

# BEACON

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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY



**Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life in any true sense. Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron. - DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER**

EDITORIAL

There has never been a graver time in modern history for the world's people. The thrust for power, for new territories, for control of the world's valuable resources are once again at play, with corresponding cuts to essential social programs as our taxes are used for war and not for community need. We face a world catastrophe unless the people themselves take a stand in favour of peace, democracy, and an end to interference in the affairs of other sovereign states.

We all need to examine what is happening in Syria, Afghanistan, Africa, and what is being proposed in the South China Sea and North Korea, in order to reach a true analysis of history rather than the analysis being fostered in our media and foisted on us by the powers that be.

War is not in the interests of the mass of the people; indeed, wars are catastrophic for those that wage them, for the troops, and for those at the receiving end, the civilians. We must unite in our determination to replace war with negotiation, armaments with human resources and bring an end to a military industrial complex that rules our world for profit. We face a crucial choice. We can sit back and wait for Armageddon or we can unite and oppose it.

Our view: There is general agreement among many historians and progressive supporters of peace that the First World War was an economic war based on the greedy desire for a redistribution of world markets. And the result of this pursuit was that millions died for nothing. Indeed it would be difficult to argue otherwise. Little has changed. We invaded Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria after 9/11,

first on a false premise and then to export democracy, then to fight terrorism. Since that time terrorism has increased, religious sectarianism has flourished and peace is more distant than ever.

Can we deny the fact that those involved in 9/11 were mainly Saudi, a close ally of the United States, and can we deny the fact that these actions have resulted in the growth of terrorism, the slaughter of millions, the destruction of countries' infrastructure, and the biggest displacement of people since the Second World War? It is now proposed to increase forces in that theatre in a mindless pursuit of what? What is our aim? What is the plan? What is the conclusion?

Now the US, Australia and others surround China and North Korea with bases, heavy weaponry, conduct provocative war games around their borders, and express horror when these countries react. (It should be noted that during the US invasion of North Korea in the 1950s, the US dropped 635,000 tons of explosives and 33,000 tons of napalm on North Korea. General Curtis LeMay, then head of Strategic Air Command at the time, claimed that the US killed off 20% of the population.)

We invade other nations without UN endorsement, and for the flimsiest of reasons, slaughtering hundreds of thousands, mainly civilians, promote and encourage religious discord and all this in the name of 'democracy'. Whose democracy?

**We can't afford to be indifferent. We all have a responsibility to seek the truth. What is your view?** ✚



Australia is and has been for a long time in an employment crisis. According to the government's own figures, we have just under three million people looking for work and only 166,000 job vacancies to go around – 17 job seekers competing for each job vacancy.

However for a long time both sides of politics and the media have used every tool at their disposal to cover up this employment crisis.

The official narrative of both major parties is that the problem is not a lack of available jobs but the unwillingness or incapability of unemployed workers to accept these jobs. This outlook is used to justify not only the starvation rate of Newstart – which is \$380 per fortnight below the poverty line – but also the humiliating social security system and the punitive regime of pointless appointments and activities the unemployed are forced to attend.

Despite the overwhelming evidence contradicting the government's victim blaming narrative – first created by the Fraser government after both parties abandoned the full employment model in the late 1970s – no media or established political force has seriously challenged it.

Instead the endless array of attacks on the unemployed and pensioners continues, supported by a compliant media and political establishment. Australia's growing employment crisis is not just unreported – it is systematically concealed.

Considering that in Australia there are, according to the government's latest figures, 712,000 people and their families affected by unemployment – a phenomenon known to lead to increased rates of poverty, mental and physical illness, crime and social dislocation – it is a national shame that this government's official victim blaming narrative is not held up to greater scrutiny.

So who is really responsible for unemployment and why has this cancer been allowed to persist?

These are the questions nobody in the media wants to ask, and no one in the political establishment wants to be asked. I will explain how successive Australian governments have perpetuated the victim blaming approach in order to conceal Australia's growing employment crisis.

Firstly, I will show how successive governments have deliberately manipulated the unemployment data to hide the nature of the employment crisis and pave the way for the victim blaming approach.

