



SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

the Beacon

Journal of the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church

March 2019 • Price \$2



What is happening to Australia, the country that was once the nation of a fair go, of human rights and the dignity of mankind? Where did we start to go so wrong, to marginalise ethnic, sexual and religious groups, to trash our environment, to wage wars without cause, to punish the poor and those seeking sanctuary on our shores?

What is happening to Australia when it slavishly follows a country like the USA, led by a philistine president and with a government of the wealthy and for the wealthy? Why do we follow this country into adventurist wars, slaughtering innocent people, grabbing their natural resources and creating mayhem based on lies and secret activities? When did we agree to all of this? When did we passively lie down and accept what is happening in our name?

Our recent history is littered with shameful capitulation to imperialist attacks on the sovereignty of nations solely for profit and power. We were complicit in the Korean, Vietnamese, Libyan, Syrian and Afghan wars that have destroyed whole nations and slaughtered millions.

How do we justify the unjustifiable?

On the orders of the US we accept as allies monstrous regimes such as Saudi Arabia, a country where human rights don't exist, where women are treated as sub human and where journalists can be murdered with little outcry from our government.

Now we are once again to become complicit in the latest US war of illegal intervention on a sovereign nation, Venezuela, not in order to bring 'democracy' and free elections as is claimed because we know that democracy already exists there and free elections took place and were endorsed by international overview. No, this latest heinous policy is over oil and power.

So we are prepared to support a criminal administration in the United States to destroy an elected government thousands of miles away from our shores, in a country that has neither attacked nor threatened us.

Venezuela has the largest source of oil in the world – even more than the Middle East. It also has a government determined not to be ruled by US imperialism. It is a government committed to sharing the wealth of its nation with its entire people. This is unacceptable to the United States. Its nefarious plan for Venezuela is no different to its previous illegal forays across the world. The sham of 'providing aid' has already been exposed. Both the international Red Cross and the United Nations have warned of the risks of delivering 'humanitarian' aid as a pawn to Venezuela without the approval of the Venezuelan government and security forces loyal to President Nicolas Maduro.

The United States is a failed state that has become the laughing stock of the world under the Trump administration. Its treatment of African Americans and other minorities has been a source of shame for decades. The United States has rampant poverty. It is a country divided internally, shamed and loathed by decent people everywhere, a country that is preparing for another war, and will spend billions on such a war while many of their people lack decent housing and healthcare.

But take heart! Across the United States people are standing up and demanding 'hands off Venezuela'. Around the world, indignation at another example of US imperialist policies is growing, while governments interested only in oil and spheres of influence join the US in its war games. It is time for the Australian people to speak up. It is time for us to say to both the US imperialists and our own government ... 'Not this time!' 🕯

EDITORIAL



The League of Peoples' Struggles

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. I have been looking forward to our discussions. I have been a member of the Melbourne Unitarian Church for decades, and I know that whenever Melbourne Unitarians gather in numbers small or large, there is always a buzz, always a comfortable exchange of views, food for thought and always hope for the future of the world. This is because Unitarians look at what is going on around them, what is going on in Australia and what is going on around the world to try to make sense of what is happening in order to make a decision on what we should support and what we should oppose, what is good, what is bad, what is fair, what is humane and what is equitable and democratic.

What can we do about global warming? What can be done to defeat the rise of fascist forces, the ultra right wing drive to take us back to the dark ages of Nazism, to medievalism? What can be done about the relentless drive to war?

Melbourne Unitarians are concerned about these things and the need for us to act to make a better world, a new world, to prevent the forces of darkness from ruling it.

So, before the I talk about the League of Peoples' Struggles (ILPS), I want to indulge a little in what Melbourne Unitarians do when we meet, when we gather: we talk about the inequity, the growing wealth disparity in Australia and around the world.

