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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

Governments are our servants – not our masters

EDITORIAL

'An open democratic society needs a strong government with particular characteristics. It should be neither despotic nor over-bureaucratic. It should exist within a legal framework based on the rule of law and the protection of civil liberties. It should support civil society and its multiplicity of voices and activities. It should provide the economic framework and the essential infrastructure for public and private enterprise. It should be concerned with the wellbeing of all citizens. It should protect the physical environment and it should act to alleviate the negative impacts of the marketplace on individuals, groups and environment. These roles are often poorly understood and undervalued' (Democracy Watch).

If this description of democracy is acceptable, it gives rise to deep concerns because we have moved far beyond governments 'protecting the physical environment', 'being concerned with the wellbeing of all citizens', 'alleviating the negative impacts of the marketplace ...'. Indeed, the policies of both sides of government do exactly the opposite in all of these areas: their commitment is clearly to private profit, vested interests and international capital. We would be less than honest if we have not yet reached these conclusions in light of the situation internally and indeed in our country's slavish involvement in wars of aggression against other nations that pose no threat to us.

No better example could more clearly illustrate the failure of this concept of democracy than the recent decision by the federal government to cut the income of the most vulnerable in our society: those on WorkStart. Currently, singles on Newstart are eligible for \$244 per week plus \$60.10 per week in rent assistance, compared to the average weekly male income of \$1298 or the weekly minimum wage of \$606.40. After the basic necessities are paid, it is calculated that the recipients have a maximum of \$22 per day left for their discretion, more than \$130 per week below the poverty line.

From 1st January 1,00,000 single parents will be moved onto Newstart. Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Aboriginal Affairs, Jenny Macklin, claimed in the media that she could live on Newstart. This is a people's representative who earns in the vicinity of \$6,000 per week herself and who is part of a two-income family.

Colleague, Minister of Employment, Bill Shorten, admitted the unemployment benefit was tough to live on – adding that so was his wage (\$330,000). 'I think it would be very

difficult to live on \$249 (a week)', he said. 'I've got a young family, I find it hard enough to make ends meet currently and I've got a job'. It must be a real struggle for ministers to survive in our capitalist democracy!

Minister Macklin says that providing less to these single parents will encourage them to find work. She should read the news on the 'slide in job vacancies' by 8%: currently more than 600,000 Australians are seeking work. In Victoria alone there are 3.9 people competing for each vacant position.

Neither Labor nor Liberal governments are prepared to increase taxes on the most wealthy in our society, prostituting themselves to protect the mining industry whose obscene wealth allows mining magnates to protect their profits. It is much easier to punish the poor, easier still to introduce savage cuts to all areas of community need, such as housing, health, education and jobs.

Even the pope in his New Year speech called for control over what he called 'unbridled capitalism'. He recognises the danger of pushing low-income families to the edge of desperation, with their only option to fight back against those whose policies destroy their lives and their families.

It isn't enough for churches, unions and community organisations to express their concerns. There must be concerted action to expose and push back these attacks on our democracy, the freedom to fight for the right to a dignified life and for a larger share of the wealth that we produce.

There is no excuse in this land of wealth for any family to live below the poverty line, to be homeless, to be jobless, to live in misery. Governments are not our masters – they are our servants. It is time to recognise this. ■

Russian roulette for Greeks

For a people reeling from the hard knocks of the economic crisis, the attacks on public health provision are proving deadly.

Katerina Kitida reports.



Waves of revulsion swept over family-oriented Greek society as people listened to the news on 5 December 2011. Public hospitals in Athens and three other cities were turning away pregnant women ready to give birth, if they couldn't afford to pay for their hospitalisation on the spot. Childbirth, it seemed, had become a privilege for the rich. Under tremendous public pressure, the government finally relented: by letting the women pay for the medical expenses later!

If a society is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable members, Greece's moral height is diminishing as the financial crisis escalates. 'The number of unvaccinated children is reaching a dangerous threshold', says George Nikolaidis, a psychiatrist from the public Institute of Child Health. Among working adults, one in four employees doesn't have health coverage, while a growing mass of freelancers and small traders cannot pay their insurance contributions. All these people are excluded from healthcare and must turn to NGOs and charities for survival according to Nikitas Kanakis of Médecins du Monde, 'Our free polyclinics were created to treat immigrants, but during the last two years the number of Greeks [seeking treatment] has quadrupled. In the past they represented 9–10 per cent of our patients, now they are over 40 per cent.'

Even before the crisis, a sudden illness could lead a family to the verge of bankruptcy. Today, access to

treatment is an even bigger luxury, adding to the health problems that poverty itself creates, such as the lack of sufficient and nutritious food. People are less inclined to visit doctors, resorting to impromptu treatments, while long-term patients cannot continue their medication on a steady basis. For Kanakis, it's like 'Russian roulette for survival'.