Secondly, I will explain why governments all over the world regard high unemployment as not only acceptable, but desirable for the smooth functioning of the capitalist economy.

## SO WHAT IS UNEMPLOYMENT?

An important part of the government's campaign to cover up Australia's employment crisis is to redefine the concept of unemployment in order to prevent people looking for work to be counted as unemployed.

In Australia, the official rate of unemployment is 5.5% across the country. In other words, the government is prepared to acknowledge that there are 712,000 people who are without work – a figure that, in nominal terms, is more than triple the number of people who were unemployed during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

To arrive at the 712,000 figure, each month the ABS conducts a survey across a sample of Australian households. To be counted as unemployed in this survey, you must:

- not have worked or volunteered more than one hour per week
- have been actively looking for work in the previous four weeks
- be available to start work immediately.

This survey was created in the 1960s when full-time male breadwinners served as the basis of the labour market and Australia was in the middle of its full employment era in which unemployment did not exceed 2% for three decades between 1944 and 1974.

In today's radically different labour of under employment and hidden unemployment, this survey method presents a skewed picture of the reality of unemployment. And yet media and politicians still rely on the official unemployment rate to give an accurate picture of people looking for work. The other more revealing data sets produced by the ABS – such as underemployment, hidden unemployment and labour underutilisation – never get a mention.

While the media must accept a lot of the blame for failing to accurately report about the reality of unemployment, it must be acknowledged that since the 1970s successive governments have deliberately manipulated the figures in order to under report the number of people looking for work.

Alongside the ABS data, the government used to released figures of how many people were enrolled at the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) to look for work. As more people generally look for work than are counted under the ABS survey, this presented a more accurate measure of unemployment.

However after the abandonment of full employment in 1975, the government stopped releasing this CES data and decided to rely wholly on the ABS unemployment rate – a data set that could be easily manipulated. A closer look at the ABS data clearly shows this manipulation.

First let's take the example of the government's refusal to count anyone who volunteers one hour a week as unemployed.

As part of its own requirements for being on the dole, tens of thousands of unemployed people are required to volunteer. The government must think they are pretty clever – they have essentially created a system where for tens of thousands of people the only way to receive unemployment benefits is to actually rule yourself out as being counted as unemployed. It comes as no surprise that in its recent budget the government drastically increased the requirements of Australians to volunteer.

According to the latest data about volunteering released in 2010, 1.22 million unemployed people participated in a volunteer activity.

That's 1.22 million that the government have deliberately tried to sweep under the carpet in order to conceal the true nature of the employment crisis.

Adding to this statistical sleight of hand is the government's refusal to count anyone as unemployment who works just one hour a week.

Currently, there are 1.1 million Australians who are considered underemployed – they are working but they are looking for more.

As a result of the way the government counts statistics, these people – many of whom rely on Newstart to survive due to lack of work – will never be counted as unemployed.

Refusing to count underemployed people as unemployed is very convenient for the Turnbull government, not just because it conceals the true nature of our employment crisis but also because it has allowed the Coalition to get away with presiding over the collapse of the full-time labour market.

More than three-quarters of the 650,000 jobs created since the Coalition took power in 2013 have been part-time jobs – the biggest increase in part-time employment since statistics began. As a result of this explosion in underemployment, the average hours worked per adult per month has actually decreased.



**AS A RESULT OF THE WAY THE GOVERNMENT COUNTS STATISTICS, THESE PEOPLE – MANY OF WHOM RELY ON NEWSTART TO SURVIVE DUE TO LACK OF WORK – WILL NEVER BE COUNTED AS UNEMPLOYED.**

And yet because of the way unemployment statistics are counted in this country, the Coalition has boasted that they have created more than half-a-million jobs!

So on top of the 1.22 million unemployed volunteers the government refuses to count, there is a further 1.1 million underemployed people condemned to the ranks of the hidden unemployed – a total of 2.3 million work-ready Australians.

Finally, there is the requirement that someone look for work over the previous four-week period in order to be counted as unemployed.