OFAM'S latest report on this subject says:

'The top 1% of Australians own more wealth than the bottom 70% combined. There has been a record increase in the number of Australian billionaires, up from 33 to 43. They had a wealth increase last year of \$36 billion or \$100 million per day. This wealth increase alone is enough to fund about half the Federal Government health budget for 2018/19. This trend

has continued year after year and is getting more pronounced. Eight men now own the same wealth as the poorest half of the people of the globe. The wealth of the world's billionaires increased by 12% or almost 3.5 billion a day last year. At the same time the poorest half of humanity saw their wealth shrink by 11%.'

Is it any wonder that the handful of people controlling what happens in the world don't want to see any fundamental change to the current circumstances. People should get angrier and angrier about this. The wealth produced by working people should be distributed fairly amongst them based on their needs. We talk about war and the threat of war that is expanding across the globe, along with interference in the internal affairs of many countries by the big powers and aggression against the people and many countries' sovereign rights.

Let us begin with Venezuela. The United States and other imperialist nations are currently leading a campaign to overthrow the democratically elected government of Venezuela. The Venezuelan people have the absolute inalienable right to decide their own future without foreign interference. The US has spent 20 years or more attempting to destabilise Venezuela by sabotage, interference in its elections, economic sabotage, the preparation and planning for coups and lying about the situation that Venezuela is in at present.

Democratic elections were held in Venezuela last year and declared fair by international observers. President Nicolas Maduro was re-elected in those elections, but US warmongers in government didn't like the results. Why is this happening? Because Venezuela has the highest oil reserves in the world – US capitalism wants that oil and the US imperialists want to dominate the region strategically and militarily. And we see the terrible lickspittle of the US, the Australian government, simply following like pathetic sheep.

We must demand hands off Venezuela! Stop the illegal intervention by US imperialism that is the number one terrorist in the world today. Let's look at recent interventions by US big business and its government:

1. The overthrow of the Libyan government and the resultant total disaster that has resulted for the Libyan people.
2. The intervention in Syria by the US and its forces and the ongoing attempts to overthrow the Syrian government. What a mess this has created for the Syrian people.
3. The invasion of Afghanistan, which now represents the longest war in US history and how this impacts on the Afghan people.
4. The total devastation of the Palestinian people's home country by the illegal US-backed Israeli occupation of Palestine.

And couldn't we go on and on: The US backing of the medieval Saudi Arabian regime and the death and destruction inflicted on Yemen. The US/NATO backing of the fascist measures being implemented by the Turkish government. The US backing of the suppression of the people of Egypt put down by the Egyptian military, and this is just the Middle East! In Latin America and even here there is much more to discuss.

The US rulers maintain military bases in at least 160 countries and in the final analysis these bases are designed to protect and extend their capitalist empire in the world, to ensure markets, cheap labour, minerals and other sources of wealth, and of course always to protect their strategic interests against other global competitors. We must continue to demand that foreign bases be removed from all countries and that all nuclear weapons be destroyed and outlawed.

Then of course there is the issue of pollution and global warming. Some ask whether such a problem really exists. We see the melting of the ice packs in the world and the rising sea levels that the Oceania and Pacific peoples tell us about. We see the destruction of many species, the terrible deterioration of the coral reefs, the warming of sea temperatures. We see the extreme weather events, floods, heat waves, tornados, cold and snow and we see water supplies drying up.

Every school child in Australia can see it and is convinced about the need for urgent action on climate change, but our stupid government and other individual politicians still consider that global warming is 'crap' and that the story is made up as part of a left wing conspiracy. Such politicians do not deserve to govern for one minute more. Their views are based on their intent to protect big business and the big polluters' economic interests and they must go.

Now, there are many more things than this wrong with the world that Melbourne Unitarians consider and debate when they gather, but obviously they cannot all be covered today. Suffice to say that the protection of the democratic and human rights of the people, the alleviation of poverty, the wealth gap, the need for world peace and the independence of nations among others are foremost in our minds. I would argue that these major issues facing humanity can't be resolved

in the interests of the people whilst capitalism and imperialism continue to dominate our nations and the globe.

