

# BEACON

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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

## IS THIS A CLASS ISSUE? UNDISPUTEDLY!

EDITORIAL



WHERE JUSTICE IS DENIED, WHERE POVERTY IS ENFORCED, WHERE IGNORANCE PREVAILS, AND WHERE ANY ONE CLASS IS MADE TO FEEL THAT SOCIETY IS AN ORGANIZED CONSPIRACY TO OPPRESS, ROB AND DEGRADE THEM, NEITHER PERSONS NOR PROPERTY WILL BE SAFE.

**FREDERICK DOUGLASS**

This wise comment, over 100 years old, accurately sums up the period we are in more succinctly and honestly than any media comment in this whole pre-election period. Any criticism of the budget, any suggestion that it favours the wealthy and condemns the rest is met by most of the media with accusations of 'class bias' or 'politics of envy'. 'Class bias' is apparently acceptable when it favours the rich, but totally unacceptable when it highlights inequality. Is it a class issue when a budget favours the rich and punishes the poor, as this budget undoubtedly does? Of course it is, and we shouldn't apologise for this.

The Abbott/Hockey budget (crafted with the approval of the right-wing think tank the Institute of Public Affairs) was overwhelmingly rejected by the community despite a wealth-funded scare campaign that we would fall into a deep financial hole if it wasn't accepted. Was it a class issue? Of course it was.

Let's not be fooled into believing that the Turnbull/Morrison budget is any different, or that if elected it won't be even worse than we anticipate. The Turnbull/Morrison budget has already been rejected by many NGOs, welfare agencies, unions and people's organisations as a savage attack on those on low incomes, youth, homeless, the aged, the unemployed, and worse, it is promoted by the federal government as a fairer budget! Fair for which class?

The Turnbull government in this very 'class oriented' budget is introducing harsh, punitive measures attacking the most vulnerable in our community. Policies such as:

- cutting welfare support for those with a disability in order to fund the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- reducing the foreign aid budget to its lowest level ever as if we have no responsibility toward others
- freezing the Medicare rebate, costing patients \$925 million
- continuing the Abbott/Hockey cuts to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
- creating fees for pap smears and blood tests
- processing the Abbott/Hockey plan to make cuts to paid parental leave and family tax benefits for low-income families
- dividing our schools on class lines.

This is not a different budget to the Abbott government's budget. It's simply worded differently. It is a giant 'class' con!

Duncan Storrer on Q&A summed up the whole issue very simply and very clearly when he articulated what we all feel about this budget being 'not for us'. Not all the blustering by politicians can minimise his impact and clarity in recognising the class nature of the budget. Shame on the biased media that attempted to denigrate him!

The *Beacon*, in its editorials, has constantly exposed the blatant efforts by government to shift the responsibility for the deficit onto the majority of the hardworking people of this country, when they, and indeed we, are all aware that the deficit was created by the banks and multinational companies – those whom this budget serves. Australians can't afford this budget or those that promote it. †



# CUBA GUARANTEES RIGHTS

by **MARJORIE COHN**

IN ADVANCE OF PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA'S HISTORIC VISIT TO CUBA ON MARCH 20, THERE IS SPECULATION ABOUT WHETHER HE CAN PRESSURE CUBA TO IMPROVE ITS HUMAN RIGHTS. BUT A COMPARISON OF CUBA'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD WITH THAT OF THE UNITED STATES SHOWS THAT THE US SHOULD BE TAKING LESSONS FROM CUBA.

**T**he Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains two different categories of human rights – civil and political rights on the one hand; and economic, social and cultural rights on the other.

Civil and political rights include the rights to life, free expression, freedom of religion, fair trial, self-determination; and to be free from torture, cruel treatment, and arbitrary detention.

Economic, social and cultural rights comprise the rights to education, healthcare, social security, unemployment insurance, paid maternity leave, equal pay for equal work, reduction of infant mortality; prevention, treatment and control of diseases; and to form and join unions and strike.

These human rights are enshrined in two treaties – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The United States has ratified the ICCPR.

But the US refuses to ratify the ICESCR. Since the Reagan administration, it has been US policy to define human rights only as civil and political rights. Economic, social and cultural rights are dismissed as akin to social welfare, or socialism.

The US government criticises civil and political rights in Cuba while disregarding Cubans' superior access to universal housing, healthcare, education, and its guarantee of paid maternity leave and equal pay rates.

Meanwhile, the US government has committed serious human rights violations on Cuban soil, including torture,

cruel treatment, and arbitrary detention at Guantanamo. And since 1960 the United States has expressly interfered with Cuba's economic rights and its right to self-determination through the economic embargo.

The US embargo of Cuba, now a blockade, was initiated by President Dwight D Eisenhower during the Cold War in response to a 1960 memo written by a senior State Department official. The memo proposed 'a line of action that makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and the overthrow of the [Castro] government.'

That goal has failed, but the punishing blockade has made life difficult in Cuba. In spite of that inhumane effort, however, Cuba guarantees its people a remarkable panoply of human rights.

