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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY



EDITORIAL

It is said that a country must be judged on how it treats its elderly and its young. If this is a yardstick, we fall far short of any standard.

In the 1950s Robert Menzies promoted the 'Australian dream' of home ownership because he was purported to have said that homeowners tend not to become revolutionaries. Menzies believed that if you had a mortgage you were less likely to be influenced to take political or strike action. Today, home ownership or the great Australian dream is out of the reach of most young people and whole generations face the prospect of never owning a home, despite the fact that a secure, affordable roof over one's head is the most fundamental human right. Without this you are not able to function as a normal democratic citizen or as a valuable contributor to society. Yet it is this very fundamental right that is now less achievable than ever before and housing is simply another commodity from which hefty profits are earned.

With rapidly disappearing jobs, the situation for young people is also dire and youth unemployment in this country is at a totally disastrous level. 'Almost one-third of Australian young people are unemployed or underemployed, the highest level in 40 years,' according to a report released on Monday. The rate of underemployment – now at 18% – has become an entrenched feature of the youth labour market, according to the 'Generation Stalled' report commissioned by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Underemployment is a very important labour market indicator because an internationally agreed labour statistics collection assesses an individual as employed if they work one hour per

week for pay or profit. Altogether these figures mean 1.64 million people who have no work or not enough work are potentially competing for available job vacancies.

It is in this situation that the federal budget sets out to further demonise young people competing for rapidly disappearing jobs. Dole recipients will be drug tested, forced to spend more time looking for work and have their welfare cut after a 'three-strike' demerit point system in a tough new stance on welfare recipients unveiled in the budget. Introducing a demerit system is simply another way of punishing them for not finding a non-existent job.

Now the Government is well aware of the job situation; they contributed to its demise. So to divert attention from the economic situation, they punish the unemployed, penalise the impoverished, apportion blame to those least able to afford it. The Government calls them 'drug addicts' and 'dole bludgers' and attempts to whip up public support for its actions, supported by the yellow Murdoch media.

For those who thought this government could not sink any lower, here is a new depth. Nobody denies there is a drug problem in our society, but it isn't confined to those seeking a job. Do we assume that alcohol and tobacco will also be included? If so, we should certainly begin at the top with our politicians, as suggested by Senator Lambie.

Indeed, it is hardly surprising that young people denied a decent education, a secure future, access to housing and with the potential of being drawn into war, should seek respite in some form of drug.

This is the policy of a desperate, failed government. They and their policies must be rejected. ✚



WHY WE SHOULD MARCH ON MAY DAY

I was asked to speak on why we should march on May Day. The following are my reasons.

According to the *Saturday Paper*, in the early days of his prime ministership, John Howard shared with some a private view about universities: 'Don't spend money on them; the people there don't vote for us.' This week the federal government announced plans to save \$2.8 billion through cuts to university funding and increases to student payments.

This is about more than budget-saving. It is about the established fact that the more educated a person becomes, the less likely they are to vote conservative. This is one reason to march on May Day: to educate the public.

We should march on May Day because the world has never been more divided and May Day stands for unity, cooperation, internationalism and peace. May Day is celebrated around the world, beginning as the struggle for an 8-hour day. The happy idea of using a proletarian holiday celebration as a means to attain the eight-hour day was first born in Australia. The workers here decided in 1856 to organise a day of complete stoppage, together with meetings and entertainment, as a demonstration in favour of the eight-hour day. The day of this celebration was to be April 21. At first the Australian workers intended this only for the year 1856. But this first celebration had such a strong effect on the proletarian masses of Australia, enlivening them and leading to new agitation, that it was decided to repeat the celebration every year.

The first country to adopt the eight-hour working day was Soviet Russia. The eight-hour day was introduced in 1917, four days after the October revolution, by a decree of the Soviet government.

May Day is the most important international day for working people around the world. It is a day that ensures that the demands of the people are heard.