Can we simply just vote out the handful of the super rich who currently dominate our nation and indeed the world? Given the so-called parliamentary democracies, I would say no. Therefore it will take a revolution by the people of the world to overthrow capitalism and imperialism and implement a real government of the people by the people. Such a people's movement would logically, once in power, start to implement a socialist program with public ownership of the wealth and productive forces to use for the good of the majority of the people – a government that would be independent, peaceful, and a resolute campaigner to solve global warming.

I would like to finish today by telling you about the International League of Peoples' Struggles (ILPS) and its role in the world. I am currently the International Vice President of the ILPS and the President of the Australia chapter of the ILPS, called the League. The League's policy is to promote, support and develop the anti imperialist and democratic struggles of the people of the world, including workers, peasants, women, youth, professionals and other sectors of society against the ideological, political, military, economic, social and cultural domination and attacks by imperialists and reactionaries. The ILPS strives to realise and support the unity, cooperation and coordination of anti imperialist and democratic struggles throughout the world.

The League's activities are based on the 17 concerns decided on many years ago.

The League was formed over 20 years ago and has become the most outstanding democratic and anti imperialist formation in the world today. The League has hundreds of organisations with millions of members in more than 40 countries.

The League has 17 study commissions heading up its 17 areas of concern and through the work of these commissions, and the overall work of the League itself, it aims to give political guidance to the struggling people of the world. It is expanding its work through country chapters such as Australia and ILPS chapters and regional organisations throughout the world, such as the Asia Pacific chapter of which Australia is a part.

The League holds an international congress every three or four years which attracts hundreds of delegates and observers who help make ILPS policy for the period ahead. The 6th International of the League is to be held in June of this year in Hong Kong. The slogan for this year's international is 'Win a bright socialist future of humanity; unite the people to fight and end imperialist wars, racism and fascism'.

I should also tell you that the Australian chapter of the League will hold a national congress in April of this year in Melbourne and more information on this will be distributed shortly. All are most welcome to attend.

The Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church has recently become an affiliate of the ILPS and this seems to be an appropriate match as the church shares the views about world peace and democracy.



On March 17 at 11.00 am our church, working with the Human Rights Law Centre, will be hosting a forum to discuss the growth of racism here and across the world, the move to the extreme right and the need for a Bill of Human Rights for Australia.

Why are we doing this? We believe that as the economic and political situation worsens, the repressive legislation already in existence and further legislation will diminish our democratic rights, will justify the demonisation of minorities and will further shackle our trade unions and destroy democracy as we know it.

Professor Gillian Triggs, respected former president of the Human Rights Commission said 'Australia's human rights record is regressing on almost every front'. In 2016 the Chief Justice of the New South Wales Supreme Court, Tom Bathurst, found 52 examples of laws in that state alone that impinged on the presumption of innocence. In February this year, the Institute of Public Affairs think-tank identified 307 laws that infringed just four rights: the presumption of innocence, natural justice, the right to silence, and the privilege against self-incrimination. Another 2016 study found 350 current laws that infringe democratic rights such as freedom of speech.

'The church should stay out of politics' – this is the mantra of those who are scared of life itself. Politics determines our lives from birth to death: how we live, how are children are educated, where we work, if we work, our accommodation, whether we can be healthy, the future of our environment, our fundamental rights, war or peace.

All of these issues establish how we live, how we operate and how our society operates. Should churches, representing many people of all colours, nationalities, religions and political persuasions not be allowed to express the views of their members on these fundamental issues? The Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church says an emphatic 'yes'. We not only have that right, we have a deep responsibility to work towards a socially just democracy where the rights of every citizen, young, old, black, white, overseas, native born and Indigenous are represented and where everyone's views are respected and heard.

Currently we do not have such a system. In Australia today homelessness is rampant and growing. The number of homeless people in Australia jumped by

more than 14,000 (or 14 per cent in the five years to 2016), according to census data. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) said 116,000 people were homeless on census night in 2016, representing 50 homeless people per 10,000. Waiting lists for public housing Australia-wide have now reached 190,000. Yet there is no national plan to deal with this. People without a secure, affordable home cannot participate in society.