## **Healthcare**

Unlike in the United States, healthcare is considered a right in Cuba. Universal healthcare is free to all. Cuba has the highest ratio of doctors to patients in the world at 6.7 per 1,000 people. The 2014 infant mortality rate was 4.2 per 1,000 live births – one of the lowest in the world.

Healthcare in Cuba emphasises prevention, rather than relying only on medicine, partly due to the limited access to medicines occasioned by the US blockade. In 2014 the *Lancet* journal said, 'If the accomplishments of Cuba could be reproduced across a broad range of poor and middle-income countries the health of the world's population would be transformed.' Cuba has developed pioneering medicines to treat and prevent lung cancer, and prevent diabetic amputations. Because of the blockade, however, we in the United States cannot take advantage of them.

## **Education**

Free education is a universal right up to and including higher education. Cuba spends a larger proportion of its GDP on education than any other country in the world. 'Mobile teachers' are deployed to homes if children are unable to attend school. Many schools provide free morning and after-school care for working parents who have no extended family. It is free to train to be a doctor in Cuba. There are 22 medical schools in Cuba, up from only 3 in 1959 before the Cuban Revolution.

## Elections

Elections to Cuba's national parliament (the National Assembly) take place every five years and elections to regional Municipal Assemblies every 2.5 years. Delegates to the National Assembly then elect the Council of State, which in turn appoints the Council of Ministers from which the President is elected.

As of 2018 (the date of the next general election in Cuba), there will be a limit of no more than two five-year terms for all senior elected positions, including the President. Anyone can be nominated to be a candidate. It is not required that one be a member of the Communist Party (CP). No money can be spent promoting candidates and no political parties (including the CP) are permitted to campaign during elections. Military personnel are not on duty at polling stations; school children guard the ballot boxes.

## Labor rights

Cuban law guarantees the right to voluntarily form and join trade unions. Unions are legally independent and financially autonomous, independent of the CP and the state, funded by members' subscriptions. Workers' rights protected by unions include a written contract, a 40–44 hour week, and 30 days' paid annual leave in the state sector.

Unions have the right to stop work they consider dangerous. They have the right to participate in company management, to receive management information, to office space and materials, and to facility time for representatives. Union agreement is required for lay-offs, changes in patterns of working hours, overtime, and the annual safety report. Unions also have a political role in Cuba and have a constitutional right to be consulted about employment law. They also have the right to propose new laws to the National Assembly.

## Women

Women make up the majority of Cuban judges, attorneys, lawyers, scientists, technical workers, public health workers and professionals. Cuba is ranked first in Save the Children's 'Lesser Developed Countries' Mothers' Index. With over 48% women MPs, Cuba has the third highest percentage of female parliamentarians in the world. Women receive 9 months of full salary during paid maternity leave, followed by 3 months at 75% of full salary. The government subsidises abortion and family planning, places a high value on prenatal care, and offers 'maternity housing' to women before giving birth.

## Life expectancy

In 2013 the World Health Organization listed life expectancy for women in Cuba at 80; the figure was 77 for men. The probability of dying between ages 15 and 60 years per 1,000 people in the population was 115 for men and 73 for women in Cuba.

During the same period, life expectancy for women in the United States was 81 for women and 76 for men. The probability of dying between 15 and 60 per 1,000 people was 128 for men and 76 for women in the United States.

## Death penalty

A study by Cornell Law School found no one under sentence of death in Cuba and no one on death row in October 2015. On 28 December 2010, Cuba's Supreme Court commuted the death sentence of Cuba's last remaining death row inmate, a Cuban-American convicted of a murder carried out during a 1994 terrorist invasion of the island. No new death sentences are known to have been imposed since that time.

By contrast, as of 1 January 2016, 2,949 people were on death row in state facilities in the United States. And 62 were on federal death row as of 16 March 2016, according to Death Penalty Information.

## Sustainable development

In 2006 the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a leading global environmental organisation, found that Cuba was the only country in the world to have achieved sustainable development. Jonathan Loh, one of the authors of the WWF report, said, 'Cuba has reached a good level of development according to United Nations' criteria, thanks to its high literacy level and a very high life expectancy, while the ecological footprint is not large since it is a country with low energy consumption.'

## Stop lecturing Cuba and lift the blockade

When Cuba and the US held talks about human rights a year ago, Pedro Luis Pedrosa, head of the Cuban delegation, said, 'We expressed our concerns regarding discrimination and racism patterns in US society, the worsening of police brutality, torture acts and extrajudicial executions in the fight on terror and the legal limbo of prisoners at the US prison camp in Guantanamo.'

The hypocrisy of the US government in lecturing Cuba about its human rights while denying many basic human rights to the American people is glaring. The United States should lift the blockade. Obama should close Guantanamo and return it to Cuba. ✝

**Source: Adelaide Voices**

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# STOP THE CHOP!



