethics on moneylending were different from Christian. Although they condemned the charging of interest rates between Jew and Jew, they were quite free about lending and charging anyone else, including Christians. Much as the churchmen might declaim (and they did it only feebly because many of *their families* were in the profitable rackets too) the whole capitalist system was developing fast and sweeping the old prohibitions against usury. Much later, and too late, in 1745, Pope Benedict XIV promulgated the encyclical *Vix pervenit*: On Usury and Other Dishonest Profit and this was re-emphasised by Pope Gregory XVI as late as 1836. But the Roman Catholic Church had long since lost the battle to retain control and it had retreated from actively enforcing its social teachings in the financial sphere as the practice of charging interest on loans became very widely accepted in the Western world. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution and industrial capitalism that facilitated the European great leap forward, the world had long passed the church by.

Debtors thrown in prison

But the Common Law still punished debtors. Even as late as in Charles Dickens' time it used to be common

practice to throw debtors into prison until they paid up – and many lingered there for years before they died. Creditors often never saw their money again. Gradually the law seems to have wakened up to the fact that although punishment may have had some deterrent effect on getting into debt, there was state expense in keeping the defaulters in prison and, unless some friend or relative paid off their debts for them they could never make any money there or ever finally pay off their debts. It is a version of the old advice that if the village blacksmith owes you money, the last thing you do is force him to sell off all his tools before all of his debt is paid.

Of course, you probably do not need reminding that the essence of capitalism just means using accumulated surpluses (capital) in an easily transferrable form, like money, to command resources in labour and materials for new enterprises. Nor, I am sure, do you need reminding that humankind has benefited enormously from that capitalist system. In a simple agrarian pre-capitalist society money lending and extortionate rates of interest were, and are, endemic and they depress the whole community as the economists of the development of underdeveloped countries know well and as the religious and ethical teachers of yesterday also understood.

Thus it was and is, that with the development of a stock exchange, many moderately wealthy individuals together can use accumulated money to equip trade expeditions or develop mines and factories and the profits, if any, can be recycled for fresh enterprises. This became really important when science, engineering and technology could be harnessed to make huge strides in material wellbeing – as has happened, led by Western Europe and latterly America over the last four hundred years. A stock market, as most of you may not need reminding, has a very useful function. Crucially, it allows the direction and redirection of available real resources in manpower and materials to be commanded and employed by the enterprises and entrepreneurs that most investors agree are going to produce the best value. Without a stock market, we would have few railways, poor roads, subsistence agriculture, rampant ill health and so on. Allowing people to buy shares in an enterprise and recoup some profit from it when it succeeds is here to stay.

But, slowly what had been a boon in the 17th and 18th centuries began to turn into a nightmare. By the late 19th century, sections of the stock market had become almost completely divorced from the useful realities of steering available resources to best communal aims and outcomes. Traders on the stock exchange began speculating (gambling in other words) on the rising prices of certain stocks and huge sums could be made just by that speculation. As the profits of speculation rose, the notorious cycles of boom and bust emerged. Worse, as smart practices developed further into the 20th century, shares, bonds and mortgages became like chips in a casino. The medieval alchemists had once dreamed of making gold from base metals. Twenty-first century traders make money out of nothing more than money, often out of other people's money. How envious the alchemists would be!

Making money out of nothing

By selling short, by developing leverages, by trading derivatives and by many other smart tricks most of us know little of, certain people, especially bankers, have

learned to *make money out of nothing else but money* by doing nothing more than manipulating the market or by acting on information so quickly that other people cannot catch up with them. It is no accident that almost all the traders on the floor, watching their banks of computers like hawks are male and most are under 25 because they have the fastest reflexes.

Now, in fully developed casino capitalism, traders trade away other people's jobs, other people's properties and other people's life chances. They are traded away without any connection with, or even thought of, real flesh and blood. Just as chips in a casino help gamblers forget they are playing with real money, perhaps losing their next month's rent, perhaps winning an island in the Bahamas, so these figures on a screen you see on TV are manipulated by the traders on the floor to produce a profit for their bank and earn a bigger bonus for the player. I repeat: the old alchemist's dream is now reality for an elite in merchant banking.

