

# BEACON

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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

SOME SEE A  
HOPELESS END...

...OTHERS SEE  
ENDLESS HOPE

EDITORIAL

**T**his is our time, to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth, that out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope. And where we are met with cynicism and doubt and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can.'

This is part of the victory speech articulated by President Obama when he first took office. Hope was the keynote feature of this address. Hope for the future, hope for young people, hope for a peaceful world, hope for work, for housing, for education, for healthcare; this was his commitment.

That was 2008. Fast-forward to 2016 and search for hope among the majority of Americans. What has been the result of that inspired promise?

In 2014, 47 million people lived in poverty, representing 15% of the population. This included 15.5 million children (source: Census Bureau).

Unemployment figures depend on the methodology used, but if you include, as you should, under-employment, there are 16.4 million people unable to lead a useful, productive life or to develop the potential of their children.

It doesn't matter where you live, your religion, colour, creed or nationality, if you are without hope you are denied a fulfilled life.

Can we claim any better here at home? We have a large, richly endowed country made up of a tapestry of citizens from

many diverse nations who call Australia home. This provides us with the absolute ability to produce, manufacture, develop and therefore sustain our whole population in prosperity, environmental safety and with hope for the future, except this hasn't and won't happen, and why? For the very same reason hope has died in the USA: because of greed, manipulation, exploitation and the neoliberal policies imposed by financial institutions, the IMF and the World Bank.

This policy called neoliberalism, which is being imposed across the world, manifests itself in the privatisation of public entities, destruction of jobs, imposition of so-called 'free trade' agreements, casualisation of labour, undermining of healthcare, attacks on education, trashing of the environment, diminishing people's housing and pensions; in other words, an attack on the social fabric of society in order to enrich the minority and this manifests itself in an ever-widening gap between those who create the wealth (the majority) and those who appropriate it (the minority).

All of these policies are carefully designed and introduced across the world and result in diminishing hope for the future.

Who has not met a young person faced with a huge education debt, difficulty in finding employment, the inability to enter the housing market, faced with endless wars and who has given up hope for the future?

Is this what we want? Is this what we've all worked so hard for?

It's time to take a stand, become more involved and take control of our world. The alternative is to bury hope and betray our future.



Illustration by Simon Kneebone and used with the artist's permission.

# Turnbull escalates war on the poor

Unemployed and underemployed Australians can be issued with on-the-spot fines by privately owned job agencies under a tough new government proposal, writes Owen Bennett.

Later this month the Turnbull government will be asking the Senate to support one of the most devastating attacks launched against poor and vulnerable Australians in recent memory. The bill – entitled Social Security Legislation Amendment (Further Strengthening Job Seeker Compliance) Bill 2015 – proposes to give privately run job agencies unprecedented new powers to financially penalise unemployed and underemployed Australians. If passed, the fines will come into effect on 1 July 2016.

Under the proposal, Australians receiving the dole can be fined 10% of their income support – increasing by 10% each day until they ‘re-engage’ – if they:

- fail to sign a job plan at their first job agency appointment
- are found by their job agency to have behaved inappropriately at an appointment (‘inappropriate behaviour’ is defined as acting in a manner ‘such that the purpose of the appointment is not achieved’)
- fail to attend a Work for the Dole or Training exercise without an excuse deemed reasonable by the job agency.

All fines (roughly \$55) will be deducted immediately. Unemployed Australians who feel they have been unfairly fined will be required to go through Centrelink’s arduous appeals process to get their money back – a procedure that can take up to four months.

This means that even if an unemployed worker successfully appeals against a fine – and thousands do every year – they will still be forced to endure up to four months without a significant portion of their income support. As privately run job agencies can effectively impose these financial penalties on unemployed workers before having to provide any concrete proof, the Coalition’s proposal gives privately owned job agencies the power of life and death over unemployed workers.

With the dole already \$391 below the poverty line according to the Melbourne Institute, for many unemployed workers a 10% deduction of their income support will place them in severe financial distress. If this proposal is passed next month, unemployed Australians will be just one unfair penalty away from extreme poverty and even homelessness.

The dole has already been proven to be not enough to live on. A recent report showed that one in four people on the dole were forced to beg on the streets for more than a year, while 6 in 10 were required to approach a charity for help. Escaping this poverty trap has become almost impossible for unemployed Australians – according to official government figures there are 11 job seekers competing for each vacancy, even more when you consider low-skill jobs.

With unemployment already a one-way ticket to poverty for many Australians, why is the Turnbull government introducing a bill that will make it considerably harder for unemployed workers to survive?

To answer this question, it is necessary to understand the employment services industry. Comprised of for-profit and not-for-profit companies ranging from billion-dollar corporations like Max Employment to charities like the Salvation Army, the employment services industry has become a highly lucrative business.

Under the Coalition government’s 4-year \$6.8 billion jobactive program, government payments to employment services are tied to a variety of ‘jobseeker outcomes’. The most efficient way for job agencies to maximise outcome payments is to ensure that their unemployed ‘caseload’ is, at a bare minimum, compliant with appointments and activities. Clearly the employment services industry has a financial interest in obtaining increased powers to penalise the unemployed.

With these perverse financial incentives already firmly in play, there are a number of well-documented cases of job agencies bullying unemployed workers. Every day, the Australian Unemployed Workers’ Union receives new

cases of Australians being bullied into unfair activities or appointments by money-hungry job agencies.