YOUR ABC IS  
BEING GUTTED

## Since the election of the Abbott/Turnbull government, the ABC has LOST:

- Almost \$500m in funding, and almost 500 jobs, including many senior staff
- The Australia Network (ABC Television broadcasts into Asia and Pacific) & 72 jobs
- Much of the reach and diversity of Radio Australia
- TV production facilities in Adelaide and Hobart (Brisbane and Perth had already gone)
- ABC Shops

## CUTBACKS have included:

- Televised sports broadcasts
- Classic FM Live Broadcasts (50%)
- Foreign Correspondent
- Regional news bulletins and state news rooms
- Regional radio (12 studios closed)
- Specialist programming units (50%)

## ALSO AXED

- State 7.30 Programs
- At the Movies
- RN Specialist Programs – Bush Telegraph
- Hindsight, Encounter Poetica
- First Bite
- Into the Music
- 360 Documentaries
- By Design
- The Media Report

Footnote: the Rudd Gillard Labor government increased ABC Funding by \$130m

Source: Update

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# FASCISM IS ABOUT THE MOST POWERFUL EPITHET ONE CAN USE

(PART OF AN ARTICLE IN THE MAGAZINE SLATE)

In an interview with *Slate*, the historian of fascism Robert Paxton warns against describing Donald Trump as fascist because 'it's almost the most powerful epithet you can use'. But in this case, the shoe fits. And here is why.

Like Mussolini, Trump rails against intruders (Mexicans) and enemies (Muslims), mocks those perceived as weak, encourages a violent reckoning with those his followers perceive as the enemy within (the roughing up of protesters at his rallies), flouts the rules of civil political discourse (the Megyn Kelly menstruation spat), and promises to restore the nation to its greatness not by a series of policies, but by the force of his own personality ('I will be great for' fill in the blank).

To quote Paxton again, this time from his seminal *The Anatomy of Fascism*: 'Fascist leaders made no secret of having no program.' This explains why Trump supporters are not bothered by his ideological malleability and policy contradictions: He was pro-choice before he was pro-life; donated to politicians while now he rails against that practice; married three times and now embraces evangelical Christianity; is the embodiment of capitalism and yet promises to crack down on free trade. In the words of the Italian writer Umberto Eco, fascism was 'a beehive of contradictions'. It bears noting that Mussolini was a socialist unioniser before becoming a fascist union buster, a journalist before cracking down on free press, a republican before becoming a monarchist.

Like Mussolini, Trump is dismissive of democratic institutions. He selfishly guards his image of a self-made outsider who will 'dismantle the establishment' in the words of one of his supporters. That this includes cracking down on a free press by toughening libel laws, engaging in the ethnic cleansing of 11 million people ('illegals'), stripping away citizenship of those seen as illegitimate members of the nation (children of the 'illegals'), and committing war crimes in the protection of the nation (killing the families of suspected terrorists) only enhances his stature among his supporters. The discrepancy between their love of America and these brutal and undemocratic methods does not bother them one iota. To borrow from Paxton again: 'Fascism was an affair of the gut more than of the brain'. For Trump and his supporters, the struggle against 'political correctness' in all its forms is more important than the fine print of the Constitution.

To be fair, there are many differences between Italian Fascism of interwar Europe and Trumpism of (soon to be) post-Obama America. For one, Mussolini was better read and more articulate than Trump. Starting out as a schoolteacher, the Italian Fascist read voraciously and was heavily influenced by the German and French philosophers

Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Marie Guyau, respectively. I doubt Trump would know who either of these two people were. According to the *Boston Globe*, Trump speaks at the level of a fourth grader.

There are other more consequential differences, of course: the interwar Italy was a much bigger mess than the USA is today; the democratic institutions of this country are certainly more resilient and durable than those of the young unstable post-World War I Italy; the economy, both US and worldwide, is not in the apocalyptic state it was in the interwar period; and the demographics of the USA mitigate against the election of a racist demagogue. So, Trump's blackshirts are not marching on Washington, yet.

Also, as a historian I have learned to beware of historical analogies and generally eschew them whenever I can, particularly when it comes to an ideology that during World War II caused the deaths of 60 million human beings. The oversaturation of our discourse with Hitler comparisons is not only exasperating for any historian, but is offensive to the memory of Hitler's many victims most notably the six million Jews his regime murdered in cold blood.

Finally, rather than explaining it, historical analogies often distort the present, sometimes with devastating consequences. The example that comes to mind is the Saddam-Hitler analogy many in the George W Bush administration used to justify the US invasion of Iraq, which was an unmitigated disaster. The overuse, or misuse, of a historical analogy can also make policy makers more hesitant to act with equally disastrous consequences: the prime examples are Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s when the West attributed their inaction to stop the slaughter in each country by arguing that these massacres were 'not like the Holocaust'.