Simultaneously with the power of the international markets for capital came the growth of huge international companies like Ford, Lever Brothers and, today Starbucks and Amazon. Many of these single companies have an annual turnover greater than that of several small countries put together, occasionally greater than the whole continent of Africa. These companies now move around the world as they please.

Threats to move if taxed

Notoriously if *one* government taxes one of these companies more than another government promises to tax it, then that company simply moves its headquarters to the country that taxes it less in a kind of Dutch Auction. Similarly, if even powerful states like the USA and the EU tax and regulate those stock markets in ways they do not like, then the huge empires like Goldman Sachs or the Lehmann Brothers (that was) merely move to a more lawless less regulated state somewhere else in the world like, say, the Cayman Islands. As a part of recent trade agreements such as is threatened by TTIP these huge international corporations are even threatening to acquire the rights to sue governments for passing laws that dent their profits. The global problem with which this casino capitalism confronts the governments of the world today is very similar to the problems posed by these huge international corporations.

This kind of problem of *rogue organisations that grow stronger than democratic governments and take away power from the people* bears a lot of similarity to the problem of piracy at sea that has blighted trade in various parts of the world from time to time. If a strong medieval government threatened to wipe out the pirates of the Barbary Coast, they merely based themselves elsewhere.

Bankers manipulate for bonuses

We have seen recently how it is requiring international cooperation by several national navies together to reduce the depredations of the Somali pirates today. We have the same problem with the huge cartels of suppliers of illegal drugs and, in the same way, today casino capitalism is seriously difficult to bring back under any but light regulation. We have the same problem with fighting global warming. Any attempt by a single government to take sensible steps to improve the ongoing situation

provokes squeals of fear and anger, often from people in positions of power and responsibility who are using the loosely regulated stock exchanges, the hedge funds, the tax free international corporations and other institutions to make fortunes and do not want to see their lucrative game spoiled.

To return, for a moment, to casino capitalism, some bankers have been caught ganging up together to cheat even their own kind by manipulating LIBOR, for example, and the bonus-heavy bosses know what they are doing. So do the traders on the floors of the exchanges. Certainly they must know, like most gamblers, that in their feverish operation of casino capitalism, they are generating little or no real wealth in the real economy, merely redistributing the profits of others towards themselves. Ordinary people caught in a fever of gambling activity playing with unreal chips in the casino, are often carried away in a hypnotic trance and rarely stop to think what they may be doing. They are merely playing within the rules. But, in casino capitalism, it is the rules and the system that are wrong. And without total international cooperation better rules are unenforceable.

Calling out the wrong barons

Right wing politicians used to enjoy calling the leaders of trade unions 'the trade union barons' referring by analogy to a medieval society in which the king was the protector of the little people against the over-mighty barons who threatened both him, as the state, and them, as the common people. Nowadays within democratic countries we have a different kind of baron – in private corporations who fund political parties, lobby parliaments and expect their will to be done by the targeted politicians; in global corporations who escape certain aspects of regulation by any state. These are not easily identifiable individuals like the over powerful great nobility of Europe or the TU 'barons'. They are gangs that sometimes bring great improvements to our lives but are too often out of any state control.

I put it to you that it is our collective responsibility in the name of our Unitarian values of Justice and Freedom to ensure that we elect politicians who are not too friendly with drug lords, not too friendly with international corporations or too friendly with those who have their snouts in the trough of casino capitalism. Politicians who believe in the free market to the point of madness are not wanted in this global crisis. But, as with drug lords and pirates at sea, ultimately it will require a really fierce enforcement of internationally accepted regulations to bring these pirate-like problems under control. This is best done through a universal global alliance of governments. At present the governments of the world do manage some alliances, however loose or feeble, against infectious diseases through, for example, the World Health Organisation. Other alliances between democratic states are badly needed while the growth of extra-democratic organisations with their roots firmly in the very democracies that begat them creep up on the hopes of the poor of the world for freedom from oppression.

