

Christmas  
greetings

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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

## WHITHER DEMOCRACY OR WITHERING DEMOCRACY?

The year's at the spring,  
And day's at the morn;  
Morning's at seven;  
The hill-side's dew-pearl'd;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn;  
God's in His heaven –  
All's right with the world.

With all due respect to Robert Browning, little is right with our world, and indeed, much is wrong. In August 2012 a dinner was held by the Institute of Public Affairs. Guests at the dinner were Tony Abbott, Gina Rinehart and Rupert Murdoch and it was chaired by that stalwart of extreme right politics, Andrew Bolt. At the dinner a wish list was promoted which was evidently to be a blueprint for government if won by Tony Abbott. Now we have that government, due mainly to the ineptitude and failure of the previous Labor government.

It is interesting to examine the list of policies already in the process of being implemented. Those policies clearly reveal a government bent on slash and burn and we draw your attention to the following very revealing action words, in alphabetical order, of the Abbott Wish List on page 9 of this edition: abandon, abolish, cut, defund, deregulate, eliminate, end, force, privatise, reduce, remove, rule out and slash.

Now, in emphasising that it is a wish list from the richest, most influential, most right wing and reactionary elements in our society, we shouldn't be surprised by their slash and burn tactics; however, we need to be aware that these parasites on the public purse have enormous lobbying power, and access to and influence with those elected to govern for all Australians. What makes it easier for their influence to be so pronounced is that many in the government share their view of society.

In contrast, let's examine the people's experiences with government. There is now greater secrecy, concealment, lack of information and failure to respond to community concerns than ever before that we can recall.

Indeed, what we have now is secret government: a government using community funds (our taxes) while

they slash and burn programs and tear away safety nets. Indeed, what they are doing is abolishing, privatising and destroying all the conditions, safeguards and rights of the very people who employ them, and indeed, who pay their very lucrative salaries and perks.

While the rich and powerful have unfettered access to the seat of power, what is happening out in the community? Community activists across all areas are increasingly fighting against environmental vandalism, unwanted and undesirable planning decisions, against privatisation, in defence of wages and on-the-job safety conditions, and opposition to secret and intrusive legislation, against job cuts, destruction of our land due to coal seam gas activity, and endless other campaigns as this secret and reactionary government carries out its reactionary agenda.

Yet those fighting for social justice cannot get the ear of government. Indeed, many tell stories of ministers refusing to meet them, of letters and petitions going unanswered and unacknowledged, of deliberate avoidance of all requests for discussion on issues of concern.

Added to this is a communication blackout of foreign policy and democratic rights. The media have been sidelined. This raises a very urgent question for the Australian people: the question of true democracy and where we are heading.

If we ignore this situation we do so at our peril, because if the Abbott government continues to implement the 'wish list' provided by the Rineharts and Murdochs of our society, we will be living in a very different Australia. History demonstrates that failure to act leads to the type of society that so many have given their lives to oppose. ■

EDITORIAL

# THE TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

# DON'T TRADE AWAY HEALTH

**T**he Australian government is negotiating a trade agreement spanning 12 countries in the Pacific. But the deal is not only about free trade, and it poses real threats to public health.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) involves Australia, the US, New Zealand, Canada, Peru, Chile, Mexico, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Japan and Vietnam. The negotiations are shrouded in secrecy, but limited public information and leaked documents show that the agenda on health and medicines is being set by giant US pharmaceutical and tobacco corporations, and threatens to:

- **increase patent rights leading to higher medicine prices**
- **undermine our Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme**
- **give special rights for corporations to sue governments for damages**
- **restrict government public health regulations for food labelling.**

After three years of negotiations, the pressure is on to sign the deal this year. We need to ensure that the Australian Coalition government rejects any proposals which would affect the affordability of medicines and retains the ability to regulate in the interest of public health.

## **Longer patents leading to higher medicine prices**

Pharmaceutical companies already have patent rights to charge high monopoly prices for new medicines for 20 years before we can access cheaper generic medicines. However, US trade negotiators, on behalf of pharmaceutical companies, are demanding stronger patent rights in the TPPA.

This would further delay the availability of cheaper medicines. Australians would have to pay higher prices for medicines, and in developing countries new medicines would become unaffordable.