Thus, for a historical analogy to be useful to us, it has to advance our understanding of the present. And the Trumpism-Fascism axis (pun intended) does this in three ways: it explains the origins of Trump the demagogue; it enables us to read the Trump rally as a phenomenon in its own right; and it allows those of us who are unequivocally opposed to hate, bigotry, and intolerance, to rally around an alternative, equally historical, program: antifascism.

Author: **Fedja Buric**, historian

Read the whole article: **Trump's not Hitler, he's Mussolini: How GOP antiintellectualism created a modern fascist movement in America**

[http://www.salon.com/2016/03/11/trumps\\_not\\_hitler\\_hes\\_mussolini\\_how\\_gop\\_anti\\_intellectualism\\_created\\_a\\_modern\\_fascist\\_movement\\_in\\_america/](http://www.salon.com/2016/03/11/trumps_not_hitler_hes_mussolini_how_gop_anti_intellectualism_created_a_modern_fascist_movement_in_america/)

Source: Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship April 2016

A TALK GIVEN AT THE MELBOURNE UNITARIAN CHURCH ON 17 APRIL 2016 BY  
**MICHAL SHAIK**, PROJECT WORKER, AUSTRALIA PALESTINE ADVOCACY NETWORK

# PALESTINE AFTER THE PEACE PROCESS – IS PEACE STILL POSSIBLE?

by **MICHAL SHAIK**



Before I start I'd just like to thank you for inviting me to speak today and acknowledge the very important work that the Unitarians do in helping raise public awareness of the Palestinians' struggle.

The last time I spoke on the subject of Palestine was in August 2014. At the talk I expressed the opinion that not only was there no prospect of peace for the foreseeable future, but that there was every reason to believe that things will continue to get worse.

**I also made the following predictions that:**

- the blockade on Gaza will remain and the situation there grow worse
- the settlements will continue to grow larger and the demolition of Palestinian houses in the West Bank will continue
- the Palestinians will grow more desperate and probably more violent
- Israel's response to such resistance will grow crueler
- to justify such violence, Israel's supporters will resort to ever wilder and more racist extravagances in denouncing the Palestinians.

Now if we just consider how each of these predictions has turned out, I think we can get a pretty good picture of not only where we are today, but where we're heading.

So, first to Gaza, which at the time I made the prediction was undergoing a punitive bombing campaign in which:

- 551 children were killed, more than 1,500 were orphaned and more than 3,400 injured (many are now living with life-long disabilities)
- 11,000 homes were destroyed and 160,000 damaged (of which only 3,000 have been rebuilt leaving 16,000 families displaced, mainly because Israel will not allow in the necessary building materials).

Last month the Palestinian water authority announced that 97% of Gaza's water is unfit to drink, mainly because demand on the Strip's aquifer is outrunning its capacity to recharge, Gaza's sewage and water treatment infrastructure has collapsed due to Israeli airstrikes and a lack of maintenance due to Israel's blockade. According to a UN report, unless urgent action is taken, the damage to Gaza's aquifer will become irreversible this year so that it will become unusable by 2020.

The second prediction I made was that the settlements would continue to grow and the demolition of Palestinian houses would continue. Today there are 580,000 Jewish settlers throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem. That's almost one tenth of Israel's Jewish population. Now, the explicit purpose of the settlement program since it began 49 years ago has been to make Israel's occupation irreversible by permanently changing the demography of the Occupied Territories. Last year Israel built 1,800 new settlement homes, 42 new industrial and agricultural structures and 63 public structures, such as synagogues and schools in the settlements. At the same time as it is building infrastructure for Jews, it is destroying Palestinian infrastructure. This month the United Nations reported that so far this year 804 Palestinians have been displaced by home demolitions.

The third prediction I made was that the Palestinians would grow more desperate and more violent, which I suppose was my least daring prediction. Historically speaking there has never been a colonial project that has not triggered a defensive reaction on the part of the indigenous population. In Palestine this reaction is called 'terrorism' and I suppose it has remained one of the salient facts of the conflict. Even today, when Hamas is scrupulously suppressing rocket fire from Gaza and the Palestinian Authority has been working with Israel to suppress militant activity in the West Bank for the past 12 years, we find Palestinian teenagers

undertaking suicidal attacks on their oppressors with household weapons such as scissors and kitchen knives.

The fourth prediction I made was that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians would get crueler. Now, in addressing this issue, it's easy to focus on the big atrocities such the bombing of hospitals and refugee centres in Gaza, the torture chambers, the assassinations and other spectacular crimes. But by focusing on these things it's easy to miss unspectacular routine acts of cruelty and humiliation inflicted upon Palestinians on a daily basis. To give you just one example, in January the Israeli NGO Physicians for Human Rights released a report on how a new set of restrictions has been placed on Palestinians leaving Gaza for medical treatment. Now, just to give you some context, the reason that they have to leave is because public health in Gaza is in a state of collapse. Most of the population, as I have already mentioned, have no access to unpolluted drinking water. Most of them also rely on food aid to survive and frequently this is inadequate to meet their minimal nutritional needs. Tens of thousands of people have just spent their second winter living in plastic tents or among the ruins of bombed buildings because Israel will not allow in the building materials needed to rebuild their destroyed homes. Hospitals in Gaza suffer from desperate shortages of equipment and medicines and many of their staff are undertrained because they cannot leave Gaza to upgrade their qualifications. This means that many people are forced to leave Gaza for treatment. One such patient was Rahma Zatma, a baby girl with a heart defect that