May Day stands for a world free from war, for the removal of foreign bases and foreign troops from every country and for negotiation to replace conflict. There has never been a time such as now when there are so many wars on so many fronts. These wars are extremely profitable for the military industrial complex. These are not wars of national liberation, but wars for power, for resources, for the reallocation of markets and for the seizure of control of other countries' mineral wealth, strategic land or access. There has never been a time when the gap between the rich and the poor has been so acute and there has never been a time when the coming generations, our young people, have become so devoid of any hope for the future, for work, for a home, for a decent life. The UN says there are over 200 million unemployed young people suffering worldwide. In Australia, according to Roy Morgan research, real unemployment is now 9.2% – this of course doesn't count the underemployed of which the *Sydney Morning Herald* says includes another 1.1 million. Unemployment doesn't tell the significant story of what this means to families or individuals or their continuing denial of basic human rights.



WE NEED TO MARCH ON MAY DAY BECAUSE IT STANDS FOR OPPOSITION TO RACISM AND RACIAL PROFILING WHICH ARE USED AS TOOLS TO MANIPULATE THE COMMUNITY AND DIVIDE US SO THAT THE POLITICS OF POWER CAN CONTINUE UNCHALLENGED.

Conservative governments of both sides no longer give lip service to the needs of the majority. In fact there is little to differentiate between them. Globally the corporate organisations – whether they are in energy, pharmaceuticals, armaments or technology – all wield enormous control over those in power regardless of party, and decisions are made that serve their needs, the needs of their profits rather than the needs of the people.

We have lost the ability to recognise that the state exists to serve the people, not the people to serve the state. We need to march on May Day to demonstrate our opposition to corruption, both in governments and corporations, that is rife and has never been so open and tolerated by those in power. Corruption and anti people policies are rampant and growing. Whether it is in global deals (euphemistically called free trade)

or in unjustified wars for control of other countries' resources, in destroying the environment, in selling off every valuable resource owned by the people, whether it is building a lying campaign about asylum seekers or denying them their rights under international law. We all recognise that these things are occurring on our watch, but we turn our faces to the side.

We need to march on May Day because it stands for opposition to racism and racial profiling which are used as tools to manipulate the community and divide us so that the politics of power can continue unchallenged. May Day stands for cooperation between people, not confrontation and destruction.

Daily we witness the prostitution of the media. We have no free media – no media that is committed to the truth. We have corporately owned media fighting each other for further control, a control that prevents the people from making correct judgments about their lives and a media that distorts the truth in order to control the community. Their information is carefully vetted and emitted in short sound bites while the elite make their plans and sow the seeds of further control.

We need to march on May Day because it stands for unity and courage and a fighting spirit at a time when the ruling class has deliberately developed a climate of fear: fear of terrorists, fear of foreigners, fear of asylum seekers, fear of losing our jobs, fear of ill health and old age with no services to meet our needs. A society cannot function when it lives in a state of fear.

It is fear for the future and fear of no future that creates crime. We live in a society that doesn't examine the causes of crime but simply locks up those committing crimes in privately owned prisons, while both sides of politics argue over who is best suited to deal more savagely with such crime.

I would like to quote you a very moral Christian, the Reverend Hewlett Johnson, who wrote a book in 1939 about Soviet Russia called *The Socialist Sixth of the World*. The last time I quoted Hewlett Johnson one or two church members criticised me strongly for using this man's work. I stand by his analysis and his comments. I respect and believe in his written experiences and repeat them today.

The Dean of Canterbury, Rev. Johnson, spent considerable time in the new Soviet socialist state and he wrote this about fear:

The vast moral achievements of the Soviet Union are in no small measure due to the removal of fear. Fear haunts workers in a capitalist land. Fear of dismissal, fear that a thousand workless men stand outside the gate, eager to get his job, fear breaks the spirit of man and breeds servility. Fear of unemployment, fear of slump, fear of trade depression, fear of sickness, fear of an impoverished old age, lie with crushing weight on the mind of the worker. Only a few weeks' wages lie between him and disaster.

Fear binds and devitalizes the middle class as well. They perhaps fear more, for they have more to lose, though in a different way. Buttressing

themselves around with safeguards on every side, they tremble at the breath of change. Fascism is built on fear, the fear of the possessor in face of the dispossessed. Fear kills initiative, it makes some servile and others brutal.

It seems little has changed. We march on May Day because we are against this kind of fear. We demand that full employment should be the norm, that conditions and pay should meet the needs of those creating the wealth, that it is time to introduce a shorter working week at the same rate of pay and if this means a little less profit, then so be it. We must join our unions and show pride in their defence of workers against the exploitation of the employer.