The results are already evident. As George Nikolaidis gloomily puts it: 'In unequal societies, the first health indicator to get worse is suicides. Then there is a rise in health problems related to alcohol use; then heart disease and malignant neoplasms. In Greece, suicides are already on the rise. For heart disease, official data are published with great delay, but I estimate they are also rising. As for cancers, we might have to wait for a couple of years. But it is certain their time will come'. There is a resurgence of long-forgotten illnesses related to poor living conditions, including tuberculosis and malaria. As for HIV, between 2010 and 2011 there was a 57-per-cent rise in the general population and a 1,250-per-cent rise among drug users.

Even citizens who can still afford treatment are turning away from private hospitals, which have lost more than a third of their clientele. Nevertheless, obeying its foreign lenders, the government is squeezing public health expenditure to below the bare minimum. In 2010, public health expenditure as a percentage of GDP was just 5.8 per cent, among the lowest in developed countries. However, for George Nikolaidis, 'the sums given to private companies for auditing, installing digital systems, creating websites and doing publicity are now bigger, if we compare them to the pre-crisis era. The main reduction is in medical equipment'.

Olga Kosmopoulos, a specialist in infectious diseases at the hospital of Nikaia, considers this the number-one problem. 'There is an unjustifiable and constant lack of cheap material for everyday use like gloves, bandages and cotton. Every day, there is another thing missing', she notes, also remarking on staff shortages. This leads doctors to exhaustion, cynicism and desperation, especially since wages have been cut by about 40 per cent.

Meanwhile, the public keeps paying, after the enforcement of measures like the generalised five-euro (\$6.50) hospital entrance fee. The sum may seem small, but people also pay for medical examinations. Undeterred, the government promotes the full privatisation of each hospital's supporting operations (security, cleaning, catering, etc.) even though this is bound to raise costs.

All of the above lead people living below the poverty line (who I estimate at about 20–25 per cent of the population) to conditions of total misery. This is bound to reduce life expectancy, just as it has done in all countries where the IMF intervened', observes Kanakis. The IMF is notorious for pushing the 'user pays' model, wrecking public health provision. 'The implemented policy has been tested and found wanting. It worsens the population's health and it worsens the use of the few existing resources', he adds. Countries with systems like the British National Health Service pay less for healthcare as a percentage of GDP, in comparison to the US, which uses a private system. We need to learn from reality and support public healthcare. ■

Katerina Kitidi is a journalist and co-creator of the documentaries *Debtocracy* and *Catastrika*.

Source: New Internationalist November 2012

PART ONE

Moral medicine: the Cuban way

A revolutionary example of efficient and affordable healthcare,
by **John M Kirk** and **Chris Walker**

It is one of the world's best-kept secrets: an island nation, whose citizens earn on average under \$50 a month, has outstripped the high and mighty in extending international medical support to those in dire need. That nation is Cuba. And its conception of healthcare is nothing short of revolutionary.

Cuba currently has more medical personnel serving abroad than all of the wealthy G-8 nations combined. As of April 2012, there were 38,868 Cuban medical professionals working in 66 countries, of whom 15,047 were doctors – about 22 per cent of Cuba's total number of physicians. To date some 135,000 health workers have participated in medical missions abroad.

'Solidarity is tenderness between peoples' is the message of this backdrop to a Cuban field hospital in San Vicente town square in El Salvador. The words are José Martí's, a hero of the Cuban independence struggle. John M Kirk

Cubans don't use the term medical 'aid' – which they see as extremely paternalistic. Instead they refer to 'cooperation' or 'collaboration'. Cuban medical teams do not engage in disaster tourism. They are there for the long run: generally working for two-year periods, to be replaced by other Cubans should the need persist.

Their vision is to introduce a sustainable medical system which trains up the local population to play an active part. This approach differs from that employed by well-meaning, but often naive, medical professionals from industrialised nations who drift in and out of poor countries. Because the Cubans live within the communities where they work, they are visible, not only on their daily visits to their patients, but also as they line up at the market for food or get water from the local well. Significantly, too, they do not charge their patients for medical care.

The patient as person

In many ways the approach used by Cuba in its numerous overseas missions mirrors its domestic public health system. First, there is no cost for the patient, since access to healthcare is seen as the most fundamental human right and is embedded in the Cuban Constitution. Cuban medical training insists on solid diagnostic skills, since access to high-tech equipment abroad – from basics such as X-ray machines to scanners and the like – can be extremely limited. Moreover, patients are not seen as suffering from a singular ailment, treatable by a simple prescription: instead they are viewed in the wider bio-psycho-social context.