Even if unemployed workers are able to muster up the courage to demand that their rights be recognised, job agencies use the threat of sanctions to ensure compliance. With the continued failure of the Department of Employment to effectively regulate the industry and bring bullying job agencies into line, unemployed workers have nowhere to go. This has created a culture of fear and intimidation throughout the employment service industry.

By proposing that job agencies should be given new unprecedented powers to financially penalise unemployed workers, the Turnbull government is sending a clear

message to the employment services industry that these tactics are not only acceptable but should be intensified.

If you have been unfairly fined by your job agency, join the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union legal challenge against this unfair compliance system by contacting them on [contact@unemployedworkersunion.com](mailto:contact@unemployedworkersunion.com). You can also participate in the AUWU's Fight the Fine campaign against this bill. Visit the AUWU's Facebook page for more info.

**Owen Bennett** is the president of the Australian Unemployed Workers Union, an organisation dedicated to fighting for the rights and dignity of the unemployed. He is currently writing his PhD thesis on the employment services industry.



**Melbourne Unitarian**  
Peace Memorial Church Est. 1852  
"Seek the truth and serve humanity"

110 Grey Street,  
East Melbourne, Vic. 3002

Phone/Fax: (03) 9417 4178 web: [www.melbourneunitarian.org.au](http://www.melbourneunitarian.org.au) email: [admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au](mailto:admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au)

10 March 2016

## SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TREATIES

The Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties  
Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT

Dear Secretary and Committee Members

The Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church is deeply concerned about the impact that the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) will have on the welfare of Australian citizens and on the sovereign rights of the Australian nation. We are firstly concerned that the TPPA has negligible value as an instrument of trade development, but more importantly, that it is by nature an aggressive legal instrument that severely limits the rights of our citizens and the sovereignty of our nation.

We can see no worthwhile economic outcome from accession to the requirements of this treaty. The World Bank has stated that the TPPA will have almost no net benefit for Australia's economy – a paltry 0.7% growth after 15 years, and we already have free trade agreements with all but three of the proposed TPPA member countries. The Australian Productivity Commission and the ACCC have each said that the TPPA gives foreign investors special rights to sue TPPA member governments over the enforcement or introduction of domestic laws and bestows increased monopoly rights on medicines and copyright at the expense of consumers.

Having examined the information now released about the TPPA we also conclude that the TPPA is far less about free trade than it is about restricting the ability of current and future governments in TPPA member states to legislate and regulate in the public interest where the protection of the public interest is deemed to be harmful to the profits of private corporations. The TPPA provides enormous freedom for corporations to determine our future, which we believe will very rarely be aligned with the health, wellbeing and prosperity of the overwhelming majority of Australian citizens.

The Investor State Dispute Settlement provisions are a blatant attack on the democratic traditions in judicial process that are observed in most civilised and enlightened countries such as ours. The TPPA allows foreign corporations to ignore our domestic court system and sue governments in international tribunals that have no independent judiciary, no precedents and no appeals. The minimal changes in the draft agreement do nothing to alleviate the purposeful sweeping aside of democratic and juridical principles. While we obviously support, for example, the exclusion of tobacco regulation from this agreement this can hardly be lauded as a victory for the public good when so many other legislative safeguards for our health, our environment, our rights as workers, our rights as citizens and our rights as a nation are all laid open to attack.

This is not a hypothetical issue – there are governments in many countries that are already falling victim to unconscionable predation through the exercise of the dispute clauses of existing Trade Agreements.

The TPPA grants stronger monopoly rights for pharmaceutical companies that will inevitably lead to higher prices for medicines. Australia is required to accede in the long term to up to 3 years of additional monopoly for biologic medicines, which could cost our Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme hundreds of millions of additional dollars per year because of the additional delay in benefiting from the availability of cheaper 'generic' medicines. This will inevitably become an additional burden on the taxpayer or the unwell.

We also believe that copyright provisions for global media and IT companies will restrict future governments from responding not only to consumer rights but also to the rapidly changing impact of technologies that may demand public interest regulation.

Labour rights and environmental standards expected in a modern and civilised country such as ours have been virtually wiped out in the TPPA and the few that remain are clearly unenforceable in any realistic interpretation of that term. The removal of labour market testing for employment of temporary migrant workers will expose these workers to the sort of exploitation that we have recently seen in the 7-Eleven stores scandal, and further, removing the need to test if local workers are available to fill job vacancies will have a devastating effect on currently employed Australian workers and their families.

We strongly believe, as do large numbers of people in the other countries considering the ramifications of the TPPA with regard to their own circumstances, that the TPPA has been designed not as a mechanism to free up trade between participants, but as a legal and political construct to enhance the power of corporations over nations and that it is consequently impossible to argue genuinely that the TPPA is in the public interest of any participant nation.

Our church thanks the committee for the opportunity to comment on this matter, and in so doing, we strongly urge you not to support the implementing legislation required to effect the treaty.

With thanks

**Peter Abrehart**

Chairperson

Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church

## MAY DAY: A BRIEF HISTORY

**The history of May Day is the history of the struggle of working people to achieve a better way of life, decent pay, working conditions and for a society that meets the needs of the people.**

The international labour holiday called May Day actually originated in the United States in 1884 at a conference of US and Canadian trade unions.

The conference decided to launch an intensive campaign for the 8-hour day and to culminate the struggle on 1 May 1888.

This campaign led to a bitter struggle. There were 1572 strikes involving 600,000 workers leading up to the May 1st demonstrations. Over half-a-million workers took part in the May 1st activities. Six workers were killed, 200 injured and others were framed and hanged.

Subsequently, at an International Labour Congress in Paris, a resolution was carried to declare 1 May 1890 a great day of workers international demonstrations throughout the world. Australian delegates were at this conference.

On this day in Australia large demonstrations were held in Queensland in Barcaldine and Ipswich by striking shearers. Over 1000 people took part, some 600 on horseback.

Three years after the first celebrations of May Day saw the adoption of socialism as one of the main aims of May



Day and the recognition that workers can never be free of exploitation, injustice and poverty while capitalism exists.

In Victoria the day was marked by a meeting at the Trades Hall Council. It was later decided to celebrate International May Day by the holding of a march on the first Sunday of every May calling for better wages, working and living conditions, the end to imperialist wars and for socialism.

May Day marches in Victoria started in 1893 and continued every year up to today, except for 1941 and 1942 (war time).

The Melbourne May Day Committee has continually made representations to the state government to declare May 1st a public holiday, but only public awareness, support and pressure will finally achieve this demand.

Until then the May Day march is traditionally held on the first Sunday in May so that all members of the community have the opportunity to take part and demonstrate the broad range of issues that affect them.

**This year, 2016, the first Sunday is May 1st.**

# IBAKUSHA, H-BOMBS AND HIROSHIMA

– REFLECTIONS ON THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ATOMIC BOMBINGS

A talk given at the church on 7 February 2016 by **Kisten McCandless**

When the invitation came from the Japan Council against A & H Bombs (known as *Gensuikyo*) to attend their annual world conference and to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki last year, I felt it was too important an invitation to refuse. I felt a need to go and thought that the CICD should attend. So, with the blessing of the CICD committee, I self-funded the trip and took my daughter with me to 'hold my hand' because she can speak Japanese and has lived there. As it turned out it was better than I expected and has inspired Fiona and me to become more involved in the peace movement back here in Melbourne. So off we went, arriving in Tokyo on a sweltering hot August day, jumping on a pristine, ultra-modern bullet train at the airport and making the long trip to Hiroshima at the other end of the country.

With the theme 'A Nuclear Weapon-Free, Peaceful and Just World – Let Us Make the 70th Year of the A-bombing a Decisive Turn to a World without Nuclear Weapons', it was an impressive conference with a total of 11,750 people attending. There were 250 in the International Meeting from the 2 August to the 4 August in Hiroshima, 5,500 in the Hiroshima Conference which was open to the general public from the 4 August to 6 August and 6,000 people came to the public Nagasaki Conference on the 7 August to the 9 August.

There were 147 overseas guests from 21 countries. It was attended by government officials from Indonesia, Venezuela and Cuba, and a New Zealand parliament member, communist parties, the World Peace Council, peace groups such as CND from Britain, ICAN, Peace and Planet from the US, the International Peace Bureau, the World Council of Churches and other religious leaders, the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space, the Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament, youth movements, women's groups, artists and professional associations for peace, trade unions, one of the Cuban 5 – Fernando Gonzalez Llort – who is vice-president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples, and the Acting UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. These were just some of the delegates at the conference.

There were about 22 atomic bomb survivors called *hibakusha* who attended the conference and some of them spoke there. The word '*hibakusha*' is Japanese for 'exposed person' (*hibaku* means 'exposed' and *sha* 'person'). The word *hibakusha* has come to describe all those victims of atomic weapons testing and reactor accidents. Their testimonies of what it was actually like to have atomic bombs dropped on them on the 6 August and 9 August 1945 and their ongoing suffering, both mental and physical since then, were the most powerful and moving presentations at the conference.

There was a sense of urgency from the *hibakusha* at this conference to get their stories of the horror of nuclear weapons out to the wider public because the average age of them now is 80.

The imperative is to record as many *hibakusha* testimonies as possible and get their stories out to the world, especially to the youth. *Hibakusha* who have previously not talked about their experience and suffering are now coming forth too as they get to the end of their lives.

It takes immense courage for the *hibakusha* to speak out, or even just come up onto the stage, because many of them were ashamed and shunned by Japanese society after the atomic bombings, finding it difficult to get jobs and marry. Also, talking about the horror of having an atomic bomb – the most cruel and inhumane of all weapons – dropped on them, their family and city is extremely difficult because they are reliving that fateful day over and over again. There is also a sense of guilt that they survived while others perished. Some *hibakusha* feel that speaking about their experiences helps them to heal too.

In the second part of the conference in Nagasaki the 22 *hibakusha* came up on the stage: they were brave, humble and inspiring. Many of them have devoted their lives to working for peace by getting their first-hand accounts out there such as speaking to schools in particular and speaking around the world and at the United Nations.

Second generation *hibakusha* spoke too: this just emphasises that the effects of nuclear weapons like radiation go on and on for decades. Some *hibakusha* are very sick. One had to go to hospital every fortnight for radiation sickness treatment that had caused leukemia and chronic fatigue. Another told us that though he has escaped cancer his daughter had just been diagnosed with womb cancer believed to have been caused by her exposure to radiation via her *hibakusha* parents.

Seeing and listening to Taniguchi Sumiteri from Nagasaki tell his story left the greatest impact on me. I remember seeing a photo of him when he was seventeen years old in one of my mother's books as a child with a back that looked like bloodied minced meat. His back took the blast from the atomic bombing and he spent 21 months in hospital lying on his stomach, hearing people around him dying. He miraculously



survived and saw his doctor's face for the first time in nearly two years. Because he spent so long lying on his stomach waiting for his back to heal his chest is now concave and you can see his heart beating under his paper-thin skin. It was amazing to see him, now 87, at the conference speaking humbly about his experience but with a determined conviction that what happened to him never happens to anyone again; that human beings and nuclear weapons cannot coexist.

I learnt so much by attending this world conference. I learnt many facts about the current and historical situation of nuclear war and weapons that I could probably find out myself by seeking it online or in books but it was handed to me on a platter at this conference. I was immersed in the subject matter for eight days and learnt more in those days than I would have seeking the information out myself. The information given to me at the conference was a springboard too in seeking further information on the issues discussed at the conference.

The world conference was an invaluable platform in enriching the exchange of views and experiences of the participants and in generating a firm determination to make advances towards the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

The conference helped me to clarify what the important issues are right now. I learned the importance of meeting globally like this to exchange ideas about how to go forward on the anti-nuclear issue, and how other countries and Australia are so interconnected right now to America's military industrial complex and its current ultra-imperialist and aggressive actions and posturing as it goes about the implementation of its New World Order that has seriously intensified since 9/11.

I think it is important for Australian peace groups, interfaith groups or interested individuals as well as sympathetic politicians and unions to attend this conference because Australia is so geographically isolated and it is a valuable opportunity to meet with these other activist leaders. We may be able to communicate via email but nothing beats talking to these people face to face. We have their full attention and time. That is a rare privilege. Valuable connections are made face to face that you don't get via email and Facebook.

Being in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6 August and 9 August was very special. One million people visited Hiroshima for the 70th anniversary. Prime Minister Abe gave the main address at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park at which many people turned their back on him in protest at his violating and dismantling of Article 9 that is the basis of Japan's pacifist constitution and which the UN bases its rules of war on.

Article 9 was established because of Japan's remorse for its war of aggression and colonial rule and because of the atomic bombings. In Article 9 the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.

Large and vocal demonstrations converged on the Peace Park demonstrating against Abe's trampling of Article 9, and there were other demonstrations about the ongoing problem of the Fukushima nuclear power plant contamination that has still not been contained and by the Fukushima *hibakusha*.

Article 9 has since been dismantled by Abe's new war laws that open the way for Japan's self-defence forces to participate in US military actions globally and in turn the US will provide extended deterrence protection to Japan through all types of capabilities, including its nuclear forces – that Japan would come under the USA's 'nuclear umbrella'. These new war laws are unconstitutional because they negate the peace principles of Japan's pacifist constitution.

There were contributions at the world conference about the violation of Article 9 that mentioned Japan's joint military exercises with the US including the approximately 30 Japanese military personnel who are in Australia at the moment with US personnel participating in war games in the top of the country for the next couple of years.

Japan's peace culture means they have not been at war for 70 years. America has been at war 222 years out of 239! How is it in the Japanese people's interests to do away with its pacifist constitution that has served it so well and become part of the USA's hegemonic plans? As Henry Kissinger, who served as Secretary of State in the Nixon and Ford administrations said: 'America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests.' Japan, Australia and the other countries that do not have their own independent foreign policy but align themselves with the USA in exchange for the USA's 'protection' under its nuclear umbrella and nuclear deterrence doctrines for their 'security' are putting at risk themselves and the entire world.

It is just sheer luck that nuclear weapons have not been launched, either intentionally or by accident, especially with the heightening regional tensions involving nuclear powers. This nuclear deterrence doctrine prevents the nuclear powers from engaging in straightforward discussion of the abolition of these weapons, arguing that their nuclear arsenal is needed for their own security. And this flawed doctrine only perpetuates the arms race. The modernisation of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, their build-up and training exercises – which also squander vast amounts of resources – not only violates the NPT and other international agreements, but increases the danger of their actual use, even the possibility of a 'limited nuclear war' as the nuclear weapons and their delivery systems become more sophisticated.

Having nuclear weapons has nothing to do with security, safety or prosperity – they are the antithesis of these. And, indeed, for some of those states that possess them they are the ultimate expression of imperialist aggression and dominance over others – that possessing them is a threat psychologically over the population of another country. So the key to making further progress is to overcome this 'nuclear deterrence' doctrine and to expose it as a gravely flawed principle.

Japan has an active peace movement and there are many young people involved. This may be due to Peace Studies being taught in schools throughout Japan. I hope this continues.

Even though the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference failed to agree on establishing a nuclear-weapons free zone in the Middle East last May, all is not lost. The Review Conference's one achievement was widening the gap between the non-nuclear weapons states and the nuclear powers, codified in the humanitarian pledge developed by Austria and which will be a foundation for future nuclear disarmament initiatives.

The humanitarian pledge that seeks 'legal measures' for the elimination of nuclear weapons was supported by 113 states, besieging and isolating some nuclear weapons states and their allies. Ban Ki-moon said in 2010 that nuclear weapons abolition cannot be won without broad and intense pressure from the grassroots – from the people. This humanitarian pledge can form the basis for a treaty. One hundred Australian parliamentarians have signed ICAN's global appeal for a treaty banning nuclear weapons. This is a positive development.

There are still about 16,000 nuclear warheads in the world. This number is down significantly from the 65,000 at the height of the Cold War in 1986 but the use of even a few of them would cause hell on earth, a situation beyond description. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki a total of 210,000 people died by the end of 1945, and those who survived in the moment were later afflicted both mentally and physically. Nuclear weapons pose as great a risk now as they did during the Cold War years.

The essential factor that promotes and maintains the global progress toward achieving the elimination of nuclear weapons is the movement of peoples around the world and the support and pressure of public opinion. World conferences such as the one Fiona and I attended last

August are important in strengthening and galvanising all participants to work towards eliminating the world of nuclear weapons as a matter of urgency. This world conference and 70th anniversary is important for informing and educating the public about what is really going on and for motivating them to join together in demanding their governments negotiate for peaceful solutions to conflict and for the elimination of nuclear weapons, for a start.

When my mother became ill a year before she died and was struggling to go into the CICD office, her family suggested to her that she give up her work, that she should rest, that she'd done enough. She responded by saying: 'While my babies and grandbabies are in the world I will never stop fighting for peace, never give up', and she added: 'That the world is worth saving while you are all in it'.

... and that's why we work for peace and social justice, isn't it? That's what it's all about in the end.

As the poet Nazim Hikmet says in the last verse of his poem *The Dead Little Girl of Hiroshima*:

*All that I ask is that for peace  
You fight today, you fight today,  
So that children of the world  
May live and grow and laugh and play.* ✠



# UNITARIANISM

by **Peter Abrehart**, Chairperson of the Melbourne Unitarian Church

**T**he modern denomination called 'Unitarian' developed separately in Poland, Transylvania, Britain and North America, and while the common seeds such as tolerance and freedom are obvious, each developed their distinct local characteristics. Organised Unitarianism developed in Transylvania at the same time as Unitarianism in Poland, but the Polish congregations did not last beyond the early nineteenth century, while those in Transylvania still operate today.

The basis upon which the Transylvania churches grew was the decree of toleration issued by the Diet of Torda in 1568. This decree not only permitted Unitarians to grow without persecution by other sects, but indicated the lines upon which the Unitarians would seek to run their own churches. The Diet of Torda declared:

*...in every place the preachers shall preach and explain the gospel each According to his understanding of it, and if the congregation like it, well; if not, no one shall compel preachers whose doctrine they approve. Therefore none of the Superintendents or others shall annoy or abuse the preachers on account of their religion, according to the previous constitutions allow any to be imprisoned or to be punished by removal from his post on account of his teaching, for faith is the gift of God, this comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God.*

Thus church congregations were given the sole right to decide upon whom their ministers or preachers should be. The church superintendents lost their authority and no church congregation could be compelled to accept a minister whose preaching was not in accord with the ideas it approved.

This church democracy is one of the fundamental characteristics of Unitarianism.

The Renaissance (or revival of learning) was really the impetus behind the Protestant Reformation. For many, the Reformation failed to deliver. Newly found freedoms were quickly curtailed – changes were too often in form rather than substance. However the cat was literally 'out of the bag' or 'the horse had bolted': there was no going back to the absoluteness of ecclesiastical creeds.

In Britain the Unitarian Tracts of Firmin and Nye resulted in the Trinitarian Controversy from 1690–1700. The British Unitarian General Assembly had its first service at Essex Chapel in 1774. Those in the congregation included Lord Shelbourne, Lord de Despensers, Dr Joseph Priestley, Benjamin Franklin (from the then American colonies), Benjamin Vaughan, Jeremy Bentham, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sir John Pringle.

Benjamin Franklin and another American Unitarian, Thomas Jefferson, were to play key roles in support of Joseph Priestley when he was forced to move to America after his laboratory and church were burnt by a mob. As

you would be aware, Priestley was a Unitarian minister and scientist – the discoverer of oxygen, or perhaps more accurately the first to isolate this gaseous element.

Unitarians were leaders in most changes that transformed England of the 18th century to England of the 20th century. Towards the middle of the 19th century they thought themselves as the 'Vanguard of the Age'. Raymond V Holt in his book *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England* says:

*The claim to be the 'Vanguard of the Age' was not an arrogant one and was not unjustified, though it would be ridiculous as well as untrue, to pretend that Unitarians shared none of the limitations of their age. Civil Religious Liberty, education in all its forms, Local Government and better Public Health have been objects of their special concern. They were also among the men who changed the economic life of England in the long-drawn-out Industrial Revolution.*

The Melbourne Unitarian congregation was established at a meeting of ten men on 29 November 1852 when it was decided to establish a place of worship to maintain and extend the principles of Unitarianism. The foundation stone of the church was laid on 5 July 1853 by Rev. M Davidson. The congregation was active in charitable work and it began to take up what might be described as political issues, particularly those related to the fairness of the justice system (the first Chief Justice of Victoria was a member of the church). Unfortunately there does not appear to have been a reaction to Eureka from the Melbourne Unitarians.

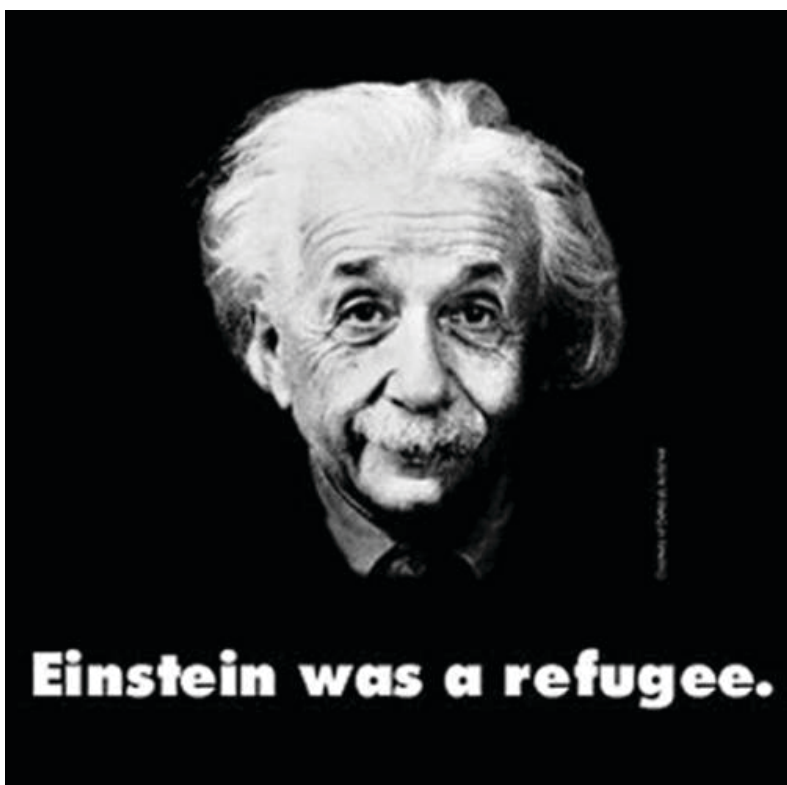
From the turn of the 20th century, particularly after the First World War, the church became more and more involved in the 'leading edge' of social and political issues. This was particularly so under the ministries of William Bottomley and Victor James.

The work of Rev. Victor James for world peace and his stand against the growth of McCarthyism during the worst days of the Menzies era and the later Vietnam War had a profound impact upon all members and friends of the Melbourne Unitarian Church.

Unitarians have been called the greatest 'name droppers' with very good reason. In the American context think five presidents, half those who signed the Declaration of Independence and a quarter of those honoured in the hall of fame (even Paul Revere was one). The worlds of science, literature and the entertainment industry include Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, Christopher Reeve, Matt Groening (the Simpsons), Rod Serling, Pete Seeger, etc. In communications we have Samuel Morse (morse code), Alexander G Bell (telephone) and Tim Berners-Lee (world wide web). In various branches of science we have Newton, Priestley, Pauling, etc. In literature we have Charles Dickens, Longfellow, etc.

It was the surgeon Erasmus Darwin who coined the phrase 'Unitarianism is a feather-bed for falling Christians'. One of those 'falling' people was his close friend Josiah Wedgwood of pottery fame. The families obviously mixed socially as one of the Darwin sons married a Wedgwood daughter. Erasmus and Josiah were the grandfathers of a rather famous naturalist, Charles Darwin.

We could go on but we will end with a few 'locals'. The first chairman of the Melbourne Unitarian Church was Sir William a'Beckett (as in a'Beckett Street), the first Chief Justice of Victoria, not forgetting the lady on the \$5 note, Catherine Helen Spence, or the poet Bernard O'Dowd. The beliefs of many of those mentioned above have been sanitised over time. Consider the role of Charles Dickens, for instance, in the introduction of child labour laws or the involvement of Josiah Wedgwood in the anti-slavery movement. A strong affinity with social justice in its many forms is a consistent theme that has run through Unitarian philosophy for many centuries. Name droppers indeed!



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# The Merciful Sea

An address given at the Church on 21 February 2016 by **Dr Fiona Hill** (anthropologist and Arab cultural consultant), was expert advisor to the UNHCR in Za'atari Camp Jordan in 2013 and visited refugees in Lebanon, Turkey and Greece 2014 and 2015.

**A**s 2015 began with Pope Francis preaching his vision of harmony with the environment, within society, and within oneself, he defined the very meaning of Islam and prompted the Brookings Institute to announce Catholic teaching's synergy with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Yet as 2015 concludes, violent mayhem in defence of religion and human rights runs rampant and the vulnerable are made a problem of logistics.

The EU no sooner pledged Turkey \$3.26 billion to stem the flow of asylum seekers than this home to the world's largest refugee population stood accused of deporting refugees back home. A logistics problem solved with a breach of international law.

Little wonder those with a view towards better lives avoid the broiling politics of purpose-built camps, choosing rented rooms above handouts, despite the lack of legal work and education for the children.

With no hope of returning home any time this decade, the lives of so many refugees in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon are devoid of a meaningful future.

My adoptive Syrian family sit on threadbare scraps of old carpet in sparsely furnished rooms in Turkey, eking out each day with abstemious meals, long sleeps, and 1000 piece wattle, Uluru and Sydney Harbour jigsaw puzzles.

Chaperoned walks around the block are the only exercise on the porous Turkish border where zealous militants walk the streets.

These crop farmers, market gardeners, and dairy breeders cared for me in their northern Syrian village on and off for 30 years. Now I care for them.

After DAESH invaded the north in 2013, daily harassment, random incarcerations, beatings and beheadings with the victim's children forced to watch are the order of the day.

Our village community is Sunni Muslim, but DAESH insist proper Muslims wear total black and long beards and surrender all boys over 12 to fight with them and post-pubescent girls for marriage.

When they started confiscating harvests and livestock and banned all females from leaving the district, my family knew their lives depended on leaving.

After months of meticulous planning and several heart stopping false starts, two dozen men, women and children slipped past DAESH under cover of night, dodged ground and air fire, and slept rough in a field for several nights until a smuggler got them safely across the border.

If discovered, the men would be killed, post-pubescent children abducted, and all the women left to mourn. Miraculously, even the baby was silent.

On Turkish soil the smuggler snapped a photo – the women's eyes downcast, the boys' faces stricken, and the girls dressed in their pinks, blues, reds and greens smiling irrepressibly into the lens.

There are strangers in the photo too. They'd stopped in the last moments of their escape to gather up a Syrian family with no smuggler of their own.

When I handed this family the money my local childcare centre raised for refugees, tears pricked everyone's eyes. Generosity from the other side of the world was bittersweet for people who'd always been the generous ones. The indignity of forced migration cuts deep.

'We can't go home, Turkey doesn't want us, and only Merkel knows what good we can do for her country,' an exhausted Syrian father explains. 'Even if we all drown, the sea is the most merciful.'

Whether to a watery grave or a long and humiliating journey, any journey towards a real future is better than home's horrific dangers, Turkey's creeping fear and stagnation and the prospect of accepting endless charity.

Commercial ferries to the closest Greek islands take less than 2 hours. But smugglers set refugees adrift outside the ports, simply gesturing towards faint glinting lights across the dark sea.

In Lesbos, dinghy-load clusters of survivors accept bananas from international volunteers who daily prepare a cooked meal in the island's asylum seeker camp. But the same fear of abduction and indoctrination of their young forced many to leave home and then Turkey keeps extended family groups lingering instead around the port, awaiting their chance to move on.

Stuck to the door of the port's immigration checkpoint is a large type written sign in Arabic that reads 'No tickets', and the seafront's hotels display Arabic and Farsi signs apologising for the lack of empty rooms.

The many who avoid the dedicated camp sleep rough on the hillsides in all the clothes they possess with plastic bags stuffed inside their shoes. As they accept pieces of fruit, the children's smiles still are quick to surface but the weary adults take a good deal longer.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Catholic teaching and Islam's essence are not serving them well.

As we prepare to commemorate the enduring miracle that arose from one beleaguered family finding refuge in a manger, let's hope we find solutions even more merciful than the sea.

# from our readers

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## **EDITORS' NOTE: WE HAVE RECEIVED SO MANY LETTERS THIS MONTH THAT WE WILL HOLD SOME OVER FOR FUTURE ISSUES.**

### **Dear Editors**

Congratulations again on an excellent publication. I admire your willingness to confront difficult problems head on, and now look forward keenly to each issue. I have not yet finished reading the January 2016 edition.

I liked the short series on corruption from late 2014 through early 2015. It seemed to briefly address large and complex problems and raised chapter headings as questions. My thoughts were that more depth was required on related subjects, so in response I wrote an essay dealing primarily with the related matter of 'Secrecy'. Are you interested in considering this for publication in the *Beacon*? It will probably be suited to serialisation.

Part of my essay is quite relevant to immediate current affairs, as our federal government is loudly proclaiming its determination to reinstate the ABCC. I have dealt with this matter in my essay, although I am about to re-draft it to place the section referring to the ABCC near the start for the sake of newsworthy relevance.

If you are interested, I can get a copy to you next week. An SMS will get to me quickly; otherwise the post seems still reliable.

**Sincerely**  
**J Endacott, Vic**

### **Dear Donna and Melbourne Unitarian Board**

Once again it's time to renew my/our subscription to the Melbourne Unitarian Church's wonderful and highly informative *Beacon* magazine, so in a day or so I will deposit \$50 into the Melbourne Unitarian Church account by direct deposit (ANZ, Melbourne Unitarian Church, BSB 013 275, A/C 3011 30386). The \$50 will be for 2-years' concession subscription and \$30 donation.

My wife Cheryl and I are always eager to read the journal from cover to cover. Having said this, we were somewhat disappointed that there was no reference made in regard to the 26 January and its significance to our First Nations people, in either I believe the January or February issues.

The 26 January gives Cheryl, I, our close friends, especially First Nations friends and possibly 99% of our Original people recurring grief.

As we know, the *Beacon* presents articles on an extensive range of the world's injustices, human rights abuses, political corruption, corporate greed, etc., and that's as it should be when mainstream media is afraid or just ignores printing them. Unfortunately I believe most of the writings in the *Beacon* are generally not linked to the human rights abuses of what is happening to our Original people on this very continent called Australia

i.e. incarceration rate (25% Australia wide, > 80% in the NT) – worse than during apartheid South Africa, as a matter of fact, worse than anywhere on this planet, deaths in custody (1 every 28 days on average), racism within the law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and government policies. The threatened closures of remote communities in WA will create our own refugees within Australia. Our government talks of closing the gap whilst building yet more so-called correctional facilities.

The major parties, along with dubious cohorts including the mining industry, banks, major corporations and a long list of sponsors and supporters, are spruiking CONstitutional Recognition

<http://www.recognise.org.au/thejourney/our-supporters/>

Of all the First Nations peoples I'm in contact with, not one supports CONstitutional Recognition. One of the comments made frequently is, 'It's nothing but a SCAMpaign to make people feel good'. Most people in general want to do the right thing and therefore probably believe that recognition is a positive move. In addition to the parties mentioned above I believe those most pushing for CONstitutional Recognition are the non-elected government-appointed, paid, 40 so-called Aboriginal 'leaders' and that CONstitutional Recognition is yet another paternalistic government ideology which does nothing to make the lives of our Original people more equitable and in fact could pose major obstacles in the way of sovereignty, treaties and self-determination.

When 97.5% are able to dictate to 2.5% of our population for an outcome, that surely is a perverse form of democracy. I believe a plebiscite should be held where only our First People take part to decide whether to go ahead with a proposal in regard to constitutional recognition in a referendum.

Prior to the 26 January this year I was asked to submit to ABC Open (<https://open.abc.net.au/>)

*The Australian flag: What does it mean to you?* See below, I ask would it be possible to place this and my covering letter in the *Beacon* when space and time permits?

Last but not least, it would be fantastic if the board would allow an acknowledgement of the 'Traditional owners of the Kulin Nation, past Warriors, Elders past and present' within the *Beacon* each month as you are I'm sure aware that the Unitarian Church stands on the land of the Kulin Nation. Thank you again for the work of the church in regard to striving to make our world more equitable.

As always, 'Seek the Truth & Serve Humanity'.

**Yours sincerely**  
**Klaus Kaulfuss, Vic**

**Letter to Government**

**Hi guys**

You know how you fellows are having all sorts of trouble paying for health, education and future expenditures for retired people like yourselves who are living longer and reckon you deserve all sorts of lifetime benefits. Well, I have an excellent idea to solve the problem. By not building those submarines that are going to cost the budget zillions, you can put that money to health and education. Here is how my awesome plan works.

Announce you are building nuclear submarines that don't need to resurface to refuel. Also announce they are being built from that stuff they make fighter planes from which makes them undetectable on radar. If you can't see them, how does anyone know they are there or not! Then announce you are building 50 of them so 'don't mess with us in the ocean'. You need to put a big TOP SECRET – NO ENTRY sign on the factory where they are being built then make the workers sign a lifetime confidentiality agreement about what they are really getting up to in there. It needs to be more frightening than the threat of 2 years' jail for whistleblowers under the existing Border Force Protection Act. I suggest a threat of 2 years in a detention centre on Manus Island or Nauru. That should scare the living daylights out of anyone. Those workers in the factory could still be paid but to do useful meaningful jobs like research and building things that will benefit humanity.

By the way, I don't think you should worry too much about those Chinese coming to take us over (I'm learning Mandarin anyway). I reckon they are just building up their defences to ensure they never have to suffer another century of humiliation like they did starting with the British Opium Wars and what the Japanese did to them in Nanjing.

Let me know if you need any more advice.

**Fay Waddington, Qld**

**Dear Marion**

I wish to give a gift subscription to D Atkinson and L MacPherson. Enclosed is a cheque for \$40.

Thank you for the *Beacon* in its delving behind the news issues – especially the editorial that is always informative and challenging.

The *Beacon* provides us with excellent information that we use in our letters to politicians. We try to make our letters and emails challenging, questioning and also informing.

**Yours sincerely  
C Whatmough, NSW**

Our church is a public and usable asset with portable seating and excellent conference, meeting and function facilities. We welcome its use by those who support our motto 'Seek the Truth and Serve Humanity'. Interested individuals or groups can contact the church office – we would be delighted to speak to you. A donation is payable.

**Dear Editor**

I contact *Beacon* in support of Joan Doyle's talk 28/2/16 Hands Off Aussie Post. A former banker, Mr Fahour, has been installed the CEO, receiving a banker's salary, \$4.5 million dollars pa, with the sole purpose to disrupt, destroy and privatise the proven successful working ethic of Australia Post.

We hear his action of deliberately withholding delivered mail for several days is one of the ploys. When this type of action is taken to the Royal Mail Service, it should come under the heading of sabotage, leading to legal action taking place. In this debate we understand that electronic transactions play a part in information delivery; however, nothing can replace the 'postie delivery' for the greater community.

Privatisation has been shown in most cases to fail 70% of the electorate and this in itself should be enough to reject this idea outright. The idea itself defies comprehension – older people who have no desire to use internet, etc., people with disabilities, the high volume of people under hospital and medical care, people in outback and rural areas, business people, 50% of workers on low incomes, these are a few reasons this charade cannot continue. Privatising the service would involve the sacking of over 3,000 workers Australia-wide, workers who have created over 200 years a linking of goodwill with their community.

Increasing the basic stamp price to \$1 is another example of how this banker is going about his task; also using 'voodoo' banking accounting methods to arrive at a desired profit-loss result is just another corporate use to support their view. The postal and parcel delivery section is doing quite well in every way and high standards are mostly attained. We, the Australian community, must not let our postal service be taken over by some unknown concoction group to be sold off for profit and thus losing the national communication arm.

**Richard Tate, Unitarian member –  
Public Interest before Corporate Interest member**

**Dear Editor**

I wish to renew the subscription for the *Beacon*.

I have made a gift of your paper to a friend and he enjoys it. He reminded me that the renewal is due in June, so I thought I would get in early.

It's great to see enthusiasm for the real story behind the news.

Keep up the good work.

**J Stewart, Vic**

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110 Grey Street, East Melbourne 3002  
Email: [admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au](mailto:admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au)  
Website: [www.melbourneunitarian.org.au](http://www.melbourneunitarian.org.au)

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