In 2015 the then Abbott government tendered out three new employment services contracts to private companies to help people look for work – at a cost of \$10 billion over 6 years.

However, rather than help unemployed people look for work, the Coalition's \$10 billion privatised employment services industry was a thinly veiled attempt to punish unemployed people.

As part of this system, unemployed people are forced to attend a range of largely pointless activities, appointments and training (such as the dangerous Work for the Dole program) run by an increasingly corrupt and unregulated industry which actually gives agencies perverse financial incentives to penalise the unemployed.

As a result, in 2015, job agencies and Centrelink imposed a record 2 million penalties on unemployed workers – ten times higher than the 2011 figure. Most of the work of the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union is helping unemployed workers negotiate this cruel and punitive system.

This system has proved very successful at pushing people off the dole and the unemployment statistics.

By making collecting the dole as humiliating and difficult as possible, the government has succeeded in not only pushing unemployed people into the arms of dodgy employers who offer illegal rates of pay and conditions – thus making them part of the growing army of underemployed – but also forcing people to give up looking for work altogether because they are so demoralised.

This group of people – known as discouraged job seekers – has skyrocketed in recent years and is now a staggering one million people.

That's one million people who are looking for work but have been refused.

When you add all these people looking for work that the government refuses to count – the hidden unemployed – with the official unemployment figure of 711,000, there are around three million people looking for jobs.

These people are competing for 166,000 job vacancies – a figure that is itself a gross over estimate – which means that overall there are at least 17 job seekers competing for each job vacancy.

As long as the Coalition are allowed to hide behind the lie that there are only 712,000 unemployed people looking for work, they will continue to get away with presenting unemployment as an individual issue.

Once it is common knowledge that there are in fact 3 million people unemployed – a figure that represents more than 20% of the workforce – then the government will no longer be able to sweep the suffering of so many people under the rug.

It is up to us to remind politicians and the general public about the reality of being unemployed today, and argue that it is their responsibility – nobody else's – to address this crisis.

## **WHY HAVE SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS ALLOWED THE EMPLOYMENT CRISIS TO EXIST IN THE FIRST PLACE?**

When you dig beneath the government's official narrative ideology that blames unemployed people for their own unemployment, it is clear that both sides of politics regard this high number of unemployed as acceptable – even desirable for the smooth functioning of our economy. According to the dominant economic ideology, an unemployment rate between 4 to 6% is considered the 'natural rate' of unemployment as it prevents increasing inflation.

Going by this definition, Australia is currently in a period of full employment! This fiction has become so pervasive that even the Reserve Bank of Australia maintains it is committed to maintaining full employment in this economy.



**ONCE IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE ARE IN FACT 3 MILLION PEOPLE UNEMPLOYED – A FIGURE THAT REPRESENTS MORE THAN 20% OF THE WORKFORCE – THEN THE GOVERNMENT WILL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO SWEEP THE SUFFERING OF SO MANY PEOPLE UNDER THE RUG.**

In contrast to what we hear from the media and politicians, there is no doubt that Australia's high unemployment economy is the result of deliberate government policy.

So what does maintaining an impoverished pool of more than three million people looking for work accomplish?

The simple answer is that a society with high unemployment – particularly when those unemployed people are condemned to a life of poverty and treated like second-class citizens – is a society where employers have the upper hand.

It is a society where employers can threaten disobedient workers with the horrors of unemployment.

It is a society where employed workers can be bullied into accepting real wage decreases and declining conditions of work.

There is nothing new about this technique.

Going back as far as the 19th century, Karl Marx wrote that unemployment is:

*a level of capitalist accumulation – a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual increase of population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expansion of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation by capital in the interests of capital's own changing valorization requirements.*

It is not only socialists like Marx who acknowledge that free market capitalist economies need unemployment to survive.

In 1943 the conservative English newspaper *The Times* agreed.