*'We send doctors, not soldiers!'
Fidel Castro*

El Salvador's Minister for Public Health María Isabel Rodríguez emphasised this grounded outlook when she spoke with me in 2010: 'The Cubans treat them [their patients] as individuals, recognising their human quality, and spending time with them. Their medical treatment is different – the Cuban doctors respect their patients and listen to them'.

Unlike the emphasis in industrialised countries on curative treatment, Cuba's approach to medical care consistently promotes prevention of diseases. This is, of course, far more cost-effective. When drugs are required, Cuban medicines are often



used – Cuba produces some 80 per cent of its own medical products, which are sold at a fraction of the price they would cost elsewhere. (When my daughter was studying in Cuba, she received three injections after a bad peanut reaction – adrenaline, an antihistamine, and dextrose. The cost was \$1.25, \$0.75 and \$0.75 – the price paid by foreigners; for Cubans this would have been free).

The Cuban medical contingents serving abroad spend a tremendous amount of time in basic public education campaigns on healthcare matters. I saw this myself in 2010, when I spent two months with Cuban personnel in El Salvador and Guatemala. They had arrived in November 2009 after tropical Storm Ida had wreaked havoc in El Salvador. After two months of providing emergency medical care in a central field hospital, the Cubans began a series of activities to improve emergency preparedness, and also to show Salvadorians how to help stop diseases such as dengue from spreading. I accompanied teams of Cuban and Salvadorian health promoters to rural communities where they went door-to-door, distributing chemicals to be used in water tanks to kill mosquito larvae, and talking about basic health promotion and hygiene.

'When I heard the Cubans were participating, I expected something quite different – a form of supervision or control by them', one Salvadorian health promoter told me. 'I did not expect a team in which we were all fully integrated, working side by side as we went door-to-door together advising people about the means of eradicating dengue'.

Finally, the system is based upon medical training in which ethical considerations and the responsibilities of professionals are emphasised far more than in medical schools of the industrialised world. Cuban medical personnel serving abroad go where the need is greatest, and where the host government assigns them responsibilities. The result is that the Cuban system has developed a cost-effective, pragmatic, highly ethical and sustainable system of public healthcare. It is this basic

framework which is shared with the host country, and which has been remarkably successful for decades.

Relief before politics

Many people first heard of Cuba's medical internationalism program when the country offered 1,500 medical professionals to support the disaster relief effort after Hurricane Katrina pounded New Orleans in 2005. (US President George W Bush rejected the offer.) In fact, Cuba has been sending medical teams abroad since 1960, when an earthquake occurred in Chile. This was followed by a large medical delegation sent to Algeria in 1963 to help the construction of the national healthcare program following that country's independence from France.

It is important to note the historical context in which these early medical missions were sent. The revolutionary government headed by Fidel Castro came to power on 1 January 1959 after the authoritarian Batista regime was overthrown. By 1961 almost half of Cuba's medical personnel had fled, most to Miami; approximately 3,000 were left. Yet despite the pressing situation in Cuba, the government saw the need to provide internationalist support. Since then, medical contingents have been sent around the globe to help in emergency situations – regardless of ideological differences with the host country.

Several hundred Cuban medical personnel are working in Honduras, for example, despite Havana's protests against the coup which overthrew democratically elected president Zelaya in 2009. Likewise, while Havana condemned the removal of President Fernando Lugo in Paraguay in June 2012, Cuban doctors remain there. Perhaps no greater enemy of the Cuban revolutionary process in the region was Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza. Yet when a massive earthquake occurred in Managua in 1972, the Cuban contingent was among the first to arrive. In 1998 the disastrous impact of Hurricane Mitch in Central America (over 20,000 were either killed or declared missing) led to a number of missions. Significantly, Cuba did not have diplomatic relations with the countries that were worst affected, yet did not hesitate in sending large delegations to the affected areas (424 specialists arrived within days, peaking at 2,000). Humanitarian considerations rather than political sympathies remain key to Cuba's approach. ■

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Just a cartoonist with a moral duty to speak

by Michael Leunig *The Age*, 11 December 2012



Several years ago I was invited to speak at Melbourne's Jewish Museum on the subject of 'The cartoonist as society's conscience'. I gladly accepted but within a week was informed by the museum that the invitation had been withdrawn because of my views on Israel. Although I had been somewhat critical of aggressive Israeli government policies I had never publicly outlined my broad views on Israel and was puzzled by the cancellation and bemused by the gross irony of being excluded from a discussion about conscience because I had acted with conscience in my work.

Upon reflection I wondered if an internal philosophical disagreement lay behind this peculiar cancellation. Whatever, a door had been closed to me.