“Most of the population, as I have already mentioned, have no access to unpolluted drinking water. Most of them also rely on food aid to survive and frequently this is inadequate to meet their minimal nutritional needs.”

needed to be treated before she was six months old. Her mother managed to get her an appointment at Israel's Tel Hashomer hospital but in December Israel introduced a new set of regulations stipulating that, unless the escort is over the age of 55, they must undergo a stringent and time-consuming security check.

As Physicians for Human Rights noted, 'Given the delays involved in extra security checks, this move de facto limits escorts to people over 55.'

The report goes on to note: 'The 33-year-old mother was told to find another escort for her daughter, an unrealistic and even cruel request for a nursing mother.' Now, as a result of a campaign by Israeli human rights organisations, the mother was allowed through without a check but this represents just one case among thousands. And the reason I cited it is not because it is by any means the worst of the cruelties inflicted upon the Palestinians but because it represents the kind of bureaucratic indignity and routine oppression inflicted upon the Palestinians on a daily basis.

The final prediction I made was that Israel's supporters would resort to ever wilder and more racist extravagances in justifying its crimes. This month Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders broke an ancient taboo in US politics by condemning Israel for bombing 'hospitals, schools and refugee camps' in Gaza. Last week he did an interview with the *New York Daily News* in which he described Israel's 2014 assault on Gaza as 'indiscriminate' and said that 'a lot of innocent people were killed who should not have been killed'. In the storm that followed, Israel's supporters accused him of 'blood libel', 'quoting the lies of Hamas', being 'ideologically blind and dangerous', presenting 'a victory for terrorism' and 'being the worst kind of Jew' because he is a 'Jew that doesn't support other Jews'. Yet the most extravagant and plainly dishonest criticism of him came from Hillary Clinton who claimed that Sanders was wrong to claim that Israel had killed innocent civilians because Palestinians, and I quote, 'often pretend to have people in civilian garb, acting as though they are civilians, who are Hamas fighters'. That isn't a Donald Trump or Ted Cruz quote. That's a quote from the Democratic frontrunner to be the next president of the United States.



Yet the most extravagant and plainly dishonest criticism of him came from Hillary Clinton who claimed that Sanders was wrong to claim that Israel had killed innocent civilians because Palestinians, and I quote, 'often pretend to have people in civilian garb, acting as though they are civilians, who are Hamas fighters'.

As I said, the reason I am addressing these predictions of two years ago was to give an overview of the situation for the Palestinians right now. Not only are things materially worse for the Palestinians than they've ever been, but their plight is met with the callous indifference of mainstream politicians in the West.

I now want to turn from the immediate situation to where we are heading. In 2010 President Obama identified solving the Israel-Palestine conflict as a 'vital national security interest of the US'. In his address to the UN in September, for the first time since becoming president, he made no mention of the conflict.

His likely successor, Hillary Clinton, in an essay entitled 'How I would reaffirm unbreakable bond with Israel – and Benjamin Netanyahu' last November promised that in her first month in office she would invite Israel's prime minister to the White House. That doesn't mean that she doesn't support a peaceful settlement to the conflict, but, as she said in October, 'It is very difficult to figure out how either the Palestinians or the Israelis can put together a deal until they know what is going to happen in Syria, and until they

know if Jordan will remain stable'. In other words, yes she wants peace but ... not yet, not until the conflict in Syria has been resolved and the situation in the rest of the Middle East has been stabilised. Until then it will be her priority to improve the US-Israel relationship by:

- increasing aid to Israel
- dropping criticism of its human rights abuses
- bringing US foreign policy in closer alignment with Israel's interests
- shielding Israel from international criticism.

Next year, the Palestinians of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip will enter their fiftieth year under Israeli occupation. For half of that fifty years they have also been the victims of a succession of peace processes that began in 1991 following a successful US-sponsored United Nations resolution that overturned a 1975 resolution that stated that Zionism is a form of racism.

And I think this is a very important point to remember for those who, like the Unitarians, strive to seek the truth and serve humanity, because when the international community denies that a colonial ideology contingent on the displacement of an indigenous population is racist, when the word 'peace' is used to normalise a regime of occupation and apartheid, when the colonial power is granted an unlimited right to self-defence while the colonised population is called upon to renounce violence, and when those who criticise the dispossession and brutalisation of Palestinians are called extremists and anti-Semites, then this is inevitably the kind of peace that you get.

'Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth', said Jesus Christ in Matthew 10, 34. 'I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.'