According to *The Times*:

*Unemployment is not a mere accidental blemish in a private enterprise economy. On the contrary, it is part of the essential mechanism of the system, and has a definite function to fulfil. The first function of unemployment (which has always existed in open or disguised form) is that it maintains the authority of master over man. The master has normally been in a position to say: 'If you do not want the job, there are plenty of others who do'. When the man can say: 'If you do not want to employ me, there are plenty of others who will,' the situation is radically altered.'*  
(Korpi 2002: 6)

High unemployment exists in every capitalist economy in the world.

Unemployment is not just an issue affecting people without work – it affects all of us. It is the central battleground in the ongoing struggle between capital and labour.

For too long unemployment has been considered a side issue – it's time we made fighting for the rights and dignity of unemployed workers and pensioners a priority.

To join this struggle I encourage you to join the AUWU and get involved in the day-to-day tasks of running a national unemployment union. It's challenging but highly rewarding work. Membership is free and open to everyone. Once you sign up on our website you will receive all the updates about the work we are doing.

In Melbourne we meet every second Friday of the month at Trades Hall and every Tuesday of the week to discuss ongoing campaigns. You are all welcome to join us.

Some of our recent campaigns include Justice For Josh in which we are demanding the government properly investigate the death of teenager Josh Park-Fing at his Work for the Dole site last year.

Another current campaign is our Dignity Not Debt and Dignity Not Drug Test movements in which we are demanding Centrelink be overhauled to respect the rights and dignity of the unemployed and pensioners. As part of this campaign, the union recently rallied outside a Centrelink in Morwell and were threatened with arrest by more than 10 cops.

We are also just about to kick off a campaign in which we will give unemployed workers a platform to talk about their experiences at job agencies and encourage them to get informed about their rights by looking at our unemployed workers rights booklet and calling our 5-day-a-week national hotline.

This year we are also involved in our first campaign pressuring government to create more jobs. Known as the Right2Work coalition, we will be trying to start a broad movement of all groups that have a stake in job creation – particularly trade unions and progressive organisations – to come together under a common banner demanding the government grant every citizen a Right2Work.

**We will be launching this movement in Melbourne on Friday 21 July at the NTEU buildings, with a great array of speakers including Jim Stanford from the Australia Institute, John Falzon from St Vincent De Paul and economist Steve Keen.**

I would encourage all people passionate about pushing back against the forces of big business to join our struggle. Look forward to seeing you there. ✚

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.

Australians are the world champions when it comes to gambling, but that's not something to skite about – it's a bit like being the world champions at smoking, or at traffic accidents.

We spend more per person on gambling than any other country in the world. We have one third of one per cent of the world's population, but 20 per cent of the world's poker machines. We lose more money gambling than from alcohol, or tobacco, or spend on illegal drugs.

Poker machines are the lion's share of the problem, taking around \$10 billion per annum, which is 60 per cent of total gambling losses.

People with a gambling problem are 4 times more likely to have a problem with alcohol, and 6 times more likely to be divorced. Considerable evidence is now emerging about a link between gambling and family violence. One Victorian study of police-recorded family violence and electronic gaming machine (EGM) accessibility found that postcodes with no electronic gaming machines had 20% fewer family violence incidents and 30% fewer family violence assaults, when compared with postcodes with 75 EGMs per 10,000 people. Hayden Brown from the City of Greater Dandenong has done work showing a strong positive correlation between financial losses per adult and police call-out rates for the northern metropolitan region in the 2015–2016 financial year.

This builds on previous research that shows that family violence is three times more likely to occur in families where there is problem gambling than in families in which there are no gambling problems. Over half of people with gambling problems report perpetrating physical violence against their children. While the way in which problems such as disadvantage, gambling, alcohol, etc., interact with family violence is complex, no doubt, it is not unreasonable to conclude from this work that reducing the financial harm done by gambling would reduce family violence in a tangible and genuinely useful way.

And while the industry likes to paint the gambler as the problem, electronic poker machines are designed by experts to mislead users into thinking they have a better chance of a win than they do. Machines are programmed to show users a 'near miss' up to 12 times more frequently than would occur by chance.