Economics and politics, even at global levels, *have to be* the concern of churches and spiritual individuals too. Let us stay informed, alert and therefore more effective. †

From a sermon by Iain Brown, member of Glasgow Unitarians

from our readers



Support the Palestinian people's struggle – what you can do to help.

Many of us feel upset about the appalling situation that's still happening in Palestine. It is deeply saddening and distressing. The brutal Israeli occupation and repression continues to cause deaths, injuries and so much suffering and destruction. The ongoing injustice and its dreadful consequences, the numerous atrocities committed against the Palestinians and their dispossession and displacement are one of the key problems confronting the world. This crucial moral issue demands a just and viable solution. Only the active participation of many people will compel the entrenched forces that support the colonial settler state of Israel to alter their policies and positions.

People contact me or I read of people stating how they feel angry, frustrated and helpless in the face of the deep-rooted political, commercial and media pro-Israel bias in Australia, the USA, etc. I firmly believe that the perceptions and viewpoints of a lot of decent people of Israel have indeed changed greatly in the past 10–15 years or so. Israel's former image of blamelessness has largely evaporated and its zealous lobby is under enormous challenge from many people waking up to the Israeli façade. They now see the real ugly face of Israel and its occupation and oppression. Many people are no longer listening to the Israeli version of events and do not believe the Israeli lobbyists and mainstream media's lies on the Palestine struggle anymore.

And I have faith that we can continue this process and increase our impact to get changes in people's attitudes on this issue. The more people who become aware of the truth regarding Palestine and do something to support the Palestinians, the more the pressure grows on Israel and its backers. We must do whatever we can to help this development. Each person has various abilities and skills, so some can do more than others, but everyone can do something and can contribute. And I believe that every act, however small, combined with thousands of other people's efforts makes a positive difference.

Talk to your family, friends, workmates, people you know and meet about Palestine, give them books or leaflets to read, post information on FB, write letters (to blogs, newspapers, magazines, to your friends, etc.), message people, make a leaflet, even just a few and put them on notice boards or prominent places or leave them around where people will see them and read them, or join a support group, go to a solidarity protest. Send letters expressing your concerns to your local politician. Boycott Israeli products and companies that support Israel and encourage others to do so. Promote the Boycott, Disinvestments and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Get a couple of enlightening DVDs that you can lend to people when they express an interest in finding out more about the Palestine issue. Send messages of solidarity to Palestinians and their organisations: this heartens their resolve.

Just do what you can and little by little this is how we will get people thinking about the issue, changing their minds and emboldening them. And this is how we achieve real change. And never forget you are not alone: there are millions of us working resolutely towards the same aim, to help free Palestine. So don't give up, be optimistic and remain steadfast, because we can and are making a difference by what we say and do. Together, our efforts will end this terrible injustice.

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.' Margaret Mead

Steven Katsineris

Just who is 'the enemy of my enemy' in Syria?

ISIS is being resisted by the Syrian Army (the real one, not the mythical 'free' one), the Kurds, the Iranians, Hezbollah militia, and of late the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

The Kurds are doing well in Syria and Iraq, but Turkey, our friend and ally, is bombing – wait for it – the Kurds.

The Houthis are trying to stop an ISIS takeover in Yemen, but Saudi Arabia, our friend and ally, is bombing – you guessed it – the Houthis.

Hezbollah and Iran are fighting against ISIS in Syria, but Israel, our friend and ally, is trying to convince the world that Hezbollah and Iran are the greatest threats to world peace in the history of the human habitation of our planet.

The Syrian Army is clearly the main anti-ISIS force on the ground, but the USA, our very best friend and ally, is training and arming 'good' terrorists in Syria to fight – that's right, the Syrian Army.

Lastly, if a month of Russian air strikes has done far more to weaken ISIS than a year of US air war coalition sorties, why has no one in the Western media asked the obvious question: Who the hell have the US and their hangers on been bombing?

And what is Australia's take on the whole situation? We don't trust the motives of the Russians!

John Gillies

Dear Editor

Enclosed please find cheque for \$50 being our sub for 2016 plus a donation.

Thank you so much for your publication – we find information in it that is not available elsewhere.

Wishing you and your staff best wishes. Keep up the good work.

M Cram, NSW

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