Worldwide, the political and economic situation continues to worsen as leaders with their 'big toys', their mother of all bombs and their atomic weapons, threaten the future of humanity. Who gains from these wars? Not the majority of the people. A very famous Canadian, Dr Norman Bethune, who became a communist and who served in the Spanish Civil War and the invasion of China by the Japanese, said this in his book *The Scalpel, The Sword* when thinking about war:

What is the cause of this cruelty, this stupidity? A million workmen come from Japan to kill or mutilate a million Chinese workmen. Why should the Japanese worker attack his brother worker, who is forced merely to defend himself? Will the Japanese worker benefit by the death of the Chinese? No, how can he gain? Then, in God's name, who will gain? Who is responsible for sending these Japanese workmen on this murderous mission? Who will profit from it? How was it possible to persuade the Japanese workmen to attack the Chinese workman – his brother in poverty; his companion in misery?

Is it possible that a few rich men, a small class of men, have persuaded a million men to attack, and attempt to destroy, another million men as poor as they? So that these rich may be richer still? Terrible thought! How did they persuade these poor men to come to China? By telling them the truth? No, they would never have come if they had known the truth. Did they dare to tell these workmen that the rich only wanted cheaper raw materials, more markets and more profit? No, they told them that this brutal war was "The Destiny of the Race," it was for the "Glory of the

Emperor," it was for the "Honour of the State, it was for their "King and Country." False. False as hell!

Those hypocrites, the leaders of yesteryear, who condemned millions to die or be maimed on the battlefields of the First World War, are replaced by the hypocrites of this current generation that promote the glory of war because they plan to embroil further generations of young people in their war adventures.

These same people, these same hypocrites, our so-called 'leaders', preside over a failed system and budget our lives away. A friend of mine coined the phrase 'government by budget' and pointed out that this government really has no genuine political policies produced or debated, no white papers to be read and commented on and considered by the people, simply decrees at budget time, calculated to further impoverish the poor and guarantee the wealth of their class. It is a budget that is not a reflection of policy but on the run, ad hoc bad decisions. This goes hand in hand with the consistent dumbing down of the people: no real information, no real debate, no real participation by the mass of the people, and no decent media.

We march on May Day because we believe in comradeship and cooperation, in working together as a community and defending each other when we are attacked. This is the very opposite of the society we live in which seeks to divide, denigrate and destroy the best values of working people.

Capitalism works feverishly to shore up its position but stands in constant fear of working class reaction... as well it should. When workers begin to challenge poverty, unemployment, homelessness and the lack of future is when those who control society look to other ways to maintain control.

Across the country, indeed around the world, this reaction to austerity, to poverty, to exploitation and war is growing.

As Unitarians, as a church, we have an important role to play. We have important resources to enable us to do this. First we need to recognise and understand the problem clearly and then we need to decide how best to utilise our resources to create public opinion, to expose the truth and to serve the people. I hope every Unitarian will participate in the coming struggles. May Day 2017 should be the first step in our participation. ✎

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.



Amnesty International (AI) has done some good investigations and reports over the years. This has won them widespread support. However, less well recognised, Amnesty International has also carried out faulty investigations contributing to bloody and disastrous actions.

One prominent example is in Iraq, where AI 'corroborated' the false story that Iraqi soldiers were stealing incubators from Kuwait, leaving babies to die on the cold floor. The deception was planned and carried out in Washington DC to influence the public and Congress.

A more recent example is from 2011 where false accusations were being made about Libya and its leader as Western and Gulf powers sought to overthrow the Gaddafi government. AI leaders joined the campaign claiming that Gaddafi was using 'mercenaries' to threaten and kill peacefully protesting civilians.

The propaganda was successful in muting criticism. Going far beyond a UN Security Council resolution to 'protect civilians', NATO launched sustained air attacks and toppled the Libyan government leading to chaos, violence and a flood of refugees. AI later refuted the 'mercenary' accusations but the damage was done.

THE SENSATIONAL NEW AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT

On 7 February Amnesty International released a new report titled 'Human Slaughterhouse: Mass Hangings and Extermination at Saydnaya Prison'. It has received huge uncritical review in mainstream and liberal media.