So this is one of those areas where clearly a fence at the top of the cliff is a lot better than an ambulance at the bottom. And when it comes to building that fence at the top of the cliff, that's where the Alliance for Gambling Reform, which I started working for in January, comes in. In the two years we've been going, we've brought together 66 organisations, including many Victorian councils, to advocate for poker machine reform.

Our work includes supporting councils with communication activities including local media, billboards, social media and a resident's action kit. With the financial backing of some generous private philanthropy and a number of councils, the alliance is building a powerful base of supporters at the grassroots level. We are a national alliance but we have a heavy focus on Victoria, and local government is very much at our core. Our board includes Tim Costello, Monash councillor Geoff Lake and Mark Zirnsak from the Uniting Church. It has generated a lot of national and local media concerning the need for gambling reform. We are supporting Maurice Blackburn in its public litigation action to hold the poker machine industry to account for the way that poker machines are designed to mislead and deceive.

## **We have realistic and achievable objectives. We know that we are not going to run poker machines out of town, but we can and intend to reduce the harm from poker machine gambling. We are campaigning for:**

**Machine re-design** – the elimination of machine design features that increase the likelihood of addiction, such as losses disguised as wins and near misses.

**\$1 maximum bets** – the Productivity Commission recommended this as a speed limit on losses that would contain them to \$120 per hour. We are encouraged that Coles, a significant owner of machines through hotels has signed up for this, and we are pushing other pub and club owners to do likewise.

**More community say** – changes to the licencing regulations for poker machines that enable communities to have more say over the location of machines in their community. At present 90% of the applications for machines in Victoria are approved by the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation, and when local Councils object, over 80% still go through, so scant regard is being paid to local community views. This needs to change.

**Community benefit** – at present clubs are being taxed less than hotels on the basis that they spend the money saved on community benefits. This is poorly policed and regularly rorted, with clubs claiming things like laundry expenses or advertising and promotion as a community benefit. The clubs should be taxed at the same rate as hotels, and the state government should use the extra money, perhaps in partnership with local government, to establish sporting, passive recreational and cultural facilities that provide less risky entertainment than gambling. Some gambling clubs claim that gambling revenue is essential to sustain sporting and other club endeavours. If this claim were true, Perth, which has no poker machines outside the Casino, would be a sporting backwater. But this year the Perth Scorchers won the Big Bash, again, and the Perth Wildcats won the National Basketball League, again. Studies of Perth community life suggest it is quite rich and vibrant.

Although most of the gambling harm is caused by poker machines, and therefore that is where much of our focus is, we are aware of the flowering of gambling advertising on TV in recent years and the way in which this is normalising gambling, particularly around sport, and particularly for children and young adults. The present TV Code forbids gambling advertising during children's likely viewing hours, presumably to protect children. But it has an exception for sports programs, news and current affairs, which is a loophole you could drive a truck through, and you will be familiar with the tsunami of gambling advertising there is during daylight hours. This loophole should be closed.

*I hope you will encourage your respective councils to become involved in the work of the Alliance for Gambling Reform. And should you wish to become personally involved, you can contact me at my email address of kelvin@agr.org.au.*

# **A UNITARIAN DOXOLOGY**

Our philosophy consists of those actions, purposes and experiences that are humanly significant.

Nothing human is alien to a unitarian. It includes labour, art, science, philosophy, love, friendship – all that is in its degree expressive of intelligently satisfying human living.

We seek the fulfilment of life in the here and now – this is the explanation of our social passion.

We do not deny the possibility of realities as yet undiscovered, but rather we insist that the way to determine the existence and value of any and all realities is by means of intelligent inquiry and by the assessment of their relevance to human needs.

Our religious emotions are therefore expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social wellbeing.



*The politics of exclusion proceeds apace. Just recently we were informed that Australian citizenship would become harder to acquire: 'The new measures would see migrants face a tougher citizenship test which will assess their commitment to Australia and their attitudes to religious freedom and gender equality' [ABC News 2017-04-21].*

Not only 'values' will be emphasised; there will be a much tighter English language requirement. Immigration minister Peter Dutton made it clear that a 'significant change' would be made. Henceforth an English proficiency equivalent to IELTS Level 6 would be needed.