I relate this tale as a backdrop to more recent circumstances in which it has been publicly inferred that I am anti-Semitic because of a cartoon I created expressing sad dismay at the plight and suffering of the Palestinians in the recent bombardment of Gaza.

As a cartoonist I am not interested in defending the dominant, the powerful, the well-resourced and the well-armed because such groups are usually not in need of advocacy, moral support or sympathetic understanding; they have already organised sufficient publicity for themselves and prosecute their points of view with great efficiency.

The work of the artist is to express what is repressed or even to speak the unspoken grief of society. And the cartoonist's task is not so much to be balanced as to give balance, particularly in situations of disproportionate power relationships such as we see in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is a healthy tradition dating back to the court jester and beyond: to be the dissenting protesting voice that speaks when others cannot or will not.

My recent cartoon ('First they came for the Palestinians ...') was a lament based on the famous lines attributed to Pastor Martin Niemöller that neatly highlight the way apathetic or frightened silence in the face of injustice is a dereliction of moral duty. It is interesting to note that Niemöller had been an active Nazi supporter but a decade after the war became a pacifist.

Although greatly valued in contemporary Jewish culture, the poem's message is universal and eternal; it could apply to any oppressed group, including the Palestinians who, even with their relatively feeble rockets, are so obviously oppressed.

In spite of all the highly organised rhetoric justifying Israel's actions, the intuitive, heartfelt moral shape of the situation is becoming clearer and more obvious to the world the longer the conflict goes on. When all is said and done, it looks like the Palestinians have been massively robbed and abused, and are engaged in a desperate struggle for survival and liberation.

Israel on the other hand would appear to be conducting an imperialistic campaign of oppression supported and substantially armed by the most powerful nation on earth. My cartoonist's duty and conscience compel me to focus on the plight of the subjugated, the ones most neglected, severely deprived and cruelly afflicted.

I am not against Israel but I am opposed to what I regard as its self-defeating, self-corrupting militarist policy, which is not only excessively homicidal and traumatising but sows the seeds of irreversible hatred and can never bring a lasting peace. One expects more from a prosperous democratic country. It's as if this young nation Israel has not yet come to maturity; so delinquent, irresponsible and unwise are its actions.

I sense that the Jewish community in this country is itself increasingly divided on the question. I also suspect

continued page 9



by Michael Parenti 'Information Clearing House'

Holocaust and extermination a terrible normality

Through much of history the abnormal has been the norm. This is a paradox to which we should attend. Aberrations, so plentiful as to form a terrible normality of their own, descend upon us with frightful consistency.

The number of massacres in history, for instance, is almost more than we can record. There was the New World holocaust, consisting of the extermination of indigenous Native American peoples throughout the western hemisphere, extending over four centuries or more, continuing into recent times in the Amazon region.

There were the centuries of heartless slavery in the Americas and elsewhere, followed by a full century of lynch mob rule and Jim Crow segregation in the United States, and today the numerous killings and incarcerations of Black youth by law enforcement agencies.

Let us not forget the extermination of some 200,000 Filipinos by the US military at the beginning of the twentieth century, the genocidal massacre of 1.5 million Armenians by the Turks in 1915, and the mass killings

of African peoples by the Western colonists, including the 63,000 Herero victims in German Southwest Africa in 1904, and the brutalisation and enslavement of millions in the Belgian Congo from the late 1880s until emancipation in 1960 – followed by years of neocolonial free-market exploitation and repression in what was Mobutu's Zaire.

French colonisers killed some 150,000 Algerians. Later on, several million souls perished in Angola and Mozambique along with an estimated five million in the merciless region now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The twentieth century gave us – among other horrors – more than sixteen million lost and twenty million wounded or mutilated in World War I, followed by the estimated 62 million to 78 million killed in World War II, including some 24 million Soviet military personnel and civilians, 5.8 million European Jews, and taken together: several million Serbs, Poles, Roma, homosexuals, and a score of other nationalities.

In the decades after World War II, many, if not most, massacres and wars have been openly or covertly

sponsored by the US national security state. This includes the two million or so left dead or missing in Vietnam, along with 250,000 Cambodians, 100,000 Laotians, and 58,000 Americans.

Today in much of Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East there are 'smaller' wars, replete with atrocities of all sorts. Central America, Colombia, Rwanda and other places too numerous to list, suffered the massacres and death-squad exterminations of hundreds of thousands, a constancy of violent horrors. In Mexico a 'war on drugs' has taken 70,000 lives with 8,000 missing.

There was the slaughter of more than half a million socialistic or democratic nationalist Indonesians by the US-supported Indonesian military in 1965, eventually followed by the extermination of 100,000 East Timorese by that same US-backed military.