The peace to which he referred was the Pax Romana – a peace that was founded upon militarism, empire, slavery and torture. This is the very peace that the Palestinians have consistently refused. Is a real peace still possible? I believe it is, but if recent experience, and not just in Palestine has taught us anything, it's that racism is a resilient evil that can only be beaten if it is confronted honestly and directly. The Palestinians recognise this and that is why they have called upon us to support them by boycotting and divesting from Israeli and international institutions and companies that support and profit from their oppression.

I would suggest that this is the least we should do, not because we feel sorry for the Palestinians or because such solidarity will in itself bring an end to their oppression, but because we need to recognise that the struggle for Palestine today is bigger than Palestine, just as the struggle for South Africa in the last century was bigger than South Africa. And that in fighting for their emancipation the Palestinians are fighting not just for themselves but they are at the very centre of a much larger global struggle between justice and racism.

Hillary Clinton, Malcolm Turnbull, Rupert Murdoch and his entourage of editors and ideologues all know exactly whose side they are on. If we are to truly seek the truth and serve humanity, if we are to help bring about a real peace based upon justice and universal human rights, we also need to be clear about whose side we are on. <sup>4</sup>/<sub>7</sub>

# ‘NO TO MINING, YES TO LIFE’... PALAYASIN ‘GO AWAY’

**A**s mining companies engage in human rights abuses, land grabs, environmental destruction, community upheaval, loss of traditional life, militarisation, pollution of vital ecosystems, and vilification and killing of human rights defenders and activists, in the Philippines the Tagalog word ‘palayasin’ (go away) rings out ... and is heard throughout Asia, Latin America, Europe, Oceania and Africa. Though companies claim they are responsible corporate citizens, the branding does not match the reality. Ecosystems and farmlands can never be restored to their original state.

Amidst much suffering to indigenous communities and local people, mining corporations, in amassing much wealth, wield economic and political power over governments, whilst being protected by international trade and financial institutions. But voices cry out, ‘**go away**’, ‘**no to mining, yes to life**’. In November 2014 civil society groups, social movements and indigenous people from Colombia, Uganda, the Philippines, Spain, Scotland, South Africa sent this clear message: ‘no to mining and yes to life’ and the need for solidarity in their struggle.

At the *2015 International Peoples’ Conference on Mining*, Manila, Philippines, we saw how the Philippines is a microcosm of how globalisation or neoliberal policies on mining lead to massive land grabbing, depletion of natural resources, environmental devastation, displacement of communities, intensified militarisation and human rights violations. Mining penetrates all parts of the planet with devastating results – threatening the integrity of ecosystems on our already fragile Earth, as well as agriculture, food production, soil fertility, fresh water systems, the air, and climate. **Yes healthy ecosystems! Yes healthy food! Yes water! Yes life!**

The extraction of minerals pollutes areas beyond the actual mining sites for years after closing operation. Stella Matutina, a Filipino Benedictine sister working with the Lumad (indigenous) people of Mindanao, says: ‘They take our wealth and leave us the rubbish’. Pope Francis referred to the ‘mess’ in our planet in his recent Encyclical *Laudato Si’*. Governments promote mining and provide incentives to corporations in the name of ‘the national interest’ and ‘economic growth’, whilst the harm and cost to ordinary peoples’ lives, communities and future generations of all species is barely recognised. **For governments it is ‘yes to mining, and no to life’ for their people.**

## Food

Despite popular belief, small farmers actually feed the world. But, their land, water, livelihoods and capacity to produce food are undermined for the extraction of minerals, metals and fossil fuels.

## Soil, water and air pollution

In the villages near Africa’s biggest copper mine, one can smell and taste the pollution. Excessive quantities of water are needed for all types of mining. Depletion of local water sources jeopardises a community’s ability to produce food and affects fish and wildlife populations, and thus community livelihoods and food security.

## Land grabbing and the impact on women

The thirst for increased profit leads to land grabs and the search for cheap and docile labour – and causes violence. This affects women disproportionately because they are responsible for household nutrition as mining activity denies them access to their land, water and food crops. They are also vulnerable to abuse from activities associated with mining e.g. road building, transportation and traders. Because of mining, family nutrition suffers because of escalating prices for staple foods. ‘Nearly half the Bangladeshi population is food insecure, and nearly one quarter is severely food insecure. Local production should be strengthened, not sacrificed for industrial projects.’ Vast open pits replace land from farming communities.

Countries in Asia, such as the Philippines, or Africa and Latin America that are resource-rich but economically poor have the same story: large-scale mining projects spoil the environment, plunder natural resources and cause untold human suffering.

## Livelihoods lost vs job creation

Though mining offers employment for a defined period, the impact on the landscape and community livelihoods lasts for centuries. In Romania, where 900 jobs would be created, the use of cyanide destroyed 20,000 jobs in agriculture, tourism and other services. In South Africa, coal production in one province led to the loss of livelihood for 11,000 people.