As Henry Sherrell, Research Officer in the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University commented: 'This is not just a significant change; it is a fundamental break' [27 April 2017 Inside Story].

He reported that in 2015, ACIL Allen Consulting evaluated the Adult Migrant English Program, or AMEP. Its report is the most up-to-date assessment of the English literacy of recent migrants. Just 7 per cent of clients exit at ISLPR 2 (social proficiency, the equivalent of IELTS 4.5) after receiving 500 hours. Of the AMEP attendees who completed 500 hours of training between 2004 and 2012, **0 per cent of new migrants reached the level required for the new citizenship test.**

The implications of this are clear. Sherrell writes: 'But the practical effects of imposing this standard are immense. It amounts to the deliberate exclusion of thousands of new migrants from Australian citizenship. Back in 2015, on the same topic, I wrote: 'The worst outcome is permanent exclusion from society because barriers to entry are too high. An English language test for citizenship would be such a barrier. This exclusion would occur despite an indefinite right to remain in Australia. A tiered, broken system of residency with little long-term hope.'

Thus we are witnessing the LNP in the process of establishing an underclass of people who will be denied citizenship, which will grow year after year in the

Australian population. This underclass will be denied the right to take part in the full political life of the nation. It will be the death of an inclusive democracy.

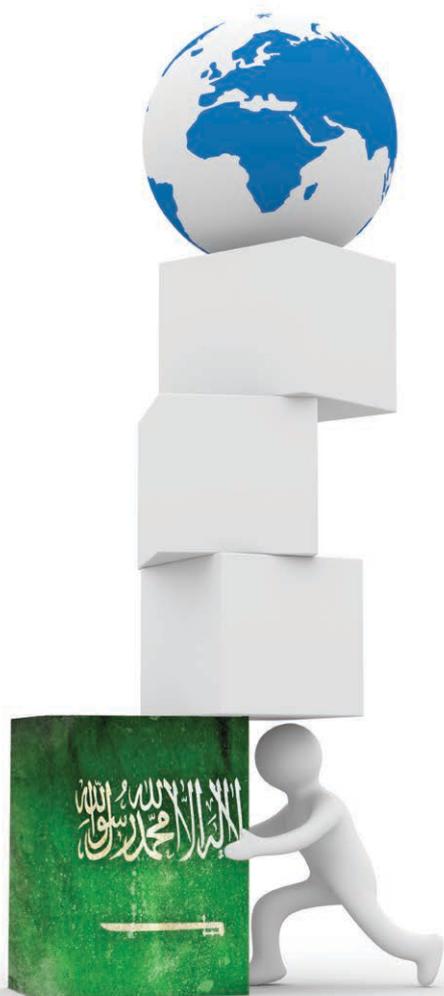
## A NON-CITIZEN UNDERCLASS

That is not a new situation for this country. First there was the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act, enforced by a dictation test which did not openly proclaim racial superiority in order not to offend non-British subjects of the empire and the Japanese ally. Then came the 1903 Naturalization Act which provided that applicants for naturalisation could not be natives of Asia, Africa or the Pacific Islands (except for New Zealand).

Men who had worked in Australia for over a decade would never be acceptable as citizens. One case study is that of Jan Mahomet, a 35-year-old Afghan storekeeper and camel-driver, who had worked in South Australia for nearly four years, Coolgardie for over a year, and then in Murchison, near Geraldton WA, for eleven years. He received his rejection of naturalisation from the Department of External Affairs in Melbourne in October 1906, about three weeks after submitting his papers. The only sign in the archives of his response is a curt telegram to the Department on 25 October asking for the return of all his papers. He was not European, not white enough. Such non-acceptable residents were excluded from the age pension and other social welfare benefits which were gradually introduced over time.

There is a discernible trend in Australian government policy towards exclusion of refugees and non-English speaking immigrants from national life. This is a break with the non-discriminatory immigration policies that have dominated since the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, continued by the Fraser government of 1975.