Utilities are privatised with their profits going mainly overseas and the number of those unable to pay these bills is growing fast. Energy firms threw the switch on almost 13,000 struggling Victorians in the first three months of this year.

Hospital waiting lists are increasing and healthcare for those without private cover is lessening, despite the commitment of our health providers.

Our environment is being trashed in order for maximum profits to be maintained, and both sides of politics do nothing but bicker, grandstand and promote only those policies they think will win them government.

Neither side of politics supports a Bill of Human Rights, despite the fact that most Western nations have one. Yet such a Bill is a fundamental human right and endorsed by the United Nations. Clearly such a Bill will not solve all of our problems, but it will provide safeguards that we cannot afford to lose.

Professor Gillian Triggs, in her excellent book *Speaking Up*, stated 'A Charter of Rights, even a simply legislated one could moderate the almost unrestricted executive powers that can be granted by Parliament.' She further stated,

A Charter of Human Rights for Australia will better protect the rights of citizens, minorities, and non citizens and ensure a culture of respect for the rights that underpin our democracy – freedom of speech, the right to vote and equality.

Again 'A Charter will allow Australia to meet its international obligations and resume its leadership globally and regionally as a good international citizen. Above all, Australia could return to the rule of law and to the principles of legality upon which our multicultural democracy is based. It is time'.

The Melbourne Church agrees. It is indeed time, and we urge those of you who are able to join us on 17 March to help make it happen. 🙏

AUSTRALIA NEEDS A BILL OF RIGHTS



Australia is the only Western liberal democracy that does not have a Bill of Rights

Repressive legislation, racism and the move to the extreme right here and across the world have resulted in the loss of democracy and human rights.

The Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church is hosting a forum on Sunday March 17 to promote a campaign for a Bill of Rights for Australia

This is supported by a range of community, legal and religious organisations.

Speakers include Prof. Rob Watts (Professor of Social Policy RMIT), Prof. Gillian Triggs (former President of the Australian Human Rights Commission) and Julian Burnside QC.

The forum will also include workshops for community participation.

Where: Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church
110 Grey Street
East Melbourne, 3002

When: Sunday 17 March 2019

Time: Commencing 11:00 am

Lunch provided. For catering purposes, please RSVP admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au

PLEASE KEEP THIS IMPORTANT DAY FREE AND PASS THIS ON TO YOUR FRIENDS AND CONTACTS!

an excerpt from...

they thought they were free

the germans 1933-45

How and why "decent men" became Nazis—the life stories of ten law-abiding citizens.

by
**Milton
Mayer**



'But the one great shocking occasion, when tens or hundreds or thousands will join with you, never comes. That's the difficulty. If the last and worst act of the whole regime had come immediately after the first and smallest, thousands, yes, millions would have been sufficiently shocked – if, let us say, the gassing of the Jews in '43 had come immediately after the "German Firm" stickers on the windows of non-Jewish shops in '33. But of course this isn't the way it happens. In between come all the hundreds of little steps, some of them imperceptible, each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next. Step C is not so much worse than Step B, and, if you did not make a stand at Step B, why should you at Step C? And so on to Step D.

'And one day, too late, your principles, if you were ever sensible of them, all rush in upon you. The burden of self-deception has grown too heavy, and some minor incident, in my case my little boy, hardly more than a baby, saying "Jewish swine", collapses it all at once, and you see that everything, everything, has changed and changed completely under your nose. The world you live in – your nation, your people – is not the world you were born in at all. The forms are all there, all untouched, all reassuring, the houses, the shops, the jobs, the mealtimes, the visits, the concerts, the cinema, the holidays. But the spirit, which you never noticed because you made the lifelong mistake of identifying it with the forms, is changed. Now you live in a world of hate and fear, and the people who hate and fear do not even know it themselves; when everyone is transformed, no one is transformed. Now you live in a system which rules without responsibility even to God. The system itself could not have intended this in the beginning, but in order to sustain itself it was compelled to go all the way.