Consider the 78-days of NATO's aerial destruction of Yugoslavia complete with depleted uranium, and the bombings and invasion of Panama, Grenada, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Western Pakistan, Afghanistan, and now the devastating war of attrition brokered against Syria. And as I write (early 2013), the US-sponsored sanctions against Iran are seeding severe hardship for the civilian population of that country.

All the above amounts to a very incomplete listing of the world's violent and ugly injustice. A comprehensive inventory would fill volumes. How do we record the countless other life-searing abuses: the many millions who survive wars and massacres but remain forever broken in body and spirit, left to a lifetime of suffering and pitiless privation, refugees without sufficient food or medical supplies or water and sanitation services in countries like Syria, Haiti, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Mali.

Think of the millions of women and children around the world and across the centuries who have been trafficked in unspeakable ways, and the millions upon millions trapped in exploitative toil, be they slaves, indentured servants, or underpaid labourers. The number of impoverished is now growing at a faster rate than the world's population. Add to that, the countless acts of repression, incarceration, torture, and other criminal abuses that beat upon the human spirit throughout the world day by day.

Let us not overlook the ubiquitous corporate corruption and massive financial swindles, the plundering of natural resources and industrial poisoning of whole regions, the forceful dislocation of entire populations, the continuing catastrophes of Chernobyl and Fukushima and other impending disasters awaiting numerous ageing nuclear reactors.

The world's dreadful aberrations are so commonplace and unrelenting that they lose their edge and we become inured to the horror of it all. 'Who today remembers

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the Armenians?' Hitler is quoted as having said while plotting his 'final solution' for the Jews. Who today remembers the Iraqis and the death and destruction done to them on a grand scale by the US invasion of their lands? William Blum reminds us that more than half the Iraq population is either dead, wounded, traumatised, imprisoned, displaced, or exiled, while their environment is saturated with depleted uranium (from US weaponry) inflicting horrific birth defects.

What is to be made of all this? First, we must not ascribe these aberrations to happenstance, innocent confusion, and unintended consequences. Nor should we believe the usual rationales about spreading democracy, fighting terrorism, providing humanitarian rescue, protecting US national interests and other such rallying cries promulgated by ruling elites and their mouthpieces.

The repetitious patterns of atrocity and violence are so persistent as to invite the suspicion that they usually serve real interests; they are structural not incidental. All this destruction and slaughter have greatly profited those plutocrats who pursue economic expansion, resource acquisition, territorial dominion, and financial accumulation.

Ruling interests are well served by their superiority in firepower and striking force. Violence is what we are talking about here, not just the wild and wanton type but the persistent and well-organised kind. As a political resource, violence is the instrument of ultimate authority. Violence allows for the conquest of entire lands and the riches they contain, while keeping displaced labourers and other slaves in harness.

The plutocratic rulers find it necessary to misuse or exterminate restive multitudes, to let them starve while the fruits of their land and the sweat of their labour enrich privileged coteries.

Thus we had a profit-driven imperial rule that helped precipitate the great famine in northern China, 1876–1879, resulting in the death of some thirteen million. At about that same time the Madras famine in India took the lives of as many as twelve million while the colonial forces grew ever richer. And thirty years earlier, the great potato famine in Ireland led to about one million deaths, with another desperate million emigrating from their homeland. Nothing accidental about this: while the Irish starved, their English landlords exported shiploads of Irish grain and livestock to England and elsewhere at considerable profit to themselves.

These occurrences must be seen as something more than just historic abnormalities floating aimlessly in time and space, driven only by overweening impulse or happenstance. It is not enough to condemn monstrous events and bad times: we also must try to understand them. They must be contextualised in the larger framework of historical social relations.

The dominant socio-economic system today is free-market capitalism (in all its variations). Along with its unrelenting imperial terrorism, free-market capitalism provides ‘normal abnormalities’ from within its own dynamic, creating scarcity and mal-distributed excess, filled with duplication, waste, overproduction, frightening environmental destruction, and varieties of financial crises, bringing swollen rewards to a select few and continual hardship to multitudes.

Economic crises are not exceptional; they are the standing operational mode of the capitalist system. Once again, the irrational is the norm. Consider US free-market history: after the American Revolution, there were the debtor rebellions of the late 1780s, the panic of 1792, the recession of 1809 (lasting several years), the panics of 1819 and 1837, and recessions and crashes through much of the rest of that century. The serious recession of 1893 continued for more than a decade.