Our country has commenced a decline into what could well be a very unpleasant, undemocratic and culturally exclusive future, at the same time as we seem to be permitting the intrusion of foreign-sponsored political corruption into national life. †



# Saudi Arabia is destabilizing the world

hijackers were Saudis, and that, as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote in a diplomatic cable eight years ago, 'Donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide.'

Recent events in Indonesia shine a light on a Saudi project that is even more pernicious than financing terrorists. Saudi Arabia has used its wealth, much of which comes from the United States, to turn entire nations into hotbeds of radical Islam. By refusing to protest or even officially acknowledge this far-reaching project, we finance our own assassins – and global terror.

The centre of Saudi Arabia's campaign to convert Indonesians to Wahhabi Islam is a tuition-free university in Jakarta known by the acronym LIPIA. All instruction is in Arabic, given mainly by preachers from Saudi Arabia and nearby countries. Genders are kept apart; strict dress codes are enforced; and music, television, and 'loud laughter' are forbidden. Students learn an ultra-conservative form of Islam that favours hand amputation for thieves, stoning for adulterers, and death for gays and blasphemers.

Many of the students come from the more than 100 boarding schools Saudi Arabia supports in Indonesia, or have attended one of the 150 mosques that Saudis have built there. The most promising are given scholarships to study in Saudi Arabia, from which they return fully prepared to wreak social, political, and religious havoc in their homeland. Some promote terror groups like Hamas Indonesia and the Islamic Defenders Front, which did not exist before the Saudis arrived.

Eager to press his advantage, King Salman of Saudi Arabia made a nine-day trip to Indonesia in March, accompanied by an entourage of 1,500. The Saudis agreed to allow more than 200,000 Indonesians to make the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca each year – more than come from any other country – and sought permission to open new branches of their LIPIA university. Some Indonesians are pushing back against the Saudi assault on their traditional values, but it is difficult to deny permission for new religious schools when the state is not able to provide decent secular alternatives. In Indonesia, as in other countries where the Saudis are actively promoting Wahhabism – including Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bosnia – the weakness and corruption of central governments create pools of rootless unemployed who are easily seduced by the promises of free food and a place in God's army.

'Information Clearing House' – Just a few months ago, the governor of Indonesia's largest city, Jakarta, seemed headed for easy re-election despite the fact that he is a Christian in a mostly Muslim country. Suddenly everything went violently wrong. Using the pretext of an offhand remark the governor made about the Koran, masses of enraged Muslims took to the streets to denounce him. In short order he lost the election, was arrested, charged with blasphemy, and sentenced to two years in prison.

This episode is especially alarming because Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, has long been one of its most tolerant. Indonesian Islam, like most belief systems on that vast archipelago, is syncretic, gentle, and open-minded. The stunning fall of Jakarta's governor reflects the opposite: intolerance, sectarian hatred, and contempt for democracy. Fundamentalism is surging in Indonesia. This did not happen naturally.

Saudi Arabia has been working for decades to pull Indonesia away from moderate Islam and toward the austere Wahhabi form that is state religion in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis' campaign has been patient, multi-faceted, and lavishly financed. It mirrors others they have waged in Muslim countries across Asia and Africa.

Successive American presidents have assured us that Saudi Arabia is our friend and wishes us well. Yet we know that Osama bin Laden and most of his 9/11

The surging fundamentalism that is transforming Indonesia teaches several lessons. First is one that we should already have learned, about the nature of the Saudi government. It is an absolute monarchy supported by one of the world's most reactionary religious sects. It gives clerics large sums to promote their anti-Western, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic brand of religious militancy abroad. In exchange, the clerics refrain from criticizing the Saudi monarchy or its thousands of high-living princes. Saudis with close ties to the ruling family give crucial support to groups like Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and ISIS. This fact should be at the front of our minds whenever we consider our policy toward the Middle East – including when we decide whether to side with the Saudis in their new dispute with neighboring Qatar.

Saudi Arabia's success in reshaping Indonesia shows the importance of the global battle over ideas. Many in Washington consider spending for cultural and other 'soft power' projects to be wasteful. The Saudis feel differently. They pour money and resources into promoting their worldview. We should do the same.