## Government involvement

It is governments that allow mining operations to continue despite numerous deaths through mine accidents. Turkish lawyers use ‘massacre’ to describe mining deaths but they are not accidents. They are foreseen as companies take out insurance to protect themselves. Despite numerous ‘accidents’ and other legal and environmental violations, companies are allowed to continue operations. South Africa saw similar violations as well as the killing of 34 and injuring of 78 others when fired upon in 2012 by security forces. In Papua New Guinea between 1984–2013 Australia’s BHP Billiton’s open-pit Ok Tedi Mine caused massive environmental degradation and pollution of rivers and adjacent ecosystems after discharging two billion tons of mine waste into the river. In West Papua, mining giants Rio Tinto and Freeport-McMoran have reportedly poured \$35 million into military infrastructure and vehicles and paid at least \$20 million to state security forces from 1998 to 2004 to quell opposition to its Grasberg Mine. Opposition to the mining operations of Freeport Macmoran, human rights violations and environmental

destruction in one of the planet's most biodiverse places has continued for decades in this most militarised area in Indonesia. Resistance to the land grabbing and plunder of Freeport Macmoran is interlinked with the struggle for national liberation. In China, coal miners seem most exploited. In 2013 there were 589 accidents and 1,049 deaths in its coal mining industry and 3,357 workers were killed in 2011–2012.

### Neoliberalisation of the mining industry

In the 1990s over 80 countries changed their mining regimes after lobbying by mining corporations and the dictates of international financial institutions (IFIs). Capital controls and regulations were lifted; generous tax breaks granted; and legislation to quell local opposition to mining activities implemented. The needs of each country gave way to the dictates of the international market and made it hostage to the changes of international trading. This liberalisation of the mining industry in the Philippines has led to economic deterioration. Instead of growth for the people, extraction of resources for export has resulted in environmental devastation and increased poverty and inequality. Eighty-two environmental activists were victims of extrajudicial killings from 2001–2015.

### Crisis

The global mining industry has recently faced an oversupply of mineral products, falling prices and profit decreases. To reduce production costs and increase profits, companies have demanded lower taxes and government royalty shares, more lax environmental laws and reduced wages, greater job insecurity and lower work safety standards for workers. They have even delayed projects or shut down mines to manipulate supply and increase prices.

### People's resistance and the anti-mining movement

Resistance to mining has taken the form of struggling for workers' rights, environmental protection, right to the land for indigenous people, assertion of the rights

and welfare of mining communities and human rights in general. People's movements for economic sovereignty, food security and development justice continually face up to the plunderers, despoilers and their powerful protectors on the international, national and local level. Despite increasing exploitation and more repressive action of the global mining industry, people's resistance continues to gather strength, particularly among indigenous peoples and among the peasantry and other rural poor communities.

In the Philippines, due to the strong resistance of affected communities to protect their lands and the surrounding environment, the 4th biggest global mining company has begun to withdraw from a long-delayed \$5.6 billion gold mining project. In El Salvador the government stopped granting gold mining permits since 2008 to preserve its water resources.

The Australian-Canadian owned mining company OceanaGold-Pacific Rim had its mining permit revoked. In 2009 it filed a lawsuit against the Salvadoran government seeking US\$301 million in damages. The government and people continue to stand firm against gold mining in their country. This case in El Salvador provides a preview as to what can be expected if controversial trade deals like the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) are passed.

There are so many more heroic struggles of indigenous peoples, peasants, mine workers, environmentalists, human rights advocates and church people in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. Their message is the same: mining companies cannot continue to plunder the common resources.

*Source: Disarming Times, The Journal of Pax Christi Australia, March 2016 (reprinted from Just World, the journal of the Edmund Rice Centre)*

### DID YOU KNOW ...

The limited disclosures contained within the 'Panama Papers' have revealed the real source of the crisis facing the NHS by exposing how the UK financial elite stash their wealth in offshore tax havens. Based on the figures from the government in 2011–2012, it is estimated that the unpaid tax bill by corporations and businesses in the UK amounted to £35 billion. This equates to the lion's share of the cuts to the NHS budget made from 2010 to 2020.

### VALE GWEN GOEDECKE

It is with deep sadness that we report the death of long-time peace activist and Unitarian Church member, Gwen Goedecke.

Gwen, very early in her life, clearly recognised that capitalism could never provide for the needs of the people. And she devoted her life to building a new and more just society.

She firmly rejected aggressive wars and was a staunch supporter of the Australian peace movement and progressive causes in all areas of struggle. She was a fearless fighter for social justice. We are proud to note her long membership of the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church. Her contribution to all of these causes will long be remembered.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

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

# from our readers



## **New Aussie subs**

Champagne corks popped up in Adelaide and Paris on 26 April 2016 when Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull proudly gave the green light to French shipbuilders Direction des Constructions Navales (DCN) and the Australian Submarine Corporation to construct in Australia 12 ultra modern French-designed diesel electric 'Shortfin Barracuda' attack submarines for the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). Costs to the Australian taxpayer were estimated at \$50 billion, or a staggering 4.2 billion per unit inclusive of life-long maintenance. Other payments could be for US-supplied integrated combat systems and weapons (torpedoes, missiles, mines). Large funds might also be needed for building bomb-proof pens to protect these costly subs, and their maintenance facilities, from missile or air attacks. By far the largest ever Australian defence commitment, the project will generate 2800 local jobs and a claimed 4000 in France, but sadly will earn us no export dollars!