After the industrial underemployment of 1900 to 1915 came the agrarian depression of the 1920s – hidden behind what became known to us as ‘the Jazz Age’, followed by a horrendous crash and the Great Depression of 1929–1942. All through the twentieth century we had wars, recessions, inflation, labour struggles, high unemployment – hardly a year that would be considered ‘normal’ in any pleasant sense. An extended normal period would itself have been an abnormality. The free market is by design inherently unstable in every aspect other than wealth accumulation for the select few.

What we are witnessing is not an irrational output from a basically rational society but the converse: the ‘rational’ (to be expected) output of a fundamentally irrational system. Does this mean these horrors are inescapable? No, they are not made of supernatural forces. They are produced by plutocratic greed and deception.

So, if the aberrant is the norm and the horrific is chronic, then we in our fight back should give less attention to the idiosyncratic and more to the systemic. Wars, massacres and recessions help to increase capital concentration, monopolise markets and natural resources, and destroy labour organisations and popular transformative resistance.

The brutish vagaries of plutocracy are not the product of particular personalities but of systemic interests. President George W Bush was ridiculed for misusing words, but his empire-building and stripping of

government services and regulations revealed a keen devotion to ruling-class interests. Likewise, President Barack Obama is not spineless. He is hypocritical but not confused. He is (by his own description) an erstwhile ‘liberal Republican’, or as I would put it, a faithful servant of corporate America.

Our various leaders are well informed, not deluded. They come from different regions and different families, and have different personalities, yet they pursue pretty much the same policies on behalf of the same plutocracy.

So it is not enough to denounce atrocities and wars, we also must understand who propagates them and who benefits. We have to ask why violence and deception are constant ingredients.

Unintended consequences and other oddities do arise in worldly affairs but we also must take account of interest-driven rational intentions. More often than not, the aberrations – be they wars, market crashes, famines, individual assassinations or mass killings – take shape because those at the top are pursuing gainful expropriation. Many may suffer and perish but somebody somewhere is benefiting boundlessly.

Knowing your enemies and what they are capable of doing is the first step toward effective opposition. The world becomes less of a horrific puzzlement. We can only resist these global (and local) perpetrators when we see who they are and what they are doing to us and our sacred environment.

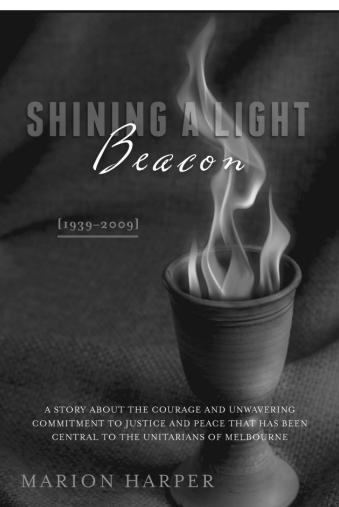
Democratic victories, however small and partial they be, must be embraced. But the people must not be satisfied with tinselled favours offered by smooth leaders. We need to strive in every way possible for the revolutionary unravelling, a revolution of organised consciousness striking at the empire’s heart with the full force of democracy, the kind of irresistible upsurge that seems to come from nowhere while carrying everything before it. ■

*Michael Parenti's most recent books are *The Culture Struggle* (2006), *Contrary Notions: The Michael Parenti Reader* (2007), *God and His Demons* (2010), *Democracy for the Few* (9th edn. 2011), and *The Face of Imperialism* (2011). For further information about his work, visit his website: www.michaelparenti.org.*

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Continued from page 5

Just a cartoonist with a moral duty to speak

that the more aggressive Israel supporters fear this moral unease and quiet doubt in their community and are angered by any cartoons or commentary that might encourage such doubt. In spite of what the bullies say, I suspect they are not really upset by any ‘anti-Semitism’ in my cartoons (there is none) but by the possible impact of a cartoon on the doubters. The better the cartoon, the more it must be discredited. What cheaper way to discredit than the toxic smear of anti-Semitism.

I am not sure whether it is legal to publicly call someone an anti-Semite without evidence but it certainly feels like hate talk to me, as well as a damaging thing to say about someone who does not agree with you. That's often why it is said of course.

At my advanced age, I know I am not an anti-Semite, not even vaguely or remotely, but others would seem to know better as false accusers always do.

If only there was some sort of test I could sit for to clarify the situation, but there is no science to this obsessive and vapid denunciation.

It's cynical, it's bullying and it's lazy. Stupidly, it's also a case of the boys who cry wolf.

Over the years it has been implied that I am ‘a second-degree anti-Semite’, ‘a new-world anti-Semite’ and a ‘latent anti-Semite’ as well as a simple old-fashioned common or garden anti-Semite. I now learn to my amazement that to make comparisons between Israeli policy and any Nazi behaviour is in itself an anti-Semitic act. So much for free speech. I say all nations that throw their military weight around, occupying neighbouring lands and treating the residents with callous and humiliating disregard are already sliding towards the dark possibilities in human nature.