Like the Iraq/Kuwait incubator story and the Libyan 'mercenary' story, the 'Human Slaughterhouse' report is coming at a critical time. The consequences of the AI report are to accuse and convict the Syrian government of horrible atrocities against civilians. AI explicitly calls for the international community to take 'action'.

As will be shown below, the AI report is biased and partial.

PROBLEMS WITH THE REPORT

The Amnesty International report on Syria violates their own research standards. As documented by Prof. Tim Hayward, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, Salil Shetty, claims that Amnesty does its research 'in a very systematic, primary, way where we collect evidence with our own staff on the ground. And every aspect of our data collection is based on corroboration and cross-checking from all parties, even if there are many parties in any situation because all of the issues we deal with are quite contested. So it's very important to get different points of view and constantly cross check and verify the facts.'

The Amnesty report on Syria fails on all counts: they rely on third parties, they did not gather different points of view and they did not cross check.

The report conclusions are not based on primary sources, material evidence or their own staff; they are solely based on the claims of anonymous individuals, mostly in southern Turkey, from where the war on Syria is coordinated.

Amnesty gathered witnesses and testimonies from only one side of the conflict: the Western and Gulf-supported opposition. For example, AI consulted with the Syrian Network for Human Rights, which is known to seek NATO intervention in Syria. AI 'liaised' with the Commission for International Justice and Accountability. This organisation is funded by the West to press criminal charges against the Syrian leadership. These are obviously not neutral, independent or nonpartisan organisations. Since the AI report has been released, the *AngryArab* has published the account of a Syrian dissident, Nizar Nayyounf, who was imprisoned at Saydnaya. He contradicts many statements in the Amnesty International report. This is the type of cross checking which Amnesty International failed to do for this important study.



MOST OF THIS IS PUBLIC INFORMATION YET IGNORED BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND OTHER MEDIA IN THE WEST.

The Amnesty report includes satellite photographs with captions that are meaningless or erroneous. For example, as pointed out by Syrian dissident Nizar Nayyounf, the photo on page 30 showing a Martyrs Cemetery is 'silly beyond silly'. The photo and caption show the cemetery doubled in size. However, this does not prove hangings of prisoners who would never be buried in a 'martyrs cemetery' reserved for Syrian army soldiers. On the contrary, it confirms the fact which Amnesty International otherwise ignores: Syrian soldiers have died in large numbers.

The Amnesty report falsely claims, based on data provided by one of the groups seeking NATO intervention, *'The victims are overwhelmingly ordinary civilians who are thought to oppose the government.'* While it's surely true that innocent civilians are sometimes wrongly arrested, as happens in all countries, the suggestion that Saydnaya prison is filled with 95% 'ordinary civilians' is preposterous. Essential facts that are completely missing from the Amnesty report include:

- a) Western powers and Gulf monarchies have put up billions of dollars annually since 2011 to train, weaponise, provide salaries and propaganda in support of a violent campaign to overthrow the Syrian government;
- b) tens of thousands of foreign fanatics have invaded Syria;
- c) tens of thousands of Syrians have been radicalised and paid by Wahabi monarchies in the Gulf to overthrow the government;
- d) over 100,000 Syrian Army and National Defence soldiers have been killed defending their country.

Most of this is public information yet ignored by Amnesty International and other media in the West.

Amnesty uses sensational and emotional accusations in place of factual evidence. The title of the report is

'Human Slaughterhouse'. Even the opening quotation is hyperbolic: 'Saydnaya is the end of life – the end of humanity'. This report is in sharp contrast with fact-based objective research and investigation; it is closer to perception management and manipulation.

Amnesty International accusations that the Syrian government is carrying out a policy of 'extermination' are contradicted by the fact that the vast majority of Syrians prefer to live in government-controlled areas. When the 'rebels' were finally driven out of East Aleppo in December 2016, 90% of civilians rushed into government-controlled areas. The Amnesty claim that Syrian authorities brutally repress peaceful protest is contradicted by the Syrian reconciliation process. For the past several years armed opposition militants have been encouraged to lay down their weapons and peacefully re-join society. This is largely unreported in Western media because it contradicts the false stereotype presented by Amnesty International and Western media in general.

The Amnesty report makes many accusations against the Syrian government but ignores the violation of Syrian sovereignty being committed by Western and Gulf countries. It is a curious fact that big NGOs such as Amnesty International focus on violations of 'human rights law' and 'humanitarian law' but ignore the crime of aggression, also called the crime against peace.

According to the Nuremberg Tribunal, this is 'the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.' Former Nicaraguan Foreign Minister and former President of the UN General Assembly, Father Miguel D'Escoto, is someone who should know. He says, *'What the US government is doing in Syria is tantamount to a war of aggression, which, according to the Nuremberg Tribunal, is the worst possible crime a State can commit against another State.'* Amnesty International ignores this.

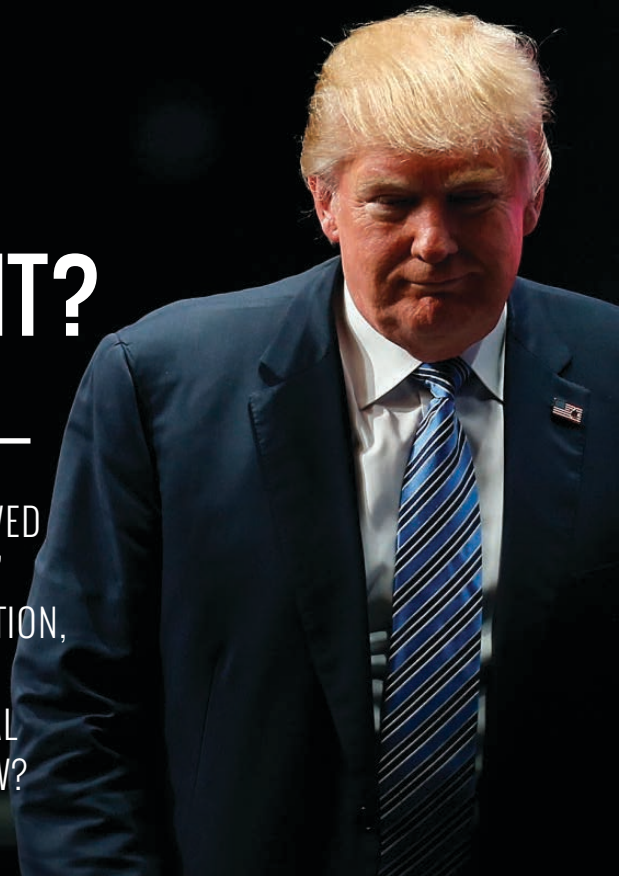
The co-author of this Amnesty International report is Nicolette Waldman (Boehland). The background and previous work of Waldman shows the inter-connections between influential Washington 'think tanks' and the billionaire foundation funded NGOs that claim to be independent but are clearly not. Waldman previously worked for the 'Center for Civilians in Conflict'. This organisation is directed by leaders from George Soros' Open Society, Human Rights Watch, Blackrock Solutions and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS). CNAS may be the most significant indication of political orientation since it is led by Michele Flournoy, who was predicted to become Secretary of Defense if Hillary Clinton had won the election. CNAS has been a leading force behind neo-conservative plans to escalate war in Syria. While past work or associations do not always define new or future work, in this case the sensational and evidence-free accusations seem to align with neoconservative political goals.

Amnesty International has previously published false information or 'corroboration' that justified Western aggression against Iraq and Libya. This seems to be the same role they are playing now in Syria. ✈

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IS TRUMP REALLY PRESIDENT?

IS TRUMP BEING ALLOWED TO 'PLAY AT PRESIDENT' FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION, WHILE THE GENERALS, SPOOKS, AND FINANCIAL PIRATES RUN THE SHOW?



These are strange times in US politics. And stranger still is the emerging character of the Trump presidency. Events are appearing with growing frequency, raising the question: Who is really running the White House and the US government? Is Trump really the President?

Trump sits there on the second floor, spending late evenings into early mornings tweeting to the world. In itself, that's politically weird. But even more strange is what he's tweeting and the next day's fallout.

We hear about the aircraft carrier task force in Asia that was reportedly steaming at full speed to the North Korean coast a few weeks ago, only to learn soon after it was actually headed in the opposite direction to Australia. Did Donald imagine that? Was the US Navy informed or requested by its titular commander in chief to turn around and go north ... and then didn't? Was Trump's command to go north perhaps countermanded by some head of Naval operations, or maybe someone else in the White House or government? Or did he just imagine it all and never even informed the Navy to head to Korea? All the possibilities are strange. Very strange.

