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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

THE LABOR V LIBERAL CONUNDRUM

EDITORIAL

The wealthiest 1% of the world will soon own more than the rest of the world's population, according to a study by Oxfam. The research shows that the share of the world's wealth, owned by the richest 1%, increased from 44% in 2009 to 48% last year. On current trends, Oxfam estimates that the wealthiest 1% will own more than 50% of the world's wealth by 2016. Oxfam also estimates a \$750 billion drop in wealth for the poorest 50% of the world in 4 years.

This analysis sums up the state of the world and indeed results from the austerity programs being imposed on the people of many nations: it is a gigantic theft from the many to the few and the policies that promote this staggering theft continue in Australia today under the Turnbull government.

Indeed, Prime Minister Turnbull benefited from this wealth transfer and is worth a staggering \$200 million, undoubtedly the wealthiest prime minister in Australia's history. This prime minister is not and will not introduce policies that meet the people's needs, and he couldn't even if he wanted to. Malcolm Turnbull is a committed Liberal and is determined to maintain the leadership

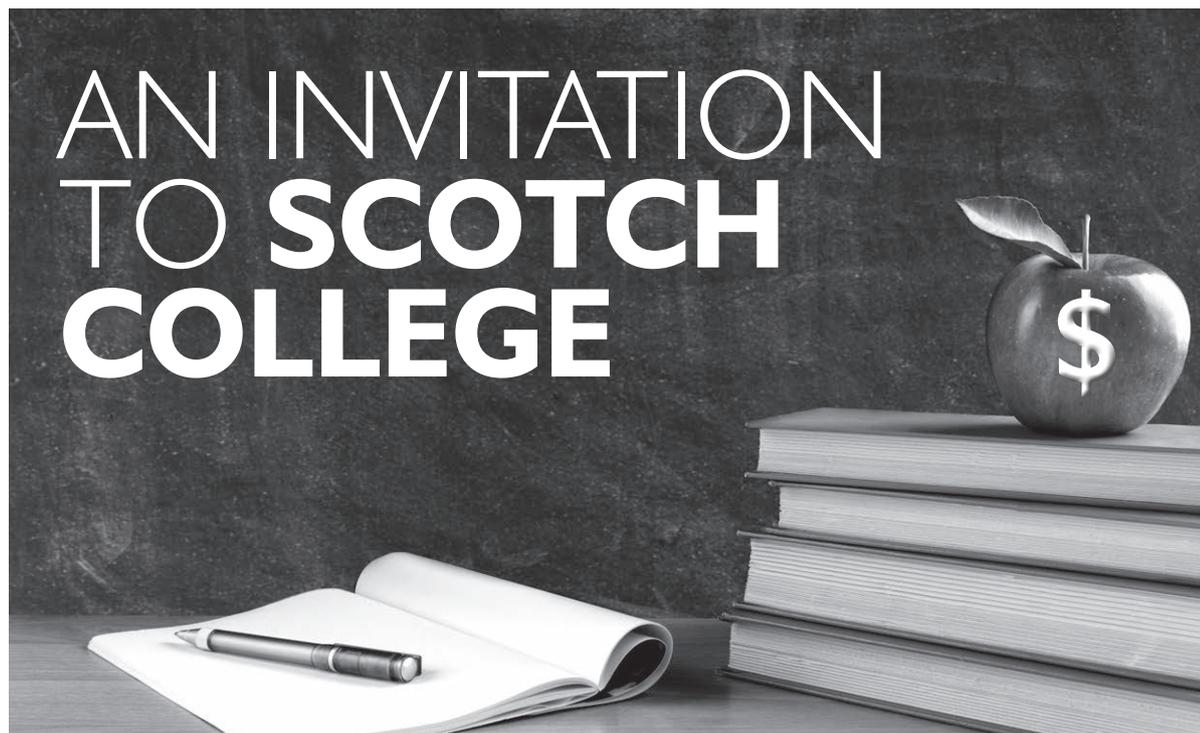
of his party and in order to do so he will remain fully supportive of the policies that have destroyed the reputation of Australia and the quality of life of its people. It is merely the leadership of the Liberal Party that has changed – not the program or the policies. While almost everyone breathed a sigh of relief when Tony Abbott was removed, the policies pursued by the previous Abbott-led government have continued under the new leadership, albeit with new names.

Sometime this year Australians will be voting for their new government. It is a dismal prospect we face. We have a limited choice between a Liberal government whose policies are unchanged and that is committed to austerity and anti democratic legislation or a Shortened Labor government that is committed to many of the same unpopular and unacceptable policies pursued by this current government: a criminal asylum seeker policy, support for US foreign policy, endorsement of anti people free trade agreements, legislation that limits our democratic rights, privatisation, pillaging the environment, and destruction of the social fabric.