The third lesson that today's Indonesia teaches is about the vulnerability of democracy. In 1998 Indonesia's repressive military dictatorship gave way to a new system, based on free elections that promised civil and

political rights for all. Radical preachers who would previously have been imprisoned for whipping up religious hatred found themselves free to spread their poison. Democracy enables them to forge giant mobs that demand death for apostates. Their political parties campaign in democratic elections for the right to come to power and crush democracy. This is a sobering reality for those who believe that one political system is best for all countries under all circumstances.

The Saudi campaign to radicalize global Islam also shows that earth-shaking events often happen slowly and quietly. The press, focused intently on reporting today's news, often misses deeper and more important stories. Historians of journalism sometimes point to the northward 'great migration' of African-Americans after World War II as an epochal story that few journalists noticed because it was a slow process rather than a one-day news event.

The same is true of Saudi Arabia's long campaign to pull the world's 1.8 billion Muslims back to the 7th century. We barely notice it, but every day, from Mumbai to Manchester, we feel its effects.

*Stephen Kinzer is a senior fellow at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University.*

*This article was first published by The Boston Globe.*

## from our readers

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### DEAR EDITOR

I enclosed thirty dollars, comprising a ten-dollar concession subscription for my friend Owen, and a twenty-dollar donation.

I really enjoy reading *The Beacon* each month and was particularly glad to hear some views of Pope Francis in the February issue. It is good to hear his sane views in the light of the presence of world leaders like Donald Trump.

Keep up the good work.

Yours faithfully

**RA Findlay**

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### DEAR EDITOR

Please find enclosed a cheque for \$20, \$10 being for my outstanding subscription due in April 2017. The other \$10 is for a subscription for one year for my pensioner friend Barbara of Doncaster.

I appreciate the many insightful articles in *The Beacon* and wish you and the Editorial Board continued success in the future.

Kind regards

**L Dalrymple**

## DEAR EDITOR

Many thanks for a great publication! Find enclosed a cheque for \$20 to cover subscription to *The Beacon* for another year.

Best

**Pia Pagotto**

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## DEAR EDITOR

Many Filipinos in Victoria have been disappointed and outraged by President Duterte's decision to impose martial law in Mindanao.

While alleged attacks by the ISIS-supporting Abu Sayyaf and Maute Group are affecting a small part of Mindanao, we know that martial law will not solve the root causes of terrorism or the armed conflict in the region.

Only the United States and its supporters stand to gain from martial rule. For the United States, martial law means securing the Philippines as a neo-colony and gives the necessary justification for establishing military bases and unhampered movement throughout the archipelago. Yesterday a US P3 Orion surveillance aircraft was seen flying over Marawi City. This is a violation of Philippine sovereignty. For big business and oligarchs, martial law secures their investments and the colonial trade. For big landlords, it is the protection and preservation of their landholdings.

This will only fuel the armed insurgencies in the country by threatening the rights of activists and other citizens engaged in normally legal activities. It is important to note that even with sixty per cent of the armed forces being located in Mindanao, none of the issues of poverty and injustice have been solved.

It is instead simply a repeat of the 14 years of martial law under Marcos that only worsened the situation of joblessness, unrest and poverty in the country. Much worse, corruption flourished and many Filipinos suffered gross human rights violations and injustices.

Instead of these false solutions we demand the continuation of peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). We demand that the social and economic reforms being proposed by the NDFP be taken seriously by the government as a means to address poverty and injustice in the country.

We ask for your support in opposing the restoration of martial law in part or the whole of the Philippines and the suppression of civil liberties.

We ask your readers to support our call for President Duterte to lift the martial law in Mindanao by raising the issue with your local MPs and asking them to call for Australia to stop its military support to the Philippines.

We also ask your church and your readers to write letters to the President of the Philippines and to the Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights in the Philippines.

The addresses are stated below.

We thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely yours

**May Kotsakis**

Convenor, Philippine Caucus for Peace

### Addresses & contact details:

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Peter Abrehart

Marion Harper

Donna Sensi

Julie Stafford

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