## **Undermining our Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)**

In the US, where there is no national system to regulate the price of medicines, the wholesale prices of new medicines are three to ten times higher than the prices in Australia. This makes retail prices even higher, and many people cannot afford to buy medicines. Through the Australian PBS, health experts compare the price and effectiveness of new medicines with the price of cheaper generic medicines to assess their health effects. They then regulate the wholesale and retail prices of many



medicines in Australia, so that pensioners pay no more than \$5.90 and others no more than \$36.10 for important medicines. As well as keeping the prices of medicines low for consumers, the lower wholesale price reduces the cost to the taxpayer. This makes the PBS more sustainable in the long term.

However, US-based pharmaceutical companies argue that the PBS is a barrier to trade, and oppose these schemes because they receive a lower wholesale price for their medicines. US trade negotiators have proposed changes which would restrict price comparisons, such as those which are used in the PBS to make medicines affordable. The Australian Government should not agree to these proposals, which would lead to higher costs for both consumers and governments.

Large tobacco companies like Philip Morris are pushing for the inclusion of special rights for corporations in the TPPA which would allow foreign investors to sue governments for damages if their investments have been harmed by a particular law or policy, even if the law or policy protects public health. Known as investor-state dispute settlement, or ISDS, disputes are heard by international investment tribunals, not domestic courts. These tribunals give priority to investor rights rather than whether the law or policy is in the public interest.

ISDS is already being used to undermine Australia's democratic legislation. The Philip Morris tobacco company is trying to use an obscure 1993 Australia-Hong Kong investment agreement to sue the Australian Government for millions of dollars of damages in an international tribunal over the tobacco plain packaging legislation. The case is ongoing, despite the fact that the Australian High Court found that the law was a public health measure and the tobacco companies were not entitled to compensation under Australian law.

The Howard government did not agree to ISDS in the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement in 2004. However, the Coalition's trade policy is to negotiate on ISDS. We urge the Government to oppose clauses in the TPPA that grant special rights for foreign investors to sue governments.

### **Restrict government public health regulations on food**

Other proposals in the TPPA would restrict the ability of government to regulate food labelling, even if it is in the interest of public health.

Australia has laws which require information for consumers about what is in our food, like levels of fat, sugar and genetically modified ingredients, and warnings about safe levels of consumption for alcohol. As public health information improves, these may need to change, through democratic public discussion and parliamentary legislation. The TPPA should not restrict the democratic regulation of food labelling for public health.

#### **TAKE ACTION!**

The pressure is on to finish the negotiations by the end of this year. We are calling on our government to ensure that our health is not compromised by this trade agreement.

Our website has resources you can use to:

- send a message to the Trade Minister
- talk to your local Member of Parliament
- discuss the TPPA with friends, relatives and workmates, or hold a local meeting
- become an AFTINET member
- donate to support the campaign
- find out more

[www.aftinet.org.au](http://www.aftinet.org.au)

**Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET)**

**128 Chalmers Street, Surry Hills, NSW 2010**

**campaign@aftinet.org.au | 02 96993686**

#### **More Information:**

Leaked US intellectual property and medicines proposals in the TPPA negotiations: <http://www.citizenstrade.org/ctc/blog/2011/10/22/leaked-trans-pacific-fta-texts-reveal-u-s-undermining-access-to-medicine/>

Multi NGO submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 'The Trans-Pacific Partnership, Intellectual Property and Medicines, 1 October 2013: <http://aftinet.org.au/cms/sites/default/files/Multi-NGO%20submission%20on%20IP%201%20Oct%202013.pdf#overlay-context=node/636>

Philip Morris Case documents: <http://www.ag.gov.au/international-relations/international-law/pages/tobaccoplainpackaging.aspx>

# FOURTEEN DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF FASCISM

By Dr Lawrence Britt

Source: Free Inquiry.co

Dr Lawrence Britt has examined the fascist regimes of Hitler (Germany), Mussolini (Italy), Franco (Spain), Suharto (Indonesia) and several Latin American regimes. Britt found 14 defining characteristics common to each:

#### **1. Powerful and continuing nationalism**

– Fascist regimes tend to make constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other paraphernalia. Flags are seen everywhere, as are flag symbols on clothing and in public displays.