My cartoons have also had me labelled a misogynist, a blasphemer, a homophobe, a royalist, a misanthrope and a traitor, to name but a few. I would sum it all up by saying: I am a cartoonist.

Michael Leunig is an Age cartoonist.

AFP Link: <http://www.australiansforpalestine.net/72715#more-72715>

Original Link: <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/just-a-cartoonist-with-a-moral-duty-to-speak-20121210-2b5hi.html>

Source: Australians for Palestine – Women for Palestine Melbourne – Australia

DID YOU KNOW ... FROM AMERICAN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS

... that five presidents of the United States were Unitarian Universalists?

- John Adams
- Thomas Jefferson
- John Quincy Adams
- Millard Fillmore
- William Howard Taft

... that these famous poets were Unitarian Universalists?

- e e cummings
- Carl Sandburg
- May Sarton

... that these famous scientists were Unitarian Universalists?

- Linus Pauling
- Carl Sagan

... that these songs were written by Unitarian Universalists?

- The Battle Hymn of the Republic by Julia Ward Howe
- Jingle Bells by James L Pierpont
- It Came Upon a Midnight Clear by Edmund Sears

... that many leaders of the women's suffrage movement were Unitarian Universalists?

- Susan B Anthony
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton

... that many famous writers were Unitarian Universalists?

- Louisa May Alcott
- Ray Bradbury
- Nathaniel Hawthorne
- Herman Melville
- Rod Serling
- Henry David Thoreau
- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Kurt Vonnegut



Here's an excerpt from a recent article by **AABCC spokesperson, Hannah Middleton**.

For the complete article, go to

<http://www.space4peace.org/newsletter/Space%20Alert%2027.pdf>

DRONES – the Australian connection

Given Australia's commitment to furthering US military policy in the Asia-Pacific and maintaining a high level of integration with US armed forces, it is unsurprising that Australian Defence is eager to follow the US and embrace the military drone. US drones have been flown from Australia, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is using drones in Afghanistan, and the Australian Government is planning to buy drones. While there is no official confirmation, the US spy base at Pine Gap is in all likelihood complicit in the targeted assassinations and indiscriminate murder of civilians by US drones in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia.

Afghanistan

The Royal Australian Air Force has deployed Israeli-owned drones for battlefield surveillance and to select targets in Afghanistan since December 2009.

Australia buys time on Heron drones from a Canadian company that leases them from Israel Aerospace Industries which is wholly owned by the Israeli government.

So far none of the unmanned aerial vehicles employed by Australian forces carry weaponry but US armed drones have conducted strike missions at the direction of Australian special forces troops.

It is hard to see the difference between the lethal power of an American missile-armed Reaper and that of an unarmed Australian Heron capable of calling in an airstrike or artillery.

Buying drones

The Australian Defence Force is planning to buy seven Northrop Grumman Global Hawk intelligence and surveillance drones that could cost up to A\$3 billion.

The idea of Australian Global Hawks remained in mothballs until July this year when the government's latest Defence Capability Plan was quietly released.

The Royal Australian Navy is also planning for drone warfare. Lieutenant Commander Bob Ferry, who runs the Navy's UAV development unit, has said that the Navy will soon start 300 hours of trials with small ex-Army Scan Eagle drones.

Four Navy frigates have already been converted to support Scan Eagle launch and recovery operations. Eventually all Australian warships will have a UAV capability.

US drones in Australia

The United States flew highly classified Global Hawk spy drone missions from the Royal Australian Air Force base at Edinburgh in South Australia from late 2001 until at least 2006.

Some aviation industry sources claim the spy drones continued to fly to Australia beyond that date and that RAAF Edinburgh remains on the approved list of landing sites.

The operations were detected by a group of Adelaide aviation historians who had a member monitoring aircraft radio frequencies 20 hours a day.

Adelaide was initially a transit stop for Global Hawks en route from the west coast of the US to the Al Dhafra air base in the United Arab Emirates. However, it is widely believed that some flights were surveillance missions of Afghanistan.

In 2004 former Australian Defence Minister Robert Hill told US officials that he intended to announce the flights to the Australian public. The US Air Force opposed the disclosure, demanding all Global Hawk operations remain classified.

While the Australian public was left in the dark, an *Aviation Week and Space Technology* journalist was given access to a report on a single Global Hawk reconnaissance mission from RAAF Edinburgh to southern Japan and back again. The mission was launched just one week after North Korea had conducted a series of failed missile tests.

Cocos Islands

In late March this year, Australian and US media reported that Australia was planning to allow the United States to use its territory to operate long-range spy drones, as part of an increased US presence in the region. The new base would be on the Cocos Islands, atolls in the Indian Ocean off northwest Australia.