'You have gone almost all the way yourself. Life is a continuing process, a flow, not a succession of acts and events at all. It has flowed to a new level, carrying you with it, without any effort on your part. On this new

level you live, you have been living more comfortably every day, with new morals, new principles. You have accepted things you would not have accepted five years ago, a year ago, things that your father, even in Germany, could not have imagined.

'Suddenly it all comes down, all at once. You see what you are, what you have done, or, more accurately, what you haven't done (for that was all that was required of most of us: that we do nothing). You remember those early meetings of your department in the university when, if one had stood, others would have stood, perhaps, but no one stood. A small matter, a matter of hiring this man or that, and you hired this one rather than that. You remember everything now, and your heart breaks. Too late. You are compromised beyond repair.

'What then? You must then shoot yourself. A few did. Or "adjust" your principles. Many tried, and some, I suppose, succeeded; not I, however. Or learn to live the rest of your life with your shame. This last is the nearest there is, under the circumstances, to heroism: shame. Many Germans became this poor kind of hero, many more, I think, than the world knows or cares to know.'

I said nothing. I thought of nothing to say.

'I can tell you,' my colleague went on, 'of a man in Leipzig, a judge. He was not a Nazi, except nominally, but he certainly wasn't an anti-Nazi. He was just – a judge. In '42 or '43, early '43, I think it was, a Jew was tried before him in a case involving, but only incidentally, relations with an "Aryan" woman. This was "race injury", something the Party was especially anxious to punish. In the case at bar, however, the judge had the power to convict the man of a "non-racial" offense and send him to an ordinary prison for a very long term, thus saving him from Party "processing" which would have meant concentration camp or, more probably, deportation and death. But the man was innocent of the "non-racial" charge, in the judge's opinion, and so, as an honorable judge, he acquitted him. Of course, the Party seized the Jew as soon as he left the courtroom.'

'And the judge?

'Yes, the judge. He could not get the case off his conscience – a case, mind you, in which he had acquitted an innocent man. He thought that he should have convicted him and saved him from the Party, but how could he have convicted an innocent man? The thing preyed on him more and more, and he had to talk about it, first to his family, then to his friends, and then to acquaintances. (That's how I heard about it.) After the '44 Putsch they arrested him. After that, I don't know.'

I said nothing.

'Once the war began,' my colleague continued, 'resistance, protest, criticism, complaint, all carried with them a multiplied likelihood of the greatest punishment. Mere lack of enthusiasm, or failure to show it in public, was "defeatism". You assumed that there were lists of those who would be "dealt with" later, after the victory. Goebbels was very clever here, too. He continually promised a "victory orgy" to "take care of" those who thought that their "treasonable attitude" had escaped notice. And he meant it; that was not just propaganda. And that was enough to put an end to all uncertainty.



'Once the war began, the government could do anything "necessary" to win it; so it was with the "final solution of the Jewish problem", which the Nazis always talked about but never dared undertake, not even the Nazis, until war and its "necessities" gave them the knowledge that they could get away with it. The people abroad who thought that war against Hitler would help the Jews were wrong. And the people in Germany who, once the war had begun, still thought of complaining, protesting, resisting, were betting on Germany's losing the war. It was a long bet. Not many made it.'

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In keeping with the new spirit of America, I removed all the Jews, Arabs, Africans and immigrants from my Nativity scene...



WE ACKNOWLEDGE

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

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.



A Century of Wars Stole Peace After the 'War to End All Wars' Was Fought

As part of victory celebrations in Britain after the First World War, a captured German Feldkanone 16 field artillery gun with a destroyed barrel was exhibited on the Mall, London. Photo by Horace Nicholls via Wikimedia Commons

On 11 November 2018 the centenary of the end of the First World War will be commemorated worldwide. Let us reflect on the truly terrible scale of death and destruction it caused.