The submarine model chosen is a derivative of the nuclear-driven Barracuda-class whose prototype is scheduled to be launched for the French navy next year – after 10 years of construction by DCN. Thus our new subs are currently only design concepts on paper. A prototype is expected to be ready for RAN testing and evaluation by the mid-2020s. Our subs will be 90 m long, have more than 4000 tonnes underwater displacement and crews of about 60. Stealth properties seem formidable, extremely low noise levels are claimed and the combat range is said to exceed RAN specifications. But, with likely top speeds of 46 km/hour (25 knots) when submerged, and half that surfaced, our subs will be greatly outpaced by anti-submarine-warfare (ASW) surface vessels of approximately similar tonnage.

Construction rates of one submarine every 2 years are expected. Barring unforeseen technical or supply problems, our flotilla of 12 might be operational only after the late 2040s. By then this flotilla is likely to be obsolete, given the rapid advances in military drone, satellite and missile technologies. Moreover, recruiting and retaining sufficient experienced personnel to operate the subs could be problematic. Australian sailors have traditionally been reluctant to serve on such vessels to avoid being 'imprisoned' days on end at great depths within unhealthy, smelly and extremely claustrophobic closed tubes of solid steel – a prospect conducive to PTSD or even insanity after prolonged exposure.

Over the past 100 years, Australian submarines have carried out various clandestine surveillance missions in foreign-controlled waters, but have never sunk any enemy ships. This ineffective performance begs the question why the Australian Government now deems submarines to be of greatest strategic importance for the nation's defence. A senior military officer, quizzed on TV recently about the need for submarines, replied 'because they sink ships, period!' Nevertheless, replacing our flotilla of six unreliable and obsolete 16-year-old Collins-class subs with 12 untried French-designs, at a cost exceeding 50 billion, is worrying, if not irresponsible, particularly in view of the relatively

peaceful region in which we live and the Government's worsening budget deficits.

Most of our neighbours have no ambitions to operate large navies. To our credit, we have established a close strategic partnership with Japan – an Asian industrial giant which only 70 years ago was our most dangerous enemy. Such a trustworthy and friendly relationship should also be forged with China – our largest trading partner and acknowledged emerging superpower in Asia. Unfortunately, Japan and China mistrust each other and, regrettably, are investing heavily in naval power, including submarines. If our defence gurus are fearful of unfriendly subs attacking our shores, then improving our ASW capabilities, available at lower costs than building six additional subs, would seem wiser.

Unquestionably, Australia, Japan and China would benefit greatly if our three navies could, by authority of a treaty, collaborate in keeping all south-east Asian shipping lanes open and free from problems such as political brinkmanship, piracy, cross-border drug trafficking and people smuggling. This would enable the dubious Franco-Australian submarine project to be downsized by 50%. The billions saved could be used for urgent civil construction and manufacturing projects benefiting all Australians, or for budget repair. Prime Minister, take the reins and lead us towards this goal!

**Fred Neumann, Vic**

## **Letter to the Editor**

Compared to the Hockey budget, the Morrison one is quite benign, on the surface. But in the context of an imminent election, let's not be fooled. This is a 'con the people into thinking we are on their side and when elected (after all, we were born to rule) our real policies will come into effect'.

If the Australian people make the grave error of returning this government in July, we will then be confronted with the real face and policies of a government committed, indeed welded, to big business, a government that ignores white collar crime, corruption and tax avoidance on a massive scale while being totally focused on destroying the trade union movement and the wages and conditions of the mass of the people.

I hold no brief for Labor and I strongly disagree with its policies on a range of issues; however, when faced with the choice of either of the two major parties, given that the global economy is in dire straits and with the appalling prospect of a Trump-led USA with continuing wars, I say a decisive no to Malcolm Turnbull in July. I hope most Australians will also.

**Marion Harper, Vic**

## **Letter to the Editor**

It's a political choice. We are creating big problems for ourselves in the near future. We know people who are quite rich and they go for every health dollar they can lay their hands on. It's not nice to watch as oldies already get good medicine benefits. We have lost all sense of proportion. Thank you for your work.

**Pat O'Brien**

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

**Cuba guarantees rights**

**Stop the chop!**

**Fascism is about the most powerful epithet one can use**

**Palestine after the peace process – is peace still possible?**

**‘No to mining, yes to life’... Palayasin ‘Go away’**

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Peter Abrehart

Marion Harper

Donna Sensi

Julie Stafford

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## MELBOURNE UNITARIAN PEACE MEMORIAL CHURCH

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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