Australian Defence Minister Stephen Smith said the key priorities in closer US cooperation were the rotation of Marines through Darwin, greater air access and more use by the US of the Stirling naval base in Perth (West Australia). Significantly, he did not deny the Cocos Islands plan, merely commenting that it was something to be considered 'down the track' ...

A new maritime surveillance version of the Global Hawk – the MQ4C Triton – is the favoured option for the Cocos Island basing. The US Navy expects to start flying the first of 68 Tritons on order by 2015.

Some will be based on Guam to cover the Asia-Pacific region, while another detachment will fly out of Diego Garcia to monitor the Indian Ocean.

The Australian-owned Cocos Islands are seen as an ideal location to base unmanned patrol planes to keep watch on the world's busiest shipping routes and the South China Sea. ■

from our readers



Dear Editor

Enclosed, subscription \$10 concession plus \$10 extra. I look forward to the *Beacon* every month. Your last *Beacon* was particularly riveting!

Sincerely

F Lillimagi, Vic

Dear Marion

Thank you for the reminder note regarding overdue subscription. It was a big oversight not to have paid before now. I thoroughly enjoy the *Beacon* – it examines issues that other publications are not prepared to explore. We would, if we lived closer, visit some of the guest speakers at the Unitarian Church. Please find enclosed \$60 to cover overdue and next twelve months' subscription.

Yours sincerely

R Henry, Vic

Dear Editor

Your front page article of the November copy was straight to the point. 'Where are our principled politicians?' When one listens to their petty mud slinging and their total ignorance of how the ordinary people are battling on low and middle incomes, paying high taxes, and who helplessly watch their enforced future superannuation savings disappearing into falling stocks and investment slush funds while politicians enjoy the 'good life' at their expense. Surely, when there is Skype and video conferencing available, there is no need to travel with their entourage and be lavishly indulged in 5-star hotels and expensive dinners. Just think of the taxpayer savings if they talked to each other over a packet of sandwiches and a cup of tea in the comfort of their offices. Wasn't that what the future offered us back in the eighties. We saw it all at Expo 1988 in Brisbane.

The Middle East is boiling with hatred and despair, religious wars and opposing world views are dividing the people. Fundamentalism is on the rise due to the depressing state of affairs. Many people are aware how outsiders stir themselves into communities inciting unrest and causing the chaos we see today. I heard 1,100 CIA operatives moved into Libya eighteen months prior to their uprising, mostly into the Benghazi area, stirring up grievances and encouraging revolution.

Egyptians seem to have elected the 'wrong' president, who is hell bent into turning one of the most sophisticated, secular Middle Eastern societies into a fundamentalist Islamic state. As Tariq Ali says in one of his books, 'They are reverting back to the 7th century'. That seems to auger as well for the rise of fundamental Judaism and Christianity [the new crusaders fighting the Muslim hordes]. Actually, when one looks at the 7th century, Islam was the most enlightened of the three faiths while the rest were in the Dark Ages!

Syria has been infiltrated as well. Statistics say 61% are Sunni and the rest divided into Shias, Christians, Zoroastrians, other faiths and, of course, those with secular or no beliefs. The 49% wait in fear or flee in dread at the awaited collapse. Forty per cent back Assad. Many dressed up as Syrian military are foreigners.

John Ruskin's view on capitalism is to lend guns to poor people so they can shoot each other; then, when they are weary of fighting, make them pay for them!

Sincerely

A Jurrjens, Qld

Dear Donna

Please extend my *Beacon* subscription for another year and accept \$5 extra for a donation. I continue to enjoy every edition – many thanks to all those involved with the production. You do a wonderful service for us all.

Yours faithfully

M Forsyth, Vic

Dear Beacon Editor

Please accept my subscription and a little extra as late payment donation. Top marks for your excellent journal and long may your pens rule. The December issue was a beaut – a very meaty read. And vale to Molly Hadfield whom I met when she got a copy of my mother's memoirs. We shared the same initials and socialist sentiments but I didn't know then that we also had in common the mighty *Beacon*! A safe and happy Christmas to all!

M Hanrahan, Vic

To the Beacon

Enclosed is \$40 for my sub.

Please – more John Pilger. He's the best journo the world owns. I'm an old hack and I reckon I ought to know.

Yours

P Henderson, Vic

Dear Beacon

Enclosed is my subscription/donation for 2013 and for a copy of *Shining a light – Beacon 1939-2009*.

I look forward to reading the issues brought to light by the *Beacon* over the years and to another year of enlightenment.

Best wishes to all.

Yours sincerely

H Williams, Qld

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