Many are asking what the difference is between the two major parties. We have to acknowledge that the gap between their policies is narrowing. We reject the argument that only the Liberal Party can manage the economy – that is nonsense. It is promoted by the Murdoch media at every election and simply means that the Liberal Party unashamedly supports the big end of town.

Daily we read about the crisis of capitalism: not enough schools, healthcare under threat, no affordable housing, trashing the environment, attacks on living standards, attacks on unions, rampant corruption throughout society, constant involvement in wars without justification and poverty increasing for many. This is society today. Is it what we want for our children and grandchildren? There is a rising tide of anger across the world as well as in Australia. It must swell and grow into a demand for a decent society that meets the needs of all, not a privileged few.





AN INVITATION TO SCOTCH COLLEGE

Recently some observations I made at Scotch College in 2001 started spreading spontaneously around the country like some sort of email samizdat. Approving letters began to arrive from complete strangers. Journalists contacted me seeking verification. The town tabloid ran a story. The Sydney press followed. Rants against my novels were posted on a right-wing hate site.

My remarks were made to year 11 students in the course of a creative writing seminar. For the record, this is what I said:

'When I first received an inquiry about my availability to come and talk at this school, I was naturally reluctant. After all, this school has little to recommend it in the eyes of the wider community. Historically it has been simply a machine for the transmission of inherited privilege.'

'It is a place where boys from middle-class backgrounds are sent to improve their material prospects and to reproduce the values of their class, or where the boys of insecure parents are sent to fulfil the distorted ambitions of their fathers.'

'When I think of Scotch College, what comes immediately to mind are the values and actions of its most prominent Old Boys.'

'I think of the scene I saw on television after Scotch old boy Jeff Kennett used his power and his philosophy to close down the only high school in the state specifically dedicated to the education of young Aboriginal people. How students from that school came here and stood at the gates and how your principal went out and told them to go away.'

'I think of your old boy, David Kemp, the federal education minister, giving millions of dollars of public money to enhance the marketability of schools like this one – justifying his actions with statistics and arguments that he refuses to apply to the needs of the 70 per cent of Australian families

who choose to educate their children in the democratic and equitable environment of government schools.'

'I think, too, of the newspaper reports of the violent behaviour of some of your students – and the quick readiness with which these boys were defended and excused in the courts by their adult class allies.'

'For these reasons, I was initially reluctant to come here.'

'On the other hand, I thought, "Well, all this is hardly the fault of the current crop of students." It is not your fault, after all, that your families decided to institutionalise you. It is not your fault that your mothers and fathers elected to place you in the emotionally distorting and educationally deficient environment of an all-boys school.'

'It is not your fault that your parents lacked sufficient confidence in your personal maturity and ability to respond to the opportunities offered by government school education – and Australia has one of the best systems in the world, by the way, despite the relentless propaganda to the contrary by the vested interest of the private-school lobby.'

'Right now, you are the victims. Later, of course, society will be your victim, and will suffer from the attitudes with which you are indoctrinated here.'

'But who knows? Just as prison does not always break the spirit of all who are incarcerated there, perhaps you will not turn out to be a burden to society.'

'Perhaps when you leave here, some of you will even manage to contribute to the wellbeing of this country.'

'I certainly hope so. But just to hedge my bets, I will be donating part of my fee today to the campaign for public education.'

'Good luck with your studies and thanks for having me.'

While these observations did not strike me as particularly original or remarkable, they were clearly new to many

of the students. Impertinent too. My teacher-escort looked at me like I'd just attempted to storm the Somme redoubt with an HB pencil. At the end of the session, several students approached me to reprise the usual arguments for government funding of rich private schools. A third-generation Scotch boy, the scion of a prominent Liberal dynasty, accused me of being 'unfair'.

Apart from sending copies to a few friends, including some Scotch survivors, I made no attempt to disseminate my remarks. Now, out of the blue, I am suddenly getting daily requests for approval to publish them. And I find myself described, inaccurately, as a public education activist.

So why this upsurge of interest, three years after the event?

My guess, based on incoming mail, is that Scotch College is perceived as emblematic of the private education lobby's increasingly aggressive war against government schools. And by criticising Scotch, I gave voice to a growing feeling among many parents, teachers and students of public schools that not enough of us are standing up for government education.

Education is a fundamental issue for millions of Australians. And public education is the preferred option of most parents. Yet, in the face of an imminent election, the major political parties seem unable to accept these facts. The Liberals, in reality if not in words, are committed to the systematic dismantling of public education. Labor, lacking a firm commitment to anything in particular, stands for its gradual impoverishment and erosion.