And then there was the announcement by Trump that his big budget was going to be announced in a few days. It wasn't even prepared. Government bureaucrats had to quickly slap something together in a couple of pages to provide to the press.

Trump did it again, tweeted announcing his big tax cuts. Again the bureaucrats were caught off guard and had to throw some general outline together and issue it to the press. All this happened after it was generally known that the tax cut proposals were not going to be developed until late summer, and that the Obamacare

Repeal Bill had to go forward first. The Obamacare repeal was a necessary prerequisite for the general tax cut. Its \$592 billion in tax cuts for business and investors had to come first. Until it was resolved, it made no sense to publicise elements of the yet bigger tax cuts of trillions of dollars more scheduled to follow. But Trump tweeted it anyway, and the bureaucracy jumped, putting something down on paper. Who's communicating what to whom? Is Donald just lobbying electronic policy missiles out of the second floor of the White House, hoping some bureaucrat will catch them before morning?

Or perhaps Trump is being allowed to sit up there on the second floor of the White House and do his tweet thing, while others actually run the government. By others, perhaps it is vice-president Pence in charge, working with some inside committee of key cabinet officers and the intelligence spooks in the NSA-CIA-FBI?

Is Trump being allowed to 'play at President' for public consumption, while the generals, spooks, and Goldman Sachs financial pirates run the show?

It's hard to believe that the members of his administration and the government state bureaucracy knew in advance of Trump's recent tweets welcoming Philippines President Duterte to the White House. Or that Trump would tweet recently that he's willing to meet with North Korea's president, for whom he, Trump, had great respect. You can imagine the political constipation that comment caused the spooks and the generals in charge of State, Defense, and National Security.

30 November 2016 this writer wrote a piece predicting that Trump the right-wing populist would

be successfully 'tamed' by the political elites of this country that really run the show. I laid out some ideas how that would be accomplished (see my blog, jackrasmus.com). But I didn't think it would happen so fast and so easily.

The past month has witnessed Trump doing a total about face on virtually all his right-wing populist proposals during the election. He's backtracking so fast it's a wonder he hasn't tripped over himself (Check that, he has). What explains his 180-degree turnabout?

Was his talk of right-wing populism during the campaign all political election hype? Tell the people whatever they want to hear to get elected, and then go do whatever the moneybags really running the show want from you – which is big tax cuts, massive across-the-board deregulation, end the taxation on Obamacare and we don't care what happens to the rest of it, give us some infrastructure spending deals that resurrect wheeling-dealing commercial property investments with big tax loopholes, and just tweak and rearrange existing free trade treaties.

So what we actually got so far from Trump during his first 100 days is government by 'executive orders' – i.e. repealing environmental protections, gutting immigrants' rights, going after sanctuary cities, opening up national monuments and parks to mining and cattle exploitation, subsidising killer coal companies, attacking consumer protection, smoke and mirror changes to H1-B skilled worker import quotas that haven't changed, gutting K-12 education and shifting funds to private schools from public, opening up offshore drilling, and so on. But elsewhere it's been a wholesale retreat from his election positions, proposals and promises. Here's a short list:

Trump does a reversal on China, from declaring it a currency manipulator to offering it major concessions at the Mar-a-Lago meeting, in exchange for help with North Korea. One wonders if China's offshore islands expansion is also part of the deal.

From NATO is a waste of money and unnecessary, Trump shifts to NATO is the great bulwark against Russia. From Putin the great leader to Putin is responsible for Syria using poison gas – of which still no proof thereof by the way (Is it true, or is it all in that great American tradition of 'yellow cake' (2003), 'babies thrown from incubators' (1990), 'tonkin gulf' (1965), 'the war on drugs' (Panama invasion), 'Soviets are in Grenada', and 'remember the Maine' (Spanish-American War) incidents that always precede and justify US going to war).

From Mexico is going to pay for the wall, to there'll be no wall (latest per Homeland Security Secretary). From dumping NAFTA, to 'I'm not going to terminate NAFTA' (Trump quote).