- Approximately 10 million combatants were killed.
- Twenty-one million were wounded, disabled, lost limbs or blinded.
- Up to 8 million were confirmed missing.
- Around 8 million civilians lost their lives.
- Unknown millions mourned the deaths of loved ones.
- Millions of innocent animals, including 8 million horses, were sacrificed.

Unknown billions in economic damage resulted. In France alone around 3 million buildings and millions of hectares of agricultural land and forest were destroyed.

The environmental damage of the war was incalculable. Its eventual legacy was unprecedented political and economic dislocation, the rise of Fascism and even more devastating, the global catastrophe of the Second World War, which itself claimed around 60 million lives.

It has been estimated that the total number of lives lost in wars over the last century is well in excess of 100 million men, women and children. We are still living with the tragic human and environmental consequences of these murderous conflicts.

REMEMBRANCE

After the Great War, the 'war to end all wars', many people were so shocked by the scale of the slaughter that Remembrance Day was introduced as an act of solemn remembrance of the millions who had died in that hitherto most terrible of conflicts. But should not this fitting recollection of the dead of past wars not be, in the philosopher AC Grayling's words, 'an instrument for a further and greater purpose, namely to question war itself'?

We must ask ourselves whether any war in history has ever truly been worth fighting.

Should it not be about remembering the utter waste, horror and futility of war itself? Should it not, as Grayling argued, remind us of 'war's causes: ugly faiths, intolerance, lust for power and revenge, mutual hatreds prompted by historical accidents of colour, custom or culture'?

As I recently walked round the Imperial War Museum, I vividly felt the connections across the generations: the memories of those who had lived and loved, the men and women who had laughed, cried and died, caught up in the ultimate blasphemy of war.

I opened the book *The Roses of No Man's Land* by Lyn Macdonald. I relived the experiences of Claire Tisdall of the Voluntary Aid Detachment – the ambulance column. Claire's brother had been killed at Ypres. She really hated the Germans – so much so that when she saw German survivors rescued from a sunken Red Cross ship she got angry that these Germans had been rescued out of the water and given the clothes 'knitted for our Tommies'.

Yet, when faced with an individual German soldier whose life she could save, she showed feelings of tender humanity. Being able to speak fluent German, she was often asked to talk to injured German prisoners of war. Seeing some ambulances full of wounded Germans she noticed one pale-faced boy look up at her.

'Pain, pain', he cried.

Claire pulled back the blanket. She saw, to her horror, a spouting artery. She instantly knew what to do, dragged his clothes aside and pressed the affected area with her thumbs.

'Haemorrhage! Haemorrhage!' she shouted.

The trained nurse then took charge. But what were Claire's feelings?

'It melted a little of my hatred ... I felt quite differently towards Germans after that.'

Other nurses showed feelings of equal humanity towards the German war wounded. One British POW tells the story of a remarkable German hospital sister, called by the allied prisoners 'Schwester Kristina'. Kristina herself did not care about the nationality of her patients and did everything possible to care for them and save their lives.

There were many nationalities in one ward. Each evening Kristina would call around the ward and offer water to all her patients. She was no gifted linguist but made a special effort to address each of her patients in a few words of his native language, such as 'Good night, Engländer'. The soldiers would return the compliment and say in a chorus in their broken German: 'Gute nacht, Schwester'.

An Australian nurse, Sister Elizabeth Nordsvan, also had vivid memories of seeing young German prisoners.

'I had charge of a ward of Germans but they were nearly all kids. We had boys of 14 crying for their mothers! The British army was very severe. They wouldn't allow the boys to write home and tell their mothers that they were sick ... So I got a list of their addresses and I wrote to all their mothers and let them know... and when I came home from the war lots of the mothers wrote to me to say how grateful they were. After all, those mothers were just as upset about their kids as we were about ours. Some of the other British nurses said I was pro-German – I wasn't ... I never hated the Germans. I just loved people – and especially poor sick kids.'

This shows us how important individual human relationships are to nurturing the latent humanity in each one of us. It is not the collective nation that we engage with but fallible individual human souls. Kristina and Elizabeth saw our common humanity in all their patients.