The schooling of our children has been reduced to a bargaining chip in wedge politics. The press is more than happy to help. After all, its education supplements are fattened with advertisements for enrolment-chasing independent schools. So every week brings coverage of some fresh 'finding' by some 'independent research institute' to prove that public education should be chopped into small pieces and flushed down the toilet.

Government school teachers are routinely denigrated and their wage claims described as attempted blackmail.

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Meanwhile, behind the facade of choice, elite private schools plunge their hands deeper and deeper into the public pocket.

Meanwhile, our children are increasingly divided into educational ghettos that undermine our civil values and reward religious fundamentalism.

Meanwhile, behind the facade of choice, elite private schools plunge their hands deeper and deeper into the public pocket.

Grants provided by the Government, added to the fees paid by parents, are used by private schools to offset the cost of affiliation to lobby groups. These organisations, in turn, generate the arguments for further subsidies.

Parents who have invested big money in having their children featherbedded into university places and designer-branded into school-tie corporate networks hedge their bets by denigrating government schools. Competitive advantage is the name of the game. And it's a zero-sum game. Most parents realise this.

Soon after my comments at Scotch, the Liberal scheme to give hefty subsidies to wealthy private schools went before the Senate. Labor could have rejected it and forced an election on the issue of education. Polling indicated it would have romped home. Instead, it approved the bill, muttered its customary weasel words and sat on its hands until the Tampa hove into sight.

In the three years since, Labor appears to have learned nothing.

Despite the welter of dodgy statistics and high-flown arguments about choice, parents know that the answer is really quite simple. Schools need money. Our 'better' schools have been operating on that assumption for generations.

So by way of a postscript to my speech of three years ago, I invite Scotch College to demonstrate its true independence and affirm its educational philosophy by declining all future government subsidies.

Noblesse, surely, compels it.

Shane Maloney is a Melbourne novelist.

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SOLIDARITY AND REPRESSION: MUSLIMS IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM

By **G Dunkel** – 25 November 2015



**‘I AM A MUSLIM. THEY SAY I AM A
TERRORIST.’ AND ‘I TRUST YOU. DO YOU
TRUST ME? THEN GIVE ME A HUG.’**

The clearest example of popular solidarity with Muslims under attack in France and Belgium is a video of a young man wearing a blindfold and standing in the Place de la Republique in Paris.

At his feet are two signs: ‘I am a Muslim. They say I am a terrorist.’ And ‘I trust you. Do you trust me? Then give me a hug.’

The video shows scores of people, some with tears in their eyes, giving this young man a hug. As of Nov. 22, it had been seen well over 2 million times and garnered thousands of comments.

The French magazine *Mademoiselle*, addressing an audience of mostly young women, said of it: ‘We see in

this video a message of hope, of an openness of spirit and of solidarity which doesn’t make barriers out of religious beliefs. A symbol of living together, to sum up.’

The French media have made it clear that the majority of the people carrying out the Nov. 13 attacks were French citizens, with the rest Belgian. Even if they were members of the Islamic State who had fought in Syria, their roots were in France.

The Muslim community has deep roots in France, which was the major colonial power in North and West Africa. Some 100,000 Muslims died fighting under the French flag during World War I. To mark their sacrifice, the Grand Mosque of Paris was constructed and completed in 1926.

After World War II, tens of thousands of North Africans came to France to work on its reconstruction.

Some anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist groups in France have been critical of the campaign the French state is waging to justify its bellicose behaviour in Iraq, Syria and Libya.

Coup pour Coup 31, a collective based in Toulouse whose name means 'Blow for Blow', said: 'The media frenzy and its injunction to patriotism, national unity and nationalism has a clear purpose: to use our emotions and fear to justify government policy both on French territory and around the world.'

VivelePCF, a group opposed to the reformist drift of the leadership of the French Communist Party, said: 'We denounce all politicians who use the tragedy to stoke fears, divisions and hatreds. ... We will not let them scandalously and insidiously consider part of the population of France as criminals.'

Commenting on President François Hollande's state of emergency and banning of demonstrations, the Young Communist Club of Paris' 15th District said this affected major trade union demonstrations that had been planned against cuts in leave time at hospitals, degraded working conditions in Paris mass transit, the liquidation of Air France as a public company, and mergers and staff cuts in public finances.

Reactions of French, Belgian politicians

Belgian talk radio host Eric Zemmour, who is also heard in France, called for the French to bomb Molenbeek, a mostly Muslim neighbourhood in Brussels where some of the alleged attackers had lived.

Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of the neofascist National Front (FN), called for restoring the death penalty for 'terrorists ... with decapitation', as well as deporting illegal immigrants and creating 100,000 new prison cells. Le Pen began his career as a torturer for the French army in the Algerian War.

Marine Le Pen, his daughter, who currently leads the FN and has expelled her father, called for deporting everyone who is requesting asylum in France and for the government of François Hollande to resign, even though it has adopted many of the FN's positions. She wants the borders of France controlled by border police.

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who was born in Spain, claims that France is 'at war', using the word nine times in a six-minute interview on TV2.

Declaring a state of war allows the French government to use extraordinary measures, like banning demonstrations, conducting raids and searches without any judicial oversight, and closing meeting halls, sports stadiums, bars and so on. The authorities can close whole neighbourhoods and detain designated individuals who they say are interfering with their operations. The minister of the interior can even order house arrests of selected individuals. (L'Humanité, Nov. 19)

The French government is trying to use the Paris attacks to justify its military aggression in Western Asia and Libya, as well as keep the French people, who don't support this aggression, in line.

Source: Australia Cuba Friendship Society, December 2015

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IGNORED IN COMMENTARY ON SYRIA: 23 MILLION SYRIANS AND THE SECULAR SYRIAN STATE

By Susan Dirgham, Dec 2, 2015

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003 there was cause for Syrians to be concerned that their country would one day be targeted by the United States. Though not officially in what George Bush termed the 'Axis of Evil', Syria had attained pariah status: it was not a member of any Western club.

Covert and overt interference in Syria by Western governments was nothing new. For example, the first military coup in Syria was orchestrated by the CIA not long after the country achieved independence from France, a country that had destroyed part of the old city of Damascus to quell a rebellion. However, despite its history and position in the world, for those living in Syria in 2003, it was difficult to conceive that this stable, peaceful country would be rocked by a catastrophic war in less than a decade.

Damascus and Aleppo, the two oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, were tolerant, vibrant cities. They were modernising at a great pace. There was a buzz in the air. Sometimes the signs of change were miniscule but significant. For example, by 2009 it was not unusual to see young unmarried couples holding hands in public. At the same time, solid faith traditions were maintained: when Christmas and Eid celebrations coincided, decorations for both festivals were sold together in the souq.

But since then, in other capitals, a new Syria has been configured. It is a notion of Syria that has at its core the conviction that 'a brutal Alawite dictator is oppressing a Sunni majority'. It is a narrative that is never substantiated; like so many other claims related to Syria today, it passes unscrutinised. But this is dangerous as it can bolster beliefs that contradict basic tenets of our society in that

it can confer a degree of legitimacy to hatred, intolerance and anti-state violence.

Clarity is needed on Syria. Before the 'Arab Spring', women's rights and freedom of religion as well as the provision of free education were integral to modern Syria. There was talk of evolution, not revolution. To overthrow the Syrian government by violent means, terror had to be inflicted on local populations; fear engendered; hatred stirred up; and lies told. A doctrine that exhorted people to murder their fellow human beings had to be imported into Syria.

A blueprint for the overthrow of a government is not new. Strategists and war rooms have always existed. However, playing with the human heart and mind in war and expecting a clean outcome is like rolling one hundred dices and expecting 6 to turn up on them all.

In Syria today mortars are fired at random into cities; car bombs explode in suburban streets; people are abducted; public servants are assassinated; women are paraded naked in streets; children are thrown off buildings to stop the army's advance; mothers become demented as they watch strangers play with the heads of their children; bodies are cut up and bagged and put on a family's doorstep. On our watch, one's worst possible nightmares are being played out in Syria.

In June 2012 Jon Williams, a BBC editor who had reported from Damascus, wrote the following on a blog post.

Given the difficulties of reporting inside Syria, video filed by the opposition on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube may provide some insight into the story on the ground. But stories are never black and white – often shades of grey. Those opposed to President Assad have an agenda. One senior Western official went as far as to describe their YouTube communications strategy as 'brilliant'. But he also likened it to so-called 'psy-ops', brainwashing techniques used by the US and other military to convince people of things that may not necessarily be true.

*A healthy scepticism is one of the essential qualities of any journalist – never more so than in reporting conflict. **The stakes are high – all may not always be as it seems.***

One example of the muddying of the Syrian story is the oft-repeated claim presented as fact that 'Assad crossed Obama's red line when he used chemical weapons against his own people' in August 2013.

Yet the United Nations has not attributed blame for that alleged sarin attack. Furthermore, a report by MIT Professor Ted Postol and former UN weapons inspector Richard Lloyd points the finger at 'rebels' being most likely responsible for firing the munitions. And that suspicion mounts. Turkish opposition MPs recently accused authorities in Turkey of providing sarin to insurgents for the attack, presumably a false flag meant to provoke US, UK and French military strikes on Damascus.

In an interview on Al-Jazeera, Sheik Yusuf Qaradawi, an Egyptian cleric based in Qatar and described as the unofficial spiritual head of the Muslim Brotherhood, condoned the targeting of civilians and religious scholars who support the Syrian regime. Just weeks after this 'fatwa', Sheik Mohamed Al-Bouti, the highly regarded

84-year-old Islamic scholar and imam of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, was killed in a suicide bomb along with nearly 50 of his students. They were Sunni Muslims killed by a Sunni Muslim.

There were many acts of terror in Syria before the invention of ISIS. However, the terrorist acts committed by ISIS have appeared more theatrical and on a much larger scale. In June 2014, purportedly over one long weekend, Islamic State massacred 1,700 young Iraqi soldiers. Not long after, former Israeli ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren, referenced this bloody orgy, but he declared that the 'lesser evil is the Sunnis over the Shiites'. He contended that 'the math' determined who the lesser evil was. 'From Israel's perspective', he went on, 'if there is going to be an evil that prevails, let the Sunni evil prevail'. But Mr Oren didn't explain who had drawn up the math and who had independently audited it.

The discourse that insists that the violence is between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims obscures the reality. If the war in Syria can be described as a religious conflict, it is one between a relatively young school of Islam meshed with the ruling elites of Saudi Arabia and Qatar and a more ancient Islam, the Islam that embraced me, a person of no particular faith, when I lived in Syria.

In the first week of August 2013 (two or so weeks before the alleged sarin attack in Damascus), around 200 civilians, mostly women and children, were massacred in and around their homes in Latakia. About the same number were abducted. Some scholars observe with concern the close connections high profile NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have with the US State Department. However, despite its generally biased stand on Syria, Human Rights Watch did present a well-documented account of the Latakia massacres. To coordinate and carry out the murders and kidnappings, up to 20 armed groups cooperated; the Islamic State was just one Takfiri group involved. The killings were vicious, but the level of cruelty was not new in the Syrian 'Arab Spring'.

A retired American pharmacologist, Dr Denis O'Brien, who scrutinised the video footage of the victims of the alleged sarin attack in Damascus, contends that some victims may have been children abducted in Latakia. He noted the stage managed quality to the display of children's bodies, and anomalies, such as the appearance of the same body in different locations and clear signs that established the victims didn't die from a sarin attack, as alleged. But the West was expected to respond with bombs to the bodies of the children; no questions were meant to be asked.

It is often claimed that the crisis in Syria began after the arrest and torture of children who wrote up anti-government graffiti in Daraa, a city near the border with Jordan. I have heard different versions of this story: children had their fingernails pulled out; children were killed; children were neither tortured nor killed. Chinese whispers and hearsay are being used to determine narratives on Syria instead of clear-sighted investigations.

But the war in Syria began before any graffiti writing. Soon after 9/11, a Pentagon insider told General Wesley Clark that Syria was on a hit list. And before the 'Arab Spring' reached Syria, former French Foreign Affairs Minister Roland Dumas learnt that Britain was 'organising an invasion of rebels into Syria'.

Like the former Israeli ambassador to America, some in Australia claim 'Assad' has killed many more people than IS. It is as if Assad is a mythological monster, and the protagonists on the battlefields in Syria are ISIS (the bad rebels), the non-ISIS rebels (the good rebels) and Assad (the monster).

Such crude attempts to present 'Assad' as the personification of evil omit mention of the tens of thousands of Syrian soldiers who have been killed by various armed groups waving various flags. And they omit reference to the millions of Syrians who seek a safe haven in government-controlled towns and cities. The truth is the Syrian people are caught in a monster of a war. Their secular state could collapse around them, and millions could be killed or forced to flee while people a long way from the theatre of war speak with certainty and power but with little reference to them.

One month after the start of the so-called Arab Spring in Syria, I returned to Damascus. On Saturday 23 April

2011, I met a young man who had just come from an opposition rally in an outlying suburb of the capital. Some demonstrators at the protest rally had been shot, two of them killed. There were armed police present, but no one saw them draw their weapons, he explained. Who had killed them and why they had been killed was a mystery. In the first stirrings of violence and terror there were many mysteries and many rumours.

The birth of the Syrian 'Arab Spring' was not as it was depicted in Australia. That April in a hotel room in Damascus I saw the funerals of soldiers and police on Syrian TV. Bereft widows pleaded for an end to the killings.

In presenting the story of Syria, a skewed narrative may support another US-led war, but it can also engender divisions, intolerance and hatreds within our own communities. We can lose what Australia holds dear: peace, harmony and integrity. The stakes are high indeed.

DID YOU KNOW...

You have enemies? Good.

That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life.

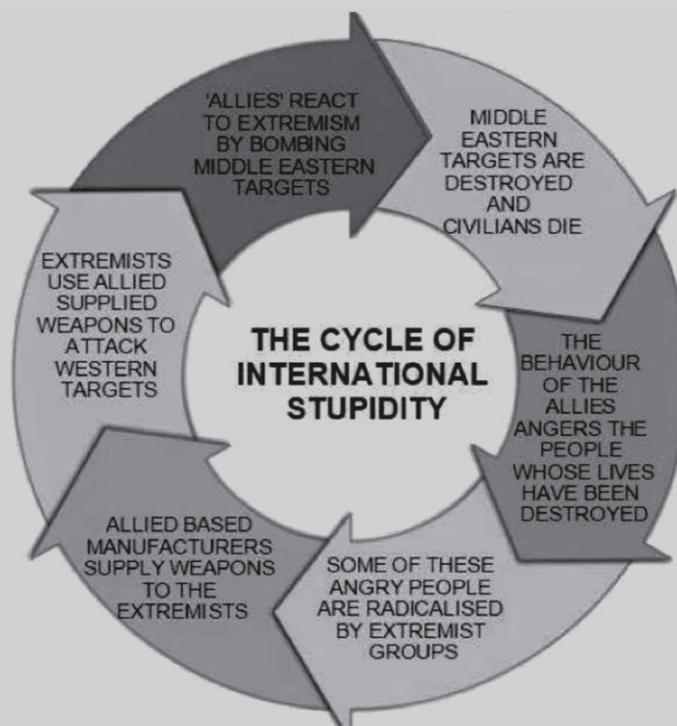
– **Winston Churchill**

Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on, or by imbeciles who really mean it.

– **Mark Twain**

Make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it.

– **Adolf Hitler**



PART ONE

The title of my remarks this morning comes from the Christian scripture, The Gospel according to John, Chapter 11, and verse 35. It is the shortest verse in the King James Version of the Bible. Two words, Jesus wept. This phrase is found within the story of Jesus' friend Lazarus who lives in the village of Bethany near Jerusalem, and who has fallen ill. His sisters Mary and Martha send word to Jesus to come quickly to visit his sick friend. Jesus is delayed and arrives after Lazarus has died. Indeed, he has been dead and buried for four days. Martha and Mary go out to meet Jesus with others who are mourning Lazarus. When the sisters tell Jesus what has happened they fall to the ground weeping. Others are crying. Jesus is moved by this outpouring of grief and weeps as well.

James Tissot, the French artist of the mid-to-late 19th century, created one of the more realistic and moving paintings of Jesus weeping. Tissot was a communist who fled Paris in the wake of the repression that destroyed the Commune. He travelled to the Middle East and studied the people and landscape and architecture. His painting of this scene is simple and human. Mary, Martha and their friends are gathered on a hillside outside of the village of Bethany mourning their lost friend. Their clothes are plain. A man in a hooded robe is sitting on a rock with his head in his left hand and his right hand lying limp in his lap. His face is almost obscured by the hood and his hand. He is crying.

It is a poignant story: an ordinary, human story. It could happen to any of us. Held up in getting to an ailing friend or family member and arriving days after the death we are confronted with terrible loss and sadness. We weep.

Of course as with most stories in the Bible there is no evidence to suggest that such an event ever occurred

at all. The story is not found elsewhere in the Bible, but does that really matter. It is a story that reminds us that when we lose something dear and close to us we grieve.

As well as sadness this phrase can also express anger. An older usage of this phrase within the English-speaking world has been as a curse; an expletive; a minced oath or euphemism for strong language best not spoken aloud; an expression of not only irritation but also of incredulity when something goes terribly wrong. Instead of saying 'bloody hell', we might say, Jesus wept.

Sadness, dismay and an expletive or two, or three or even more, are not uncommon among many of us these days. Over the latter part of the twentieth century and the beginning of our current age we have seen the great promise of a better and more just world built early in the twentieth century slowly and intentionally dismantled and destroyed.

When I was young I believed that my life was like that of the 19th-century writer and peace advocate, Henry David Thoreau, who wrote, 'I have never got over my surprise that I should have been born into the most estimable place in all the world, and in the very nick of time too.' I had this sense that the world was on this wave of progress and social justice and I too was riding this movement. It seemed like we could change the world. Was it the folly of youth?