And then there's Trump's staged press conferences with companies like Carrier Corp., indicating they're not going to export some jobs to Mexico for now (as they continue to plan to export still others at the same time). And the list of companies announcing jobs they intend to hire in the US without saying when, or that they already had planned to hire them anyway prior to the press conference.

From cancelling the TPP free trade deal (already killed in Congress), to declaring a reopening of the TTIP free trade deal with Europe. And what about the silent deal Trump struck with Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, when he was here? It's been leaked that Japan will pick up the lead on the TPP renegotiations and the US will join it later. Or Mexico's recent offer to the US to just apply the TPP terms to a new 'reform' of NAFTA by Mexico and the US? Watch both these back-door free trade resurrections, they're coming too.

And what about Trump's organisational about face, with right-wing ideologue Steve Bannon banished from the National Security Council and pro-Russia general Flynn banished from the government?

What I also find interesting is the intense media attack on Trump – focusing on his Russia connection, his tax returns, nepotism in the White House, his companies' benefiting (a violation of the emoluments clause of the US constitution) and calls for impeachment in Congress – all of a sudden all the above have disappeared from view in the media front page. They've been put on the back burner in Congress and the press. And there are no more damaging leaks coming weekly from the intelligence spooks either. Instead, what we hear is talk about 'now he's coming around', beginning to appear presidential! Is all that just coincidental? Hmmmm.

Is this a presidency where the Donald gets to sit on the second floor of the White House and do his late night tweets, and the bureaucrats scurry the next day to clean up? Where Donald is brought downstairs to the oval office for Executive Order signings or occasional reporter interviews and then trotted back upstairs? Is it a presidency where he makes his late night calls to his moneybag friends, like the billionaire Mercers and others, to find out 'how am I doing guys'? While the rest of the representatives of the economic and political elite run the show?

Is this a Trump presidency, or a government by Generals-Goldman Sachs-Pence, with son-in-law Kushner functioning as intermediary between them and the Donald? A government of second-floor tweets and first-floor executive order signing events?

The quality of the American presidency has been in steady decline for decades. From the crook Nixon to the inept peanut farmer Carter; from the movie-actor, camera friendly Reagan to the morally sleazy opportunist Bill Clinton; from know-nothing George Bush to the super-cautious false progressive Obama; and now to the fake right populist, blowhard, tweety-bird called Donald Trump.

We're going to need a lot of luck to get through the next three-and-a-half years, folks! 🍀

INCREASE OUR CIRCULATION:

Nominate potential subscribers for three free monthly copies without ongoing obligation! (Try before you buy.)

Here in SA we have found ourselves to be something of a political football being kicked around on the national oval in the match between renewable energy and fossil fuels.



Not so long ago the man who currently holds the office of Prime Minister was making public speeches about the dangers of climate change. This is what he said in the 2010 Deakin Lectures:

'We live in a continent that is uniquely challenged by climate change. We have seen the last decade the hottest decade on record. Climate change is real, it is affecting us now, and it is having a particularly severe impact on Australia. And yet, right now, we have every resource available to us to meet the challenge of climate change except for one: and that is leadership.'

That's right. He said it. He went on: 'Our efforts to deal with climate change have been betrayed by a lack of leadership, a political cowardice the like of which I have never seen in my life before.'

And he went on to refer to the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd:

'What do you stand for Kevin? What do you believe in? If you do not believe in action on climate change, what is the substance, the political substance of your leadership?'

Presumably Kevin is asking similar questions of Malcolm as we go to print. It would be comic if it were not so serious. And it demonstrates perfectly the crippling inertia that is the hallmark of political life present, an inertia that apparently sees the majority passively accepting more and more oppressive treatment of


various minorities. But majorities can be persuaded to follow their finer instincts.

Governments and even political systems come and go, it is the people and the way that they live and the way that they live together that decide whether, and how, life will go on. However they do need the impetus of principled leadership.

The renewable energy debate is an example of the opposite: the people are starting to take the lead. While some Australian politicians continue to talk about clean coal, the increase in domestic and commercial photovoltaic power generation in this country makes Australia one of the 10 largest solar power producers in the world.

By the end of 2015 there were over 1.51 million small-scale solar power systems installed across Australia (ironically the now clean coal advocating Prime Minister has one on his own roof). Australia then had the highest rate of household solar panel installation in the world.

While there are of course reasons of domestic economy for this, it does suggest that there are two different worlds here: the one inhabited by the politicians apparently heavily influenced by coal miners and the other where ordinary people take a far longer-term view.

We can only hope the day is coming when we will elect leaders with principles who will lead the way to a future where the world's resources are used sustainably and equitably! 

A Prayer for the Age of Alternative Facts

by John Philip Carter from *The Inquirer*

Blessed Spirit of Life,

Throughout the ages your prophets, sages, and common folk have called us to...

live at peace with all,
bless and not curse,
find the root of justice within the depths of our heart,
to extend hospitality to all
to live compassion and love in all our ways.
to walk this earth in gracious humility.

Yet today we live in an age

where opinion, prejudice and bias are considered holy words,
where instead of verifiable truths we are given alternative points of view,
where honest science is greeted with greedy assertions,
where the wisdom of your prophets are derided for the profit of the moment,
where minority legal protections are turned aside for the wanton desires of the majority,
where the arrogant tread upon the blessings of this earth, our common home.

Knowing that we too carry within us

the seeds of mutual destruction,
the hate filled name calling,
the condescending dismissal of others,
the willing acceptance of the momentary delights of instant gratification,
the ease of acceptance of ideology over the truth's contradictions,
the lack of compassion for all that walk upon the earth.

We come in prayer

Knowing that honest prayer calls us to change,
to become, and to be a blessing for all life.

Blessed Spirit of Life We pray

may we be a city upon the hill,
a shining light in the darkness of our time.

may we greet all as friend,
may we welcome the blessings of their presence and ideas
may we indeed live out the calling of your prophets.

In this Age of Alternative facts

may our yes be simply yes, no more no less than honest response,
may we be able to resist the siren call of false facts and opinions
may we be able to resist the push to demonise and dehumanise those with political views opposite our own,
may we respond with gentle openness and an earnest seeking of truth in all our debates and conversations.

We pray for courage

to resist when resistance is necessary.

We pray for empowerment

to act for the good of all even in the face of hateful derision,
to support and assist all persons when they act and seek for the good of all.

We pray for an open willingness

to reach out to all persons across the various divisions of humanity.

We pray for compassion

so we may open our hearts, minds and arms to all,
offering them a safe and welcoming place to be themselves.

Blessed Spirit of Life

May we always seek the ways of peace,
May we seek to live lives of compassion and love for all creatures
so that we may walk this earth, our home, in gracious humility.

May this be our desire and prayer today, and for all our days following.

So say we all, in the name of love we pray.

amen

from our readers



DEAR BEACON

I have just read Barry Jones's polemic and diatribe against Trump and would like to comment.

First Trump may well have a nasty personality, be ill read, and all the other nasty things itemised, but he did (whether illegitimately or not) stir the status quo or long suffering majority to perhaps look harder at their positions and at what previous governments had done for them. Surely that can't be all bad.

I did not find the table relating to populists and elites all that engaging either. Not all of the values held by the 'populists' such as job security and family necessarily reflect a lack of education or a vulgar grossness. Such assertions tend to beg the question. For example, the admiration for Andrews closing of Hazelwood, notwithstanding the definite need to do so may have been premature and cost a lot of families their breadwinner.

As a former science minister, quite clearly Mr Jones looks to innovation and aligns this to the need for real leaders such as Lincoln, Roosevelt, Churchill, and even Stalin, though he does add a rider relevant to the latter's brutality. This seems somewhat like Plato's government by philosopher kings.

While the environment, among many other genuine needs are real, I note that a Darwinian thrust informs this writing which is rather strange coming from what at least in part purports to be a Christian journal. As a secular and spiritual ponderer not locked into any religion I must say I see belief in life via total chance not a particularly convincing position either.

Back to Trump. As for his implicit racism I must say such seems to be the case. That said, it does not follow that those on the receiving end aren't racist too, or even worse belonging to a radical theocracy as practised in Saudi Arabia. For all its faults, capitalism may not be the total source of misery in this world and there seems the need by many to look too to other sources and not follow that Arabic saying that 'My enemy's friend is my friend'. Not to do so surely involves cognitive dissonance.

Paul Murchison

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.

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