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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

Hands Off Public Housing!

EDITORIAL

The right to a secure, affordable roof over one's head is the right of every family in a democracy. Indeed, it is a recognised human right. Yet today, in this wealthy land, we have an acute housing crisis for many while a few own more houses than they can utilise except for profit.

In the early 1900s men and women of goodwill, intelligence and determination worked to bring an end to the slums of the inner suburbs, which had been designed to provide the very minimalist accommodation for low paid workers or those without work of any kind. In December 1913 a joint Select Committee of the Victorian Parliament presented a progress report on housing conditions in Melbourne and found 'that a serious housing problem existed within the metropolis'. It called for a royal commission to be set up to carry out a thorough investigation into the slum conditions that currently existed. Public housing was the answer then as it is today.

One hundred and four years later, in our country of a fair go, there is a more acute housing crisis and we look in vain for men and women of goodwill, intelligence and determination in leadership to resolve it. The question needs to be asked again, as it was then, 'Why has public housing not figured more highly on the labour movement's political agenda?'

The only solution today's leaders appear to have is to sell off, privatise, dispossess and generally attack the most vulnerable of its people currently living in public housing. In Victoria in 2017, the state and federal governments are committed to ridding the state of public housing by selling off huge tracts of public housing land and property to private developers who

will make billions in profit at the expense of the people. Currently, estates being readied for such sales are in Brunswick, North Melbourne, Heidelberg West, Clifton Hill, Brighton, Prahran, Hawthorn, Northcote and Ascot Vale. This is happening in every state.

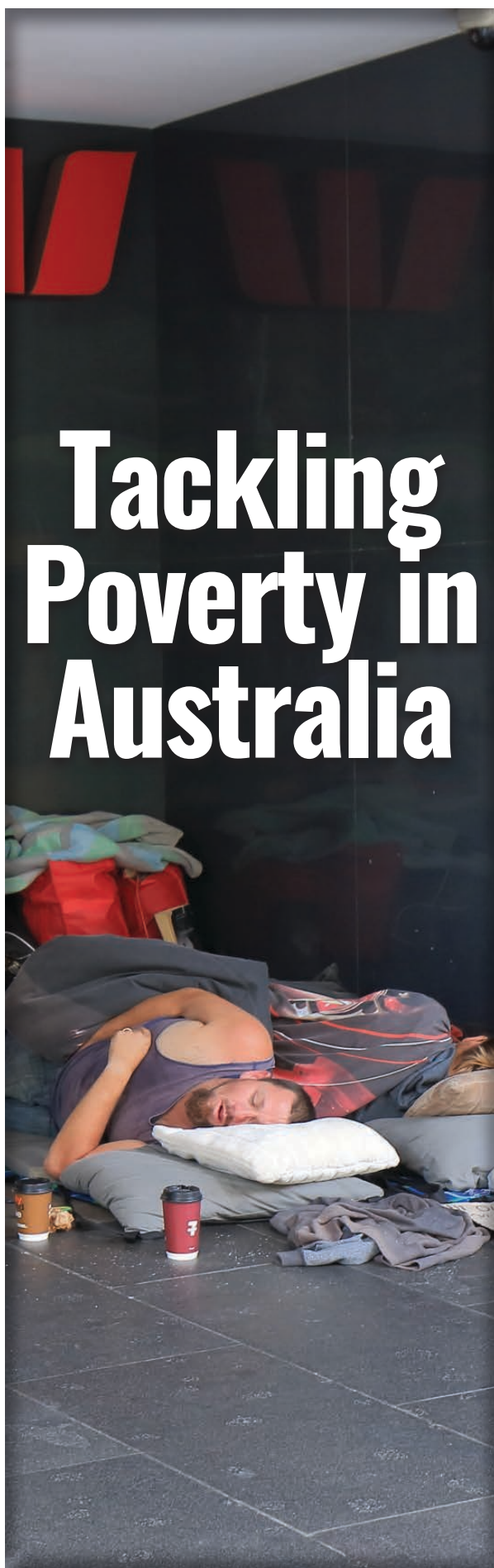
What hasn't been clearly spelled out to tenants is that the government is using mixed terms to confuse tenants, such as 'The Andrews Labor government is investing \$185 million to redevelop **public housing properties** at sites across metropolitan Melbourne, with an increase of at least **10 per cent in social housing**.'

So public housing is being redeveloped where it will magically turn into 'social housing'. Not public housing run by the government, but privately run 'community housing'. This will allow government, both state and federal, to distance itself from the provision of low-income housing which is so urgently needed and cede it to private companies to run.

We all know what happens to services when they are privatised. They are costlier, they are not answerable to the people, they make a profit for those who take them over, and the services deteriorate. And, what is worse, government generally subsidises this process with our taxes.

Every Australian needs to say NO to this process. Housing is not a commodity like soap. Housing is an essential requirement for living. We should be building high quality, environmentally friendly, easy maintenance housing to meet the needs of the growing population who are denied an affordable roof over their heads. Let us not be conned again by the privatisation of our services. Hands off public housing! ✞

Tackling Poverty in Australia



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge the owners of the land on which we met today, Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and pay my respect to their elders past, present and emerging. I also acknowledge both the owners living culture and their unique role in the life of this region.

INTRODUCTION

'Bleed 'em dry until they die.' So said Gwyneth Jones of the financial exploitation and treatment she received when a resident of Aveo, Australia's biggest retirement village operator and her home at the time. Gwyneth said Aveo's treatment of her changed her. 'It has damaged my psyche...I'm full of anger and bitterness about the trauma I was subjected to.' See <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-age-editorial/the-retirement-racket-official-probe-needed-into-retirement-village-industry-20170626-gwyy2e.html>, also Fairfax Media *Four Corners* investigative television report *Bleed them dry until they die*, 26 June 2017, ABC.

Gwyneth's heart-wrenching words apply equally to the impact of governments' callous disregard and treatment of people living around us who live in poverty and struggle to survive every day, denied access to opportunities for a fair go at life.

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY – COP IT SWEET – NOT LIKELY!

There are over 2.9 million (2,990,300 or 13.3%) of our population living in income poverty: 730,000 of them are children. Child poverty in single parent families is now at a crisis level.

<http://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Poverty-in-Australia-2016.pdf>

In 2014 there were over one million Victorians living in poverty (over 650,000) or at risk of poverty (440,000) and our work suggests we have made no progress in reducing poverty. <http://vcoss.org.au/media-release/one-million-victorians-face-poverty-risk>

Inequality in Australia is at a 75-year high with the gap widening between the top and bottom on the distribution of total income and that of total wealth. Behind these numbers are people living every day in grinding hardship and in poverty. Neo-liberalism, Australia-style, with its small government and pro-capitalist free market policies has not lifted more people out of poverty or narrowed the inequality gap, as Treasurer Morrison wants us to believe.

It is a myth that Australia has a welfare problem. We have a poverty problem and an inequality problem, as Falzon reminds us. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/20/australia-does-not-have-a-welfare-problem-we-have-a-poverty-problem>

FGFP has not stood silent about what we know and see daily on our streets. We are undertaking anti-poverty

advocacy and campaigning work and most recently tackling issues of unemployment and housing, which are both key predictors of poverty.

Our work on unemployment and housing issues shows some of what FGFP does and how the work of a progressive coalition of community groups, unions and individuals relates to tackling poverty in Australia.

UNEMPLOYMENT – ‘SICK WITH WORRY’

In 2015, FGFP continued its anti-poverty strategy work concentrating on unemployment. FGFP invited the now-named Australian Unemployed Workers’ Union and WOW! Willing Older Workers to join the Victorian Steering Committee and then established an Unemployment Working Group.

Combining our knowledge, skills and experience we produced resources to show that the dismantling of the Australian welfare system was underway. Years of funding cuts, redundancies, 17,000 jobs lost from the Australian Public Service since 2013 and rapid privatisation of government functions are evidence of this. The ‘new’ Australian ‘investment’ social welfare approach unveiled in 2016 accelerates the erosion. See Wheeler Summary Overview, FGFP Analysis of the McClure Report, 5 March 2015 held on file.

Essential public welfare services are too stretched to help people in a timely and appropriate manner when we lose our jobs, flee domestic and family violence, fall on tough times, get sick or have a disability, seek sanctuary in a new country or simply get older with little money. http://www.cpsu.org.au/system/files/cpsu_budget_submission_summary_mar_16.pdf

Given its role, Centrelink is an important example, losing 5,500 jobs since 2013. No surprise then that auditors reported that Australians waited the equivalent of 143 years to speak to a Centrelink Service Officer in 2013–2014, only to hang up before their calls were answered. And still millions of calls go unanswered each year. <http://www.yourlifechoices.com.au/.../centrelink-services-und> Imagine if you were dangling off the end of a phone waiting to report so that you could get paid. What springs to mind?

Then there is the crushing fiasco of the robo-debt recovery system issuing 250,000 notices to various income support recipients throwing thousands into the hands of private debt collectors and with a 20% administrative error rate. People affected were scared and intimidated then threatened with legal action. It is still in operation <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/feb/22/centrelinks-robo-debt-system-scrutinised-by-national-audit-office>

FGFP Unemployment Working Group pointed to the fact that instead of helping unemployed people by providing actual job creation programs and decent income support, the Turnbull coalition government continues to stigmatise and treat unemployed people as part of the so-called ‘undeserving poor’. Labels such as ‘dole bludgers’, ‘lazy’, ‘no hopers’, ‘job snobs’ and ‘leaners’ discredit and negatively stereotype individuals, blaming them for their unemployment and poverty.

This demeaning treatment lets unemployed people know there is no respect due but only the miserly



WHEN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PUBLIC POLICY FAILS UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE – GO LIVE ON THE STREET

Newstart Allowance of \$390 a fortnight below the poverty line, an obligations and compliance regime which metes out punishment and inadequate support services.

As advocacy groups have often reported, poverty not individual behaviour is the problem. No mention is ever made by this government that there are 17 unemployed people for each job vacancy. There are no jobs for all. <http://unemployedworkersunion.com/job-seekers-v-job-vacancy-data/>

If unemployed, then mental health issues can and do arise both as a consequence of not being able to find paid work no matter how hard you try, the treatment meted out by those supposedly there to help and the financial pressures of trying to survive. The emotional toll can be crippling yet the federal government continues to fail to put in place a range of public policies to address these injustices.

FGFP continues to fight for the right to work with decent wages and conditions, the provision of federal job creation programs, decent income support and support services for those out of work, reversal of privatising government welfare functions and services and putting a stop to demonising and criminalising people on welfare.

WHEN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PUBLIC POLICY FAILS UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE – GO LIVE ON THE STREET

Public housing

A new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement has been struck with state and territory governments to increase the supply of new homes and improve outcomes, particularly for those most in need, and due to commence next year. http://www.budget.gov.au/2017-18/content/glossies/factsheets/html/HA_17.htm

In the meantime, renting is becoming a permanent not a temporary housing tenure option, as fast-growing numbers of people need to rent throughout their lives. Yet public housing is getting left behind. <https://msd.unimelb.edu.au/transforming-housing-affordable-housing-all>

Jacobs points out that it is no coincidence that supply-side interventions, such as sustained investment in public housing have been spurned in favour of demand-side subsidies totalling A\$54 billion of revenue foregone in 2016. <https://theconversation.com/how-policy-success-not-failure-has-driven-australias-housing-crisis-53751>

Imagine if this revenue was available for supporting sustained investment in public housing!

As at 30 June 2014 there were 64,471 public housing dwellings in Victoria. As at June 2017, there were over 58,000 people in housing need in Victoria of who close to 23,000 were homeless and over 35,000 on the Department of Human Services state-wide waiting lists. <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/research,-data-and-statistics/public-housing-waiting-and-transfer-list>

In early 2017, FGFP set up another housing working group, this one to work on public housing, as we became increasingly concerned about what we were hearing about the Victorian government's new housing plans, particularly from Friends of Public Housing Victoria (FOPHV). We asked FOPHV to join the FGFP Victorian Steering Committee and work together on the public housing working group.

Bleed 'em dry is what the Victorian State Government is doing to public housing tenants right now through the implementation of its \$185 million stage 1 so-called Public Housing Renewal Program, which is part of the government's affordable housing policies released earlier this year called Homes for Victorians.

Stage 1 involves public-private partnerships in a sell-off of up to 80% of public housing stock to private developers to build private housing, transferring the management of 4,000 public housing dwellings to community housing providers and providing an additional 10 per cent of public housing stock and in the process destroying homes and local communities as each estate identified under stage 1 is set for demolition in part or in whole. The 9 estate sites are located in Ascot Vale, Brighton, Brunswick West, North Melbourne, 2 estates at West Heidelberg, Hawthorn, Clifton Hill and Northcote.

We have very good reason to believe that the claimed 10 per cent increase in public housing means mostly 'community housing'. The latter is not owned and managed by the government as is public housing but either owned and/or managed by private non-government community housing agencies.

Stage 1 plans are not new; rather they pick up the trend that began in Thatcher's Britain, spreading to around the world and now Australia. <https://theconversation.com/why-should-the-state-wriggle-out-of-providing-public-housing-79581>

A shortage of land in inner city Melbourne can be solved by selling off the estates located on prime inner-city real estate land and selling out the residents. These are the homes of public housing tenants we are talking about. Many have lived in their homes for decades. This is not in the public interest and certainly not in the interests of residents. It is a shameful appropriation of land and property which, when gone, cannot be replaced.

In June the Premier was called upon to reverse the two proposals regarding the transfer of the 4,000 dwellings and the redevelopment of the 9 estates. This letter was endorsed by 21 Victorian Steering Committee coalition members. As the state election is a mere 16 months away, we got two delegation meetings very quickly.

We also got very few answers to the detailed concerns raised only with advisors. We were told that land shortages, cost of building and red tape are causes of the Victorian housing crisis.

Similar to unemployment, governments have a set of myths to peddle about public housing and residents. Public housing is a failed policy reinforcing welfare dependency. There is mismanagement and neglect leading to run-down estates with some dwellings not fit for habitation and outdated rules and regulations impede new housing development. <https://theconversation.com/how-policy-success-not-failure-has-driven-australias-housing-crisis-53751>

We are hearing more of these myths and again residents are sick with worry due to the fact that they are being forced to move and are receiving little information about where, when and for how long they will be relocated.

The fight back to keep public housing took another step forward when a joint meeting was held between FGFP, FOPHV and Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church (MUPMC), initiated by Marion Harper of MUPMC. The aim is to build a joint community and union mass movement in support of public tenants and public housing.

The Hands-off Public Housing campaign is in the early stages of development building the coalition, seeking research assistance from a team of union researchers to provide the evidence to drive the mass movement, lobbying all politicians and attending public housing tenant meetings and most importantly of all joining FOPHV in visits to affected residents on the estates to share information, listen and learn about residents' needs, wants and local community and document their concerns.

A forum of organisations in support and residents is being organised to fill out more details of the campaign. Work is also underway to provide legal advice to residents about their rights.

Our joint work supports Jacobs conclusion that the 'housing problems experienced by low-income households are a symptom of entrenched inequality within Australia'. <https://theconversation.com/how-policy-success-not-failure-has-driven-australias-housing-crisis-53751>

CAN THE FAIR GO ENDURE?

Can the fair go endure given the way in which the Abbott-Turnbull coalition government tackles poverty and inequality: tackling the poor and blaming their individual behaviour as the problem while at the same time accepting shocking levels of poverty and inequality in wealthy Australia.

These are poor public policies that punish people in appallingly callous ways. It is a massive failure of

governments to adequately provide for all people and their communities.

A bare bones start towards a national anti-poverty strategy is beginning to emerge from all of our joint undertakings. This proposed change of policy direction is about a place to call home and a place to call work. These are two of the basic human rights for building a fairer, diverse, sustainable and just Australia. Yes, the fair go will endure if we continue to fight.



WEALTH INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

The latest data from Credit Suisse shows that wealth in Australia is concentrated in the hands of a few: the top 1% have over 22% of total Australian wealth.

And, the top 1% own more wealth than the bottom 70% of Australians combined.

The two richest billionaires in Australia, who are part of the top 1%, own more than US \$16 billion between them, which is more than the combined wealth of the poorest 20% of the Australian population.¹

As Figure 1 shows, the people in the poorest half of the Australian population have little or no combined net wealth, with around 6% of national wealth between them.

INCOME INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

There is also evidence to show that inequality between incomes, as well as wealth, is increasing. Oxfam's 2016 analysis of Australia's income distribution² found that the richest Australians generated disproportionately high incomes. While the incomes of the poorest 10% did rise between 1988 and 2011, as shown in Figure 2 below, this increase in income was equivalent to just

3% of the total income growth in Australia. In contrast, the income growth enjoyed by the richest 10% of Australians has dwarfed that experienced by the rest of Australia.

The richest 10% enjoyed more income growth – more than 28% – than the poorest half of Australians combined.³

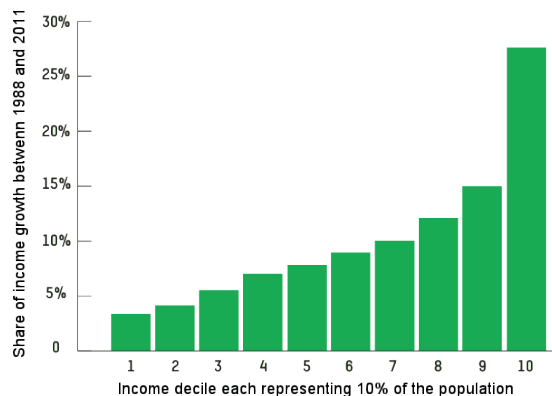


Figure 2 - Total household income growth between 1988 and 2011
Source: Laknet - Milanovic [2013] World Panel Income Distribution [LM - WPID] database⁴

WHAT CAN TACKLE THIS RUNAWAY INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA?

Oxfam argues that a human economy is the best way to tackle the growing problem of economic inequality, both here in Australia and abroad.

Building a human economy requires dedicated action from both the Australian government and corporations.

CREATING A GLOBAL HUMAN ECONOMY

Implementing these principles will enable us to build an Australian human economy. Oxfam calls for the development of a human economy across all countries.

In a human economy:

Governments will work for the 99%. Accountable government is the greatest weapon against extreme

OXFAM AUSTRALIA CALLS ON THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Tackle corporate tax dodging by implementing full public tax transparency

Multinational corporations should pay their fair share of tax, both in Australia and in the countries where they operate. One of the best ways to ensure that this happens is to mandate that large corporations publicly report on their tax affairs – including profits, revenue, employees and assets – for every country in which they operate.

2. End the era of tax havens and the race to the bottom on corporate tax rates

The relentless race to the bottom on corporate tax rates does not reduce inequality, and is likely to only benefit the super-rich. From a federal budget point of view, the proposed tax cut to big business is also revenue neutral, and does not provide additional public funds. The Government should not proceed with a cut in the corporate tax rate for large Australian businesses.

3. Move beyond GDP growth and report on indicators of Australian progress

The now de-funded Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Measures of Australian Progress (MAP), or Commonwealth Treasury's Wellbeing Framework are existing frameworks that could be used, in addition to quarterly GDP growth, to publicly report on the wellbeing of Australians. The role of women's unpaid work should also be captured by Australian progress indicators.

The Government should also use additional measures of progress, beyond GDP growth, within the Australian aid program to make sure that poverty and inequality are effectively targeted by Australian aid.

4. Conduct inequality impact analysis as part of national policy changes

In order to tackle rising inequality at home and abroad, it is imperative that the Australian Government conduct analysis of the impact that policy changes will have on economic inequality. For instance, there is no inequality impact analysis of the proposed cuts to the corporate tax rate.

5. Implement measures to reduce extreme wealth concentration, and follow through with commitment to create a public register of company ownership

In addition to tackling corporate tax dodging, the Australian Government should consider further measures to reduce extreme wealth concentration, such as land taxes, extreme net wealth taxes, and high-income taxes (such as the Buffet Rule). At a time when all levels of government are facing budget pressures, these types of measures can be used to tackle rising inequality, and provide the necessary public funding for essential services that benefit all.

Oxfam also calls on the Australian Government to follow through with the April 2016 commitment to establish a public register of ultimate beneficial owners of companies, foundations, trusts, and accounts. The register should include all companies registered or operating in Australia and from Australia. Such measures will help reduce tax dodging by wealthy individuals who own large multinational corporations.

6. Refocus efforts to tackle climate change

The devastation caused by climate change has real impacts on Australians and vulnerable communities in our region. It is crucial that the Australian Government refocus efforts to build a human economy powered by renewable energy.

This will require a transition of Australia's energy system to 100% renewables as soon as possible, with Australia reaching zero emissions well before mid-century. The Government must also prioritise support for neighbouring countries to adapt to climate impacts and build resilient, sustainable economies as part of a growing Australian aid program.

OXFAM AUSTRALIA CALLS ON CORPORATIONS TO:

1. Pay their fair share of corporate tax, and end the use of tax havens

A number of large companies have taken steps to voluntarily publicly disclose their tax affairs. We welcome this, and encourage other companies to follow suit. We also call on companies to end the use of tax havens designed to reduce tax obligations in Australia and in the developing countries where multinationals operate.

2. Ensure living wages and fair conditions for all workers in the supply chain

Both Australian workers and workers in some of the world's poorest countries are often part of multinational supply chains that produce goods consumed by everyday Australians. Companies should pay wages that are sufficient for workers to live a decent life and make sure that working conditions do not infringe on the rights of the people working within those supply chains.

3. Minimise the impact on the environment and drive sustainable solutions

Prioritising sustainability and low-carbon solutions are in the interests of all – including businesses. Companies have a pivotal role to play in driving sustainable and equitable solutions to poverty and climate change, including increasing energy access through renewables. The falling price of renewable energy, driven by technological innovation, presents tremendous opportunities to Australian businesses. Furthermore, companies have a responsibility to ensure that their impact on the planet is actively minimised and that environmental impact minimisation is at the core of business operations.

inequality and the key to a human economy.

Governments must listen to all, not a wealthy minority and their lobbyists. We need to see a reinvigoration of civic space, especially for the voices of women and marginalised groups. The more accountable our governments are, the fairer our societies will be.

Governments will cooperate, not just compete. Globalisation cannot continue as a relentless race to the bottom on tax and labour rights, which benefits no one but those at the top. We must end the era of tax havens once and for all. Countries must cooperate, on an equal basis, to build a new global consensus and a virtuous cycle to make sure that corporations and rich people pay fair taxes, the environment is protected, and workers are well paid.

Companies will work for the benefit of everyone. Governments should support business models that clearly drive the kind of capitalism that benefits all and underpins a sustainable future. The proceeds of business activity should go to those who enabled and created them – society, workers, and local communities. Lobbying by corporates and the purchase of democracy should be brought to an end. Governments must make sure that corporations pay fair wages and fair taxes, and take responsibility for their impact on the planet.

Extreme poverty and the extreme concentration of wealth are ended. Today's gilded age is undermining our future, and needs to end. The richest should be made to contribute to society fairly and not be allowed to get away with unfair privileges. To do this, we need to see the rich pay their fair share of tax: we must increase taxes on both wealth and high incomes to ensure a more level playing field, and clamp down on tax dodging by the super-rich.

The economy will work equally for men and women. Gender equality will be at the heart of the human economy, ensuring that both halves of humanity

have an equal chance in life and can live fulfilled lives. Barriers to women's progress, including access to education and healthcare, will permanently end. Social norms will no longer determine a woman's role in society and, in particular, unpaid care work will be recognised, reduced and redistributed.

Technology will be harnessed for the interests of the 99%. New technology has huge potential to transform our lives for the better. This will only happen with active government intervention, especially in the control of technology. Government research is already behind some of the greatest innovations in recent times, including the smart phone. Governments must intervene to ensure that technology contributes to reducing inequality, not increasing it.

The economy will be powered by sustainable renewable energy. Fossil fuels have driven economic growth since the era of industrialisation; but they are incompatible with an economy that puts the needs of the many first. Air pollution from burning coal leads to millions of premature deaths worldwide, while the devastation caused by climate change hits the poorest and most vulnerable hardest. Sustainable renewable energy can deliver universal energy access and power growth that respects our planetary boundaries.

We value and measure what really matters. Moving beyond GDP, we need to measure human progress using the many alternative measures available. These new measures should fully account for the unpaid work of women worldwide. They must not only reflect the scale of economic activity, but also how income and wealth are distributed. They must be closely linked to sustainability, helping to build a better world today and for future generations. This will enable us to measure the true progress of our societies.

We can and must build a more human economy before it is too late. ✊

FOOTNOTES

¹ Data from Forbes annual billionaire list <http://www.forbes.com/billionaires/> compared with Credit Suisse Global Wealth databook.

² First released in An Economy for the 1% – Wealth and Income Statistics for Australia, January 2016, Oxfam Australia Fact Sheet, available at: https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2016-11_WEF-Report_v1c.pdf

³ Oxfam calculations, using data from Lakner and Milanovic (2013). All incomes are 2005 PPP dollars, which represent real incomes at 2005.

⁴ Data for 2011 provided through personal correspondence with B Milanovic, September 2015. More information about general methodology available at: <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Luxembourg-Income-Study-Center/Branko-Milanovic,-Senior-Scholar/Datasets>

BY JOHN PICKERING



Trump is “Being the Business”

Wow! Donald Trump just sealed an arms deal with Saudi Arabia worth \$350 billion over 10 years! Sounds like great business. But wait a minute – isn't Saudi Arabia the biggest source of funds for Salafist jihadism? This is what forms the ideological basis of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, Taliban, ISIS and others that have brought death and destruction to hundreds of thousands of Muslims and others all across the Middle East. According to a December 2009 paper signed by the US secretary of state, 'Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaida, the Taliban, and other terrorist groups.'

What is even more disturbing is that both the UK and the USA are supporting the Saudi-led coalition, that according to Amnesty International and others is practically committing genocide in Yemen; and they are doing this with British-made bombs and British-made planes!

Of course our present leaders are simply following in the bloodstained footsteps of Tony Blair, who followed Bush into invading Iraq on the basis of flawed intelligence. This resulted in the needless loss of hundreds of British lives; the destruction of a whole country and it precipitated the rise of ISIS and global terrorism.

Why do our leaders support such actions? Some justify it by saying it is all about fighting for peace in the

Middle East. But isn't that a contradiction in terms – think about it: 'fighting for peace' would seem about as effective as 'bonking for virgins'.

It doesn't really work.

If governments really want peace in the world they have to be that peace.

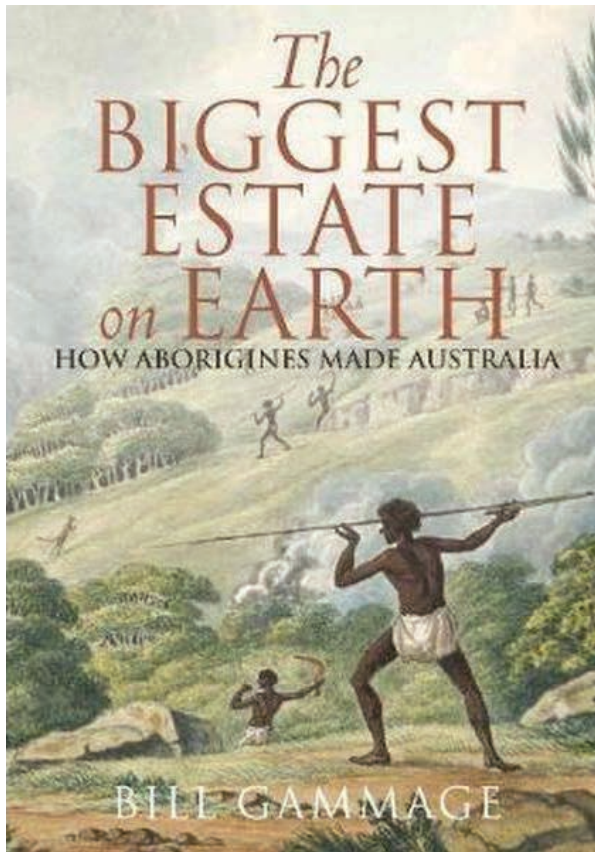
The problem is – in spite of all the rhetoric from all sides of the political spectrum – it's not peace they want, but business. And there is no better business than selling weapons. To make it work as a business model, you simply have to keep all the wars going. And guess what? That is exactly what they are all doing!

Donald Trump is merely following the status quo – he is being the business, and it looks like we can expect more of the same. This is acutely embarrassing for all of those fundamentalist Christians in America who voted for him as God's chosen man of the hour, who was going to overturn establishment values. How wrong they all were. We can only hope that like Nelly the Elephant he will eventually pack his bags and say goodbye to the circus – disappearing into the distance with a fading – trumpity trump!

John Pickering is a member of Kendal Unitarians.

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The author, William Leonard 'Bill' Gammage, AM, FASSA, is an Australian, Adjunct Professor, and Senior Research Fellow at the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University.

This book is an absolute must read in my view that should be serialised and broadcast by whatever means to every one of us who calls Australia home. It is my view that the 'colonial flag' waving, beer-swilling, BBQing that goes on around 'Australia Day' occurs because NONE of us had any education on real Australian history, let alone have any knowledge of the lies, butchery and dispossession of the First Peoples.

And from what I see, nothing much has changed: our schools' curriculum today is not much better than in my schooldays of the 1940s and 1950s.

From Bill's book I learnt that Aboriginal people managed or farmed the whole of Australia, sometimes using fire to create (in the words of so many invader/settlers) 'a park-like' environment like the landed gentry's estates back home. Time and time again Bill quotes observations by these otherwise mostly arrogant or ignorant newcomers. Bill uses a reference point of 1788 as the state of the country created by Aboriginal people and after that date what has happened since to the land.

Depending on the type of environment, the people either lived a careful life of moving with the seasons and weather, or a more settled life as in many areas across the country. When the people used fire they did it with years of acquired wisdom informing them. They might observe that ants were carrying food out of their nests so rain was in the offing, they then 'fired' an area knowing that rain would quench any fire getting out of control. They burnt small clearings in wooded areas to create a grassy patch then with the lush new growth being attractive to grazing animals they picked off the odd kangaroo, emu, etc. Waterways were kept clean and sometimes dammed, and they built aqueducts and caught fish, eels, etc., with nets and traps.

The people's management of 'the estate' probably minimised or prevented the wild 'bushfires' we are now experiencing. The ground was softer without the tamping down by cattle and sheep, and floods were less devastating. The biggest advantage of the people's ways was that they kept their population numbers within what could be supported in the worst droughts and toughest of times and did not over-breed during the good times.

As Bill states: 'If we are to survive, let alone feel at home, we must begin to understand our country. If we succeed, one day we might become Australian'. 🇺🇸

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.

TUNE INTO THE UNITARIAN HALF HOUR
EVERY SATURDAY AT 10.30 AM 3CR • 855 AM • COMMUNITY RADIO

Treaty Now!

Recently the Victorian government declared that it would begin talks about Australia's first-ever treaty with Victoria's Indigenous people. In February this year, a historic forum of 500 First Nations' representatives passed a resolution demanding the State of Victoria resource a treaty process instead of the federal government's proposal for constitutional recognition.

This treaty process could be one of the most significant developments in relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. However it has not received the national attention it rightly deserves.

The absence of a treaty meant that Australia could be created in 1901 on the basis of a lie of 'terra nullius' that ignored Aboriginal peoples. Until the late 1960s the constitution even declared they were not to be counted in the census.

While governments in the US, Canada and New Zealand have signed treaties with their indigenous communities Australia is still the only Commonwealth nation without a treaty with its First Peoples.

Former Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1988 promised to deliver a treaty but failed to do so. Liberal

Prime Minister John Howard didn't like the idea of a treaty noting a 'nation ... does not make a treaty with itself'. Also, as far back as 1835, Victoria had a so-called treaty that was negotiated by John Batman and the Wurundjeri people, which was immediately declared invalid by the NSW Governor who was overseeing the colonial government of the area. So it's not the first time Australian colonial governments have entertained the notion of a treaty.

A properly negotiated treaty that recognises Aboriginal sovereignty and self-determination will therefore go to the very heart of who we are as a modern nation state and set the course to redress past injustices with our First Australians.

Furthermore it could help foster a new, more inclusive relationship of belonging that all Australians from diverse cultural backgrounds have with Australia as it formally recognises that we are all immigrants to this land.

A treaty is the only way Australia can deal with the unfinished business of reconciliation. ✈

Oh So True!

You see, when a nation threatens another nation the people of the latter forget their factionalism, their local antagonisms, their political differences, their suspicions of each other, their religious hostilities, and band together as one unit. Leaders know that, and that is why so many of them whip up wars during periods of national crisis, or when the people become discontented and angry.

The leaders stigmatize the enemy with every vice they can think of, every evil and human depravity. They stimulate their people's natural fear of all other men by channeling it into a defined fear of just certain men, or nations. Attacking another nation, then, acts as a sort of catharsis, temporarily, on men's fear of their immediate neighbors.

This is the explanation of all wars, all racial and religious hatreds, all massacres, and all attempts at genocide.'

Taylor Caldwell, The Devil's Advocate (1952), p. 299.

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.

from our readers



DEAR LOVELY BEACON PEOPLE

Please find enclosed a cheque for \$90 for membership, subs and donation. Always love to receive the magazine and appreciate the good work you all put in.

Kind regards to you all.

H Land, Vic

DEAR EDITOR

I am one of the supporters of the radio program. It has become part of my Saturday morning listening on 3CR, often followed with the Movie Show.

Just thought I'd send a little note to show my appreciation.

Kind regards

bettykos@bigpond.com

DEAR DONNA

I received my *Beacons* yesterday and was overjoyed at reading the tribute to Celia Sanchez. Yes, she was a truly wonderful woman and I doubt that those in the forest would have survived so well without her.

I love Cuba and visited this very special island in 2008, arriving only a few days after not one but two cyclone category 5's hit the island and tore both the east and west apart. Twenty days later the homes that had been smashed in Baracoa by the tidal wave were already being rebuilt, some even to the 2nd floor. Convicts were making the bricks on their own without any guard. The 500-year-old over a metre thick wall had been almost completely demolished. The restaurant where we were to have our lunch was no more, only the floor was left and it was from there the prisoners were making and baking the bricks for the residents who were busy rebuilding their homes. All most of them had to carry them in after they were dry were wheelbarrows, although some did have little trucks.

The music and laughter wherever we went, not to mention the pina coladas and other rum cocktails we freely enjoyed. The 'living' fences: Yes, made with living branches that grow as fence rather than dead wood and steel. The delicious vegetarian dishes they prepared, the collective and independent plantations that no longer grow mono crops but sufficient food to sustain their communities. I was bowled over with the reality that in spite of the dreadful sanctions hurled at it and the people, Cuba was self-sufficient after having survived the 'special period' where Russia, after it's demise, was no longer able to help it.

I teach a small group at U3A Gold Coast a subject I call 'History with a Twist'. Well, last semester I started with Cuba and was under the impression I could make it last 2 sessions! I still hadn't finished at the end of June. I not only had in my head what I already knew but with books and the internet was able to increase my knowledge of a group of people who have one of the highest literacy rates in the world, higher than ours, the US, UK and most European nations: an absolutely free education/university system.

Here are some facts I used in my talks on their medical system alone. Today 2,000 Cuban doctors are training 17,000 medical students in Venezuela alone. I think they are taught compassion for others, something I feel lacking in our 'take what you can when you want' in our society where greed is the answer to happiness.

Ann Jurriens

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Trump is 'Being the Business'

Treaty now!

Oh so true!

Beacon Editorial Board

Peter Abrehart

Marion Harper

Donna Sensi

Julie Stafford

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the Editorial Board.**

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