What is it that gets us through the horrors of war? It is not the jingoism of cheering crowds or the patriotic ardour of those who handed out white feathers to men who did not or could not enlist. Nor is it blind hatred of a supposed and always collective enemy. Rather it is the goodness of caring individuals who see beyond the barriers of nationality and race and proclaim the intrinsic worth and dignity of every human being. It is surely they who save us from cruelty and barbarism and give us hope for our common future.

That awareness of the goodness of ordinary people and spirit of true humanity are captured in one of Siegfried Sassoon's most moving war poems, composed in November 1918:

Reconciliation.

*When you are standing at your hero's grave,
Or near some homeless village where he died,
Remember, through your heart's rekindling pride,
The German soldiers who were loyal and brave.*

*Men fought like brutes; and hideous things were done;
And you have nourished hatred harsh and blind.
But in that Golgotha perhaps you'll find
The mothers of the men who killed your son.*

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

President Dwight D Eisenhower, former Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces during the Second World War, spoke memorably about the human, material and financial costs of war. '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 not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its labourers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.'

It is so easy amid the horrors of war to forget our common humanity, to become brutalised and lose sight of the terrible effects of war on ordinary people, whether conscript soldiers or civilians. The majority of victims of modern war are now civilians. When politicians and military spin-doctors speak about 'collateral damage' they mean ordinary men, women and children – like us.

War, according to the Victorian Quaker Parliamentarian John Bright, is 'the combination and concentration of all the horrors, atrocities, crimes and sufferings of which human nature on this globe is capable'. What serious student of the evils of war throughout the ages could refute this conviction?

The root causes of war, according to William Ellery Channing, are our human propensity for evil and greed, passion for superiority and power, false patriotism that puts our own nation above all others and an upbringing and education that serve to glamourise warlike exploits.

Anticipating the uncompromising ethical stance of Bright in opposing the Crimean War in the face of populist clamour demanding war, Channing wrote that in comparison to war 'all other evils fade'.

'Let us teach that the honour of a nation consists not in the forced submission of other states, but in equal laws and free institutions, in cultivated fields and prosperous cities; in the development of intellectual and moral power ... magnanimity and justice, in the virtues and blessings of peace.'

Channing saw the remedies as well as the causes to be of a moral and religious nature. He suggested that rulers should take more pride in the welfare of their people than in the exercise of political and military power.

'We should honour nations for their free institutions, wise laws, promotion of humane education, benevolence and justice.'

According to Channing, we must learn to admire what we in our age call the heroes of conscience, human rights, the martyrs for peace and freedom.

For the sake of our future global safety and very survival is it not a pity that Trump and Putin do not heed the moral vision of William Ellery Channing? 🇺🇸



The Rev Feargus O'Connor is minister with Golders Green and with St Albans Unitarians.

Source: *The Inquirer (the voice of British & Irish Unitarians & Free Christian November 2018*

History of the Day

INTRODUCTION

International Women's Day is celebrated in many countries around the world. It is a day when women are recognised for their achievements without regard to divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. International Women's Day first emerged from the activities of labour movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe.

Since those early years, International Women's Day has assumed a new global dimension for women in developed and developing countries alike. The growing international women's movement, which has been strengthened by four global United Nations women's conferences, has helped make the commemoration a rallying point to build support for women's rights and participation in the political and economic arenas.

CHRONOLOGY

1909 The first National Woman's Day was observed in the United States on 28 February. The Socialist Party of America designated this day in honour of the 1908 garment workers' strike in New York, where women protested against working conditions.

1910 The Socialist International, meeting in Copenhagen, established a Women's Day, international in character, to honour the movement for women's rights and to build support for achieving universal suffrage for women. The proposal was greeted with unanimous approval by the conference of over 100 women from 17 countries, which included the first three women elected to the Finnish Parliament. No fixed date was selected for the observance.

1911 As a result of the Copenhagen initiative, International Women's Day was marked for the first time (19 March) in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, where more than one million women and men attended rallies. In addition to the right to vote and to hold public office, they demanded women's rights to work, to vocational training and to an end to discrimination on the job.

1913–1914 International Women's Day also became a mechanism for protesting World War I. As part of the peace movement, Russian women observed their first International Women's Day on the last Sunday in February.

Elsewhere in Europe, on or around 8 March of the following year, women held rallies either to protest the war or to express solidarity with other activists.

1917 Against the backdrop of the war, women in Russia again chose to protest and strike for 'Bread and Peace' on the last Sunday in February (which fell on 8 March on the Gregorian calendar). Four days later, the Czar abdicated and the provisional government granted women the right to vote.

1975 During International Women's Year, the United Nations began celebrating International Women's Day on 8 March.

1995 The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a historic roadmap signed by 189 governments, focused on 12 critical areas of concern, and envisioned a world where each woman and girl can exercise her choices, such as participating in politics, getting an education, having an income, and living in societies free from violence and discrimination.

2014 The 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW58) – the annual gathering of States to address critical issues related to gender equality and women's rights – focused on 'Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls'. UN entities and accredited NGOs from around the world took stock of progress and remaining challenges towards meeting the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs have played an important role in galvanising attention on and resources for gender equality and women's empowerment.

THE UN AND GENDER EQUALITY

The Charter of the United Nations, signed in 1945, was the first international agreement to affirm the principle of equality between women and men. Since then, the UN has helped create a historic legacy of internationally agreed strategies, standards, programs and goals to advance the status of women worldwide.

Over the years, the UN and its technical agencies have promoted the participation of women as equal partners with men in achieving sustainable development, peace, security, and full respect for human rights. The empowerment of women continues to be a central feature of the UN's efforts to address social, economic and political challenges across the globe.



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from our readers



DEAR FRIEND

Enclosed sub for another year, plus a small donation.

Keep up the excellent work.

M Cram, NSW

DEAR EDITOR

The editorial 'Beware Repressive Legislation' in the *Beacon*, December–January 2019, was brilliant.

I like the way the arguments about politics in the church and in the *Beacon* were dealt with. The arguments were very powerful, objective and reinforced by history.

They appealed to the inner qualities and humanity within us all.

The editorial set out what the *Beacon* stands for and fights against. You speak for me.

Congratulations!

Tom McDonald, NSW

DEAR BEACON

Enclosed is my subscription renewal/donation for 2019.

I look forward to another year reading the *Beacon* – highlighting important issues in these troubling times for democracy and freedom and the way people are campaigning for a better, fairer world.

We do need an Australian Bill of Rights, although there are moves towards such a Bill by state governments (even in Queensland).

Australia seems to lag behind on international issues such as a Bill of Rights, climate action, a ban on nuclear weapons and on international humanitarian law.

H Williams, Qld

DEAR EDITOR

While I am a general supporter of Israel, I completely disapprove of the actions of the Netanyahu government in sanctioning the taking over by 'settlers' of what is clearly Palestinian land.

But I must take issue with G Cooke in his letter in the February issue, in which he states that the Jews had been slowly forcing out the long-time inhabitants. To the best of my knowledge, the early Zionists bought their land from Arabs willing to sell. During the war of independence a lot of Arabs left because they were told they would be returning very soon as the Jews were going to be swept out in a sea of blood. But the Israelis won that war and in all the years since, none of the Arab states have offered citizenship and therefore permanent settlement and work – to the folks who ran. I wonder, why not?

Yours truly

J Rogers NSW

DEAR EDITOR

Please find enclosed my cheque for \$50 to be distributed as follows:

- \$20 my concession subscription for 2 years
- \$20 for overseas subscription
- \$10 donation to help continue your sterling work with the *Beacon*.

Many thanks and kind regards

R Pratt, NSW

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History of the Day

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Monthly journal of the Melbourne
Unitarian Peace Memorial Church
Est. 1852

Registered by Australia Post

Post Print Approved

100003043

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