We have seen societies built on the foundations of egalitarianism, social justice, compassion and solidarity absorbed into global capitalism. We have seen the social advances in humanity slowly and methodically pegged back.

There were societies that established full employment, equal pay for women, comprehensive childcare, universal healthcare, subsidised and efficient public transport,

low-cost housing, old age pensions which provided for retirement with dignity, and high levels of education. But more than the basic material services provided in such a society there was a qualitative difference based on values of cooperation, community and solidarity. Compared to the rat race of the Western world life was slower and more meaningful. Money, profit and consumption were not the underlying engines of these societies. There was time for family, friends, community, country and the world. Unions and other community and cultural organisations provided camps and holidays for young and old. The arts were available to all at low cost, or free. Many people are aware of these great social achievements and many people mourn their loss.

One of the most tragic ironies of the absorption of East Germany into West Germany is that after unification officers of the National Volksarmee, the East German military, were prohibited from using their rank, even as retired officers. They were classified as veterans of foreign military forces and were even denied military honours when buried. A further irony is that these denials were for officers of a military that had never gone to war. Indeed, they had been part of a military that had maintained peace in central Europe for over forty years. Even these indignities may have been tolerable except for the fact that officers of the Wehrmacht and Waffen SS of the Nazi regime were allowed to use their rank and receive military honours upon their death¹. Jesus wept.

Even in the so-called developing world there were examples. Thomas Sankara was an army officer, a visionary, a reformer, and a Marxist. He became President of Burkina Faso through a progressive and popular coup in 1983. He changed the name of the country from the French colonial name of Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, meaning the country of those of integrity. He came to power with a plan to get rid of the massive corruption in the public sector, and to return some dignity to the people. Just a few of his accomplishments:

- Children were vaccinated against meningitis, yellow fever and measles in a matter of weeks.
- A nation-wide literacy campaign increased the literacy rate from 13% in 1983 to 73% in 1987.
- Over 10 million trees were planted to prevent the desert encroaching into agricultural lands.
- Industry and business were nationalised and thus removed from neocolonial control. They were operated for the direct benefit of the people.
- Roads and a railway were built to tie the nation together, without foreign aid.
- Females were appointed to high governmental positions, women were encouraged to work, they were recruited into the military, and granted pregnancy leave during education.
- Female genital mutilation, forced marriages and polygamy were prohibited in support of women's rights.
- The government fleet of Mercedes cars was sold off and replaced by the Renault 5 (the cheapest car sold in Burkina Faso at that time) as the official service car of the ministers.

- The use of government chauffeurs and 1st-class airline tickets was forbidden.
- Land was redistributed from the feudal landlords and given directly to the peasants. Wheat production rose in three years from 1700 kg per hectare to 3800 kg per hectare, making the country self-sufficient in food.
- The president opposed foreign aid, saying that 'he who feeds you, controls you'.
- He spoke in forums like the Organization of African Unity against continued neocolonialist penetration of Africa through Western trade and finance. He called for a united front of African nations to repudiate their foreign debt. He argued that the poor and exploited did not have an obligation to repay money to the rich and exploiting.
- In the capital, the army's provisioning store was converted into a state-owned supermarket open to everyone (the first supermarket in the country).
- The president refused to use the air conditioning in his office on the grounds that such luxury was not available to 99% of people in the country.
- Public servants were required to wear traditional clothes woven from local cotton and sewn by local craftsmen to support local industry and to foster pride in local identity.
- When asked why the president's portrait did not hang in public places, as was the norm for other African leaders, Sankara replied, 'There are seven million Thomas Sankaras'. He lived a simple, modest life with few possessions. He rode a bicycle to work.

On 15 October 1987 President Thomas Sankara was assassinated and replaced by a dictator who served the French neocolonial interests. Sankara's progressive reforms were dismantled and the country was put back into debt to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Jesus wept. There are many such examples. We can each name our own – Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau, Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala, Salvadore Allende in Chile, Chris Hani in South Africa.

As a young man serving overseas in the US Air Force many years ago, I read in the newspaper about some fellow named Gough Whitlam here in Australia who had introduced a universal healthcare system, increased social security, and provided for fully funded higher education. In the American newspaper I was reading he was labelled a socialist, which was meant to cast him into the lower depths of Dante's inferno. It had the opposite effect on me. I rather liked what I read and I wanted to visit Australia. Thus I planned to take my R&R leave and travel to Butterworth in Malaysia and then hop aboard the regular RAAF cargo flight to Richmond air base in western Sydney in Australia. Well, this did not come to pass. Our unit was deactivated and we were sent back to the US in the middle of 1975 and on Remembrance Day that year there was the dismissal of the Whitlam government.

END PART ONE

¹ Bickford, A 1990, *Fallen Elites. The Military Other in Post-Unification Germany*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA.

from our readers



Dear Editor

Thank you for the great *Beacons*.

Enclosed cheque \$30

Also a keep-well diet I owe my life to – by the late Dr Chris Reading. I'd like to see all members receive it.

What do you think? Happy Xmas all.

A Nettleton, NSW

Dear Beacon

The sad thing is that it took 76 years for me to be introduced to the *Beacon*. The glad thing is that I am receiving it now – and needless to say, I find it very interesting and informative.

Enclosed please find \$20 for 2015/16 subscription.

M Jewell, Qld

Dear Editor

So let me get this straight: Australia is part of a USA-led coalition fighting a violent, cruel, reactionary, religious extremist enemy in Syria and Iraq. Some of our leading USA friends in this coalition include violent, cruel, reactionary, religious extremists such as Donald Trump, Senators Ted Cruz, Ben Carson, Michele Fiore and others. That right? Mmm, but hey I guess that's okay, after all what could go wrong, as we fought alongside the USA and the zealous President George Bush in Iraq and Afghanistan previously. And in Vietnam before that. And all that went well.

Steven Katsineris, Vic

I am a long-time reader of the *Beacon* and your articles are excellent and very informative.

I usually look at the 'from our readers' section first and I would like to mention one constant contributor to that page, namely Steven Katsineris who is very well-informed on so many issues and, in my opinion, a true humanitarian.

In your latest issue he excelled himself with his lengthy article urging us all to support the Palestinian people's struggle and what we can do to help this happen. He explained the situation in detail and ended by expressing his own faith and that we can and are making a difference and in the end change will come. He has inspired me and I hope that he will inspire many others. Should these aspirations succeed, Steven will have played a small part and now we must all play ours.

Jean Shaik

To Beacon staff

Herewith \$20 being 2-years' subs.

Sorry I've been so slow but I'm in pain with arthritis that puts things out of my mind. Trying all the cures – hope.

The last 2 *Beacons* were amazing and frightening but at

least we get to know things we wouldn't hear from our newspaper. Happier New Year.

K Butler, Vic

Dear Editor

Sadly, my mum (Anne Pontikis) died recently (from melanoma). She and my father were married in the Unitarian Church 55 years ago. Her life was testimony to her commitment to peace.

We miss her terribly. Sorry I can't renew her subscription.

Kind regards

Jane

Democracy challenged

The year 2015 and just 4 days under 2 years after the 2013 federal election saw the swift, but thankfully bloodless, removal from power of Australia's first-term Prime Minister and his Treasurer, as well as the Leader of the Government in the Senate, three Senior Cabinet Ministers and the Special Minister of State and Minister for Veterans' Affairs. Presumably, the ageing Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party was spared the indignity of dismissal on account of not being a member of the Liberal Party. These sackings by a rebel faction within the Federal Government, and the subsequent appointments of younger, highly motivated liberal parliamentarians to key portfolios, effectively changed within a few days much of the upper echelon of the Government without any involvement by the electorate.

Notwithstanding the merits of the case (based largely on unfavourable media opinion polls for the Prime Minister and his government plus the perceived urgency by the rebel faction to enhance its chances at the 2016 election), fair-minded supporters of Australian democracy may well question the ruthlessly efficient procedure that was used. Not because of any legal transgressions or challenges by the Governor-General (the unelected representative of the Queen – our Head of State domiciled in Britain), but because the process can provide incentives in the future for politically powerful, unscrupulous and even corrupt rebel groups within ruling parties to quickly ascend to power over extended periods without facing the people's scrutiny through elections.

Our experts in constitutional law ought therefore review, with some urgency, the current legal pathways available for rapid large-scale changes (without the people's consent) in political leadership. Recommendations to the Australian Parliament should then follow on new measures to be adopted in any future major leadership upheaval outside elections, with due regard for safeguarding and strengthening our hard-fought-for but not yet perfect democracy, based on 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'.

Fred Neumann, Vic

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Editorial

An invitation to Scotch College

Solidarity and repression: Muslims in France and Belgium

Ignored in commentary on Syria: 23 million Syrians and the secular Syrian State

Jesus wept

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Peter Abrehart

Marion Harper

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110 Grey Street, East Melbourne 3002
Email: admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au
Website: www.melbourneunitarian.org.au

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