#### **2. Disdain for the recognition of human rights**

– Because of fear of enemies and the need for security, the people in fascist regimes are persuaded that human rights can be ignored in certain cases because of 'need'. The people tend to look the other way or even approve of torture, summary executions, assassinations, long incarcerations of prisoners, etc.

#### **3. Identification of enemies/scapegoats as a unifying cause**

– The people are rallied into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe: racial, ethnic or religious minorities, liberals, communists, socialists, terrorists, etc.

#### **4. Supremacy of the military**

– Even when there are widespread domestic problems, the military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding, and the domestic agenda is neglected. Soldiers and military service are glamorised.

#### **5. Rampant sexism**

– The governments of fascist nations tend to be almost exclusively male-dominated. Under fascist regimes, traditional gender roles are made more rigid. Divorce, abortion, and homosexuality are suppressed and the state is represented as the ultimate guardian of the family institution.

#### **6. Controlled mass media**

– Sometimes the media is directly controlled by the government, but in other cases, the media is indirectly controlled by government regulation or sympathetic media spokespeople and executives. Censorship, especially in wartime, is very common.

#### **7. Obsession with national security**

– Fear is used as a motivational tool by the government over the masses.

continued

#### 8. Religion and government are intertwined

– Governments in fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the nation as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Religious rhetoric and terminology is common from government leaders, even when the major tenets of the religion are diametrically opposed to the government's policies or actions.

9. Corporate power is protected – The industrial and business aristocracy of a fascist nation often are the ones who put the government leaders into power, creating a mutually beneficial business/government relationship and power elite.

10. Labour power is suppressed – Because the organising power of labour is the only real threat to a fascist government, labour unions are either eliminated entirely, or are severely suppressed.

11. Disdain for intellectuals and the arts – Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility to higher education, and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and other academics to be censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts and letters is openly attacked.

12. Obsession with crime and punishment – Under fascist regimes, the police are given almost limitless power to enforce laws. The people are often willing to overlook police abuses and even forego civil liberties in the name of patriotism. There is often a national police force with virtually unlimited power in fascist nations.

13. Rampant cronyism and corruption – Fascist regimes almost always are governed by groups of friends and associates who appoint each other to government positions and use governmental power and authority to protect their friends from accountability. It is not uncommon in fascist regimes for national resources and even treasures to be appropriated or even outright stolen by government leaders.

14. Fraudulent elections – Sometimes, elections in fascist nations are a complete sham. Other times, elections are manipulated by smear campaigns against or even assassination of opposition candidates, use of legislation to control voting numbers or political district boundaries, and manipulation of the media. Fascist nations also typically use their judiciaries to manipulate or control elections. ■

#### From Liberty Forum

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## BARRY JONES ORATION 2013

# ARE WE THERE YET?

by Julian Burnside

It is a great privilege to be giving a talk in honour of Barry Jones.

Like many others, I first became aware of Barry when he was an apparently permanent fixture on *Pick-a-Box*. Most of us remember that he often tangled with Bob Dyer and quibbled about the expected answer, most famously when he was asked who the first British Governor-General of India was. He gave the expected answer, Warren Hastings, but then pointed out that, strictly, Hastings was only the Governor of Bengal. The first Governor-General of India was Lord William Bentinck.

But what distinguished Barry's participation in *Pick-a-Box* was a disconnect between his purposes and Bob Dyer's purposes. For Bob Dyer, the show was all about competing for material reward; for Barry, it seemed to spring from a genuine interest in knowing things. I will never forget how excited I found it to see a person who knew so much about so much.

His extraordinary run on that show started in 1960 and ended in 1968. Viewed from the present, that may not seem such a long time, but to orient it to my own life, it began when I was in Year 6 and ended when I was in my second year at Monash University. I did not imagine then that I would later be able to count him as a friend.

No one who lived through those years could forget the mark Barry made in his mighty struggle to save Ronald Ryan from the gallows. While Barry did not manage to save Ryan from the crazed vindictiveness of Henry Bolte, he won the larger fight: although

Ryan was eventually hanged in February 1967, he was the last person to be executed in Australia.

Barry once predicted that one day there would be more computers than cars in Tasmania. He was ridiculed for this.

The received wisdom then was in line with what had been said for years by people who should have known:

- In 1943 Thomas Watson, the chairman of IBM said: 'I think there is a world market for maybe five computers'.
- In 1957 the editor in charge of business books for Prentice Hall said: 'I have traveled the length and breadth of this country and talked with the best people, and I can assure you that data processing is a fad that won't last out the year'.
- And 20 years later, in 1977, the president of Digital Equipment Corporation, Ken Olson said: 'There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home'.

In this and many other things, Barry sees much further than any of us. It is no accident that he is the only Australian to be a Fellow of all four learned academies: the Australian Academy of Science, the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering.

In 1962 when I was in Year 8 at school and Barry was cleaning up all corners on *Pick-a-Box*, I discovered the writing of James Thurber, in particular, his *Fables for our Time* and *Further Fables for our Time*. These were little stories in the style of Aesop's fables: short, simple stories that generally had small animals as the main protagonists and ended with an explicit moral.

Thurber's reason for choosing that style was probably the same as Aesop's: it meant he could write subversive things but get under the radar of government censors. He wrote during the McCarthy era, when dissident thinking was even more dangerous and unwelcome in America than it is today.

In the last of his fables, Thurber tells of a lemming who, on his way home after a late night stumbles, hits his head and dazed, starts running towards the cliff. He accidentally starts a stampede. The other lemmings who follow him towards the cliff are no more certain why they are running than he is. They hurtle over the cliff, some shouting 'We are saved' and others shouting 'We are lost'.

The moral of the story was: *All men should strive to learn before they die, what they are running from, and to, and why.*

As a 12-year-old, I was greatly impressed by that moral. It has stood the test of time: I am still impressed by it, as the most unassailable single sentence of philosophical truth.

Thurber's question shares a frontier with the question all children ask as the miles roll tediously by: Are we there yet?

The answer depends on where you are trying to go.

For human beings, we discover we are there just as we go over the cliff. At that moment, it is a bit late to deal with Thurber's question.

For societies, Thurber's question is just as important, but the cliff is a much more abstract idea. But every society should ask: Are we there yet? Because asking that question focuses the mind on where we are trying to go.

Barry has a 17-year advantage on me, and his memory is far better stocked than mine. He would certainly have details that would illuminate the present landscape better

than I can. But even with my more limited vision, it looks as though Australia has not worked out what it is running from, or to, or why.

As a country, we are performing way below our potential. We have never been perfect. No country is. But I am old enough to remember how things were in the 1950s.

Post-war migration to Australia presented some interesting challenges for us.

I remember during the 1950s hearing people of my parents' generation talking about the DPs and dagos and wogs who were coming into the country. Old Australians complained that New Australians were too religious, they had too many kids, they didn't learn English, they didn't fit in. Their women dressed all in black from head to foot and their food was weird: coffee, with froth on the top. Spaghetti that didn't come from a tin. And, heaven help us, they ate squid.

They challenged our view of ourselves.

What I did not notice at the time was that, by small degrees, those same people began to adopt some of our ways, and we began to adopt some of theirs. It became smart and fashionable to eat at Italian and Greek restaurants.

The stereotypes of the 1950s faded, and our fear of wogs and dagos evaporated.

One way or another, things seemed to work out fairly well. Bit by bit the White Australia policy was dismantled. In 1967, we overwhelmingly supported a referendum to recognise Aboriginal Australians as part of the human population of the country that we had colonised in 1788.

The Pill and the Swinging Sixties did not spell the end of civilisation.

Despite the direst predictions, it turned out that 6 o'clock closing was not essential to the good functioning of society.

And some time in the 1960s the divide between Catholics and Protestants – something that had broken families in the past – faded away.

In the late 1970s there was another wave of new faces, this time refugees who had fled Vietnam and Cambodia. Fraser persuaded Whitlam that we should let Vietnamese boat people come to Australia. A lot came: about 25,000 a year for a few years. Fraser said we had been part of the problem and we had to be part of the solution.

The problem was brought to us in terrible images and in real time. For the first time in the history of human conflict, we saw events as they unfolded. Previously, we had to wait until the hostilities ended before we got the pictures. We only learned of the concentration camps when allied troops conquered Germany and the world was exposed to the skeletons, living and dead, in Belsen and Auschwitz and Dachau and other places, and suddenly we understood what the Jewish refugees had been running from when we turned our backs on them at the Evian conference in 1938.

But the Vietnam War came to us each night on the TV news. And newspapers showed us the appalling image of a Buddhist monk who set himself on fire in 1963; and by another photograph of a police chief blowing a man's brains out in the street.

Later, a photograph of a naked child running, terrified, from her burning village. And images of vast areas devastated by napalm.

It was to Fraser's credit that he persuaded Whitlam not to make a fuss about the arrival of refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia.

We took another small step forward in 1992, when the High Court departed from centuries of learning and held that Australia had not been *terra nullius* in 1788: that Aborigines had been here as the owners of the land when white settlers arrived. Rai Gaita illuminated the significance of the *Mabo* decision when he explained the thinking that had supported the doctrine of *terra nullius* for so long:

‘We love, but they “love”; we grieve, but they “grieve”; and of course we may be dispossessed, but they are “dispossessed”. That is why, as Justice Brennan said, racists are able “utterly to disregard” the sufferings of their victims. If they are to see the evil they do, they must first find it intelligible that their victims had inner lives of the kind which enable the wrongs they suffer to go deep’.

So far, so good. As a society, Australia had come to grips with a lot of contentious issues. It hadn’t been perfect, but it was not bad. And we knew that the idea of a fair go was in our DNA: it was not just a marketing idea.

But in 1998, something important and fundamental started to shift. Or perhaps that is just when I began to pay attention. By chance, I was briefed to act for the Maritime Union of Australia in what turned out to be a fairly contentious case.

Patrick was one of the two big stevedoring operations in Australia. They were caught out training an alternative, non-union workforce in Dubai and never offered a convincing explanation.

Early in 1998, rumours began to circulate that Patrick was about to do something drastic. As the weeks went by, the rumour firmed into a suggestion that Patrick was about to dismiss the entire unionised workforce on the Australian waterfront. Rumours are not evidence and so there was not much to work with. Innocent of any knowledge about the Workplace Relations Act, I asked what would happen if Patrick acted as the rumour suggested.

Those in the team, who were cleverer and better informed than I was, told me that the workforce would be reinstated, because of the provisions of the Workplace Relations Act. I asked innocently if there were any exceptions to that. They said that the only exception was if Patrick was going out of the business of stevedoring. Well, if it was to go out of the business of stevedoring, Patrick would have to sell its assets, so I suggested that we should write to Mr Corrigan asking for an undertaking not to dispose of Patrick’s assets and not to dismiss the workforce. If he did not give the undertaking sought, then his refusal would provide the evidence we needed.

He treated the request dismissively. He did not give the undertaking. We prepared a motion for injunctions, returnable on the Wednesday before Good Friday. The motion simply sought an order restraining Patrick from disposing of its assets or sacking its workforce.

On Wednesday morning, 8 April 1998, Australia woke to headlines saying that the entire workforce of Patrick Stevedores had been dismissed and had been replaced by an alternative, non-unionised workforce. When I arrived in court, Counsel for Patrick told me that administrators had been appointed to Patrick Stevedores. This was a



surprising turn of events. My time practising as a commercial junior in the 1970s and 1980s made me think immediately of Bottom of the Harbour schemes. I thought that probably the court would be unimpressed by Patrick acting precipitately and doing the very thing that the court had been asked to restrain.

The judge granted a holding injunction and directed that the matter should come back for further argument after Easter. Patrick was required to provide us with all relevant documents showing what had gone on.

The picture revealed by those documents was truly astounding.

The previous year, in September 1997, the assets of the main stevedoring companies had been sold to new companies and the resulting credit balances were sent upstream to a holding company. The companies that had always employed the workforce – apparently large and successful stevedoring companies – were left with two assets only: their workforce, and contracts to provide the workforce to the new owners of the assets. These labour hire contracts were, in effect, terminable at will by the company with the assets. The employees had no job security whatever and no means of knowing the fact.

The effective result of this arrangement was that the labour hire company could be jettisoned without harming the enterprise. This made it possible to dismiss the entire workforce in a single stroke. On the ground, nothing at all had changed: Patrick Stevedores still had the appearance of prosperity that it had enjoyed for many decades, but it was a mere shell. The workers were hostage to a corporate shadow and a CEO with a secret plan.

The only party bound to gain from this strategy was the company that owned the assets. The only people bound to lose were the employees. As it happened, an obliging Federal Government had agreed in advance to provide the labour hire company with enough cash to pay the accrued entitlements of the employees when the workforce was sacked en masse. Thus, the risks associated with the stevedoring venture were transferred to the workers and underwritten by a government enthusiastic for waterfront reform at any price.

The case ran at an astonishing pace. We resumed argument before Justice North on the 15th April. The argument ran for three days. On the 21st April, Justice North delivered his judgment and granted injunctions pending trial. At 3 o’clock that afternoon, the Full Federal Court convened. They ordered a stay of Justice North’s orders pending appeal.

The Full Court appeal began the next day, 22nd April, and ran over to the 23rd April. At 7 o’clock that night the Full Court gave judgment, upholding the order of Justice North. At 10 pm, Justice Hayne in the High Court granted a stay of the Full Court’s orders, pending an application for special leave to the High Court.

The following Monday, 27th April, the seven judges of the High Court convened in Canberra and began hearing Patrick Stevedores’ application for special leave to appeal from the Full Federal Court’s orders. The application ran until the afternoon of Thursday 30th April.

The following Tuesday, 4th May 1998, the High Court delivered judgments upholding the judgment of Justice North. The process of going from judge at first instance to appeal to a final hearing by 7 judges of the High Court took three weeks. Ordinarily it would take between three and five years.

For me at least it was a shock to learn that any Australian government would conspire to break its own laws in an attempt to break the union movement: it's not how patrician blue-bloods are meant to behave. But the Coalition government argued all the way to the High Court that it was OK. They lost.

Then things got worse.

Since the Russians had left Afghanistan, the Taliban had escalated their attacks on the Hazara minority. Millions of Hazara fled Afghanistan. A few thousand reached Australia.

In August 2001, the *Palapa I* was carrying 438 Hazaras towards Australia.

It began to sink. Australia asked the Norwegian cargo ship *Tampa* to rescue them. But when it tried to put them ashore at Christmas Island, Australia sent the SAS to take command of the *Tampa* at gunpoint.

John Howard said the people rescued by *Tampa* would never set foot in Australia. He said any asylum seeker trying to get protection in Australia would be sent to Nauru: a tiny Pacific Republic with a population of 10,000 people and an area of just 21 square kilometres. He ordered that no humanising images of the Hazara refugees were to be allowed.

Then September 11 happened. And the Liberal government headed into the 2001 election on the indecent slogan that 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come'. Liberal propaganda called asylum seekers 'illegals' and 'queue jumpers' and said that asylum seekers had thrown their children into the sea.

The Labor Party said nothing to contradict the lies. The Liberals, it seemed, had turned into a party that was prepared to lie to the electorate and gain popularity by mistreating the most helpless people in the world.

For the next few years the cruelty and dishonesty continued. Asylum seekers, innocent of any offence, were held in detention for years until they collapsed into hopelessness and despair.

A little girl, ten years old, held in detention in Melbourne hanged herself.

A little boy, eight years old, held in detention in South Australia slashed his arms with razor wire.

A man who had been in detention for five years cut himself so often he had ten metres of scarring on his body, but the government insisted that the only treatment he needed was solitary confinement and Panadol.

The Liberal government argued all the way to the High Court that a man who had not committed any offence and was not seen as a risk to anyone, who had been refused a visa but could not be removed from Australia because he was stateless, that this man could remain in detention for the rest of his life.

What was shocking was not only that the government won, but that a Liberal government was prepared to make the argument in the first place.

The Immigration Department held Cornelia Rau in detention for more than a year, in wretched, degrading conditions. She was filmed as she was dragged naked and protesting from her cell in Baxter detention centre, being manhandled by a group of guards.

Eventually the Department discovered that she had a visa and was entitled all along to be in Australia. It paid her a huge sum in compensation for the brutality and humiliation she had suffered.

We deported Vivian Alvarez-Solon from Australia and dumped her in the Philippines. The Department then realised that she was legally entitled to be in Australia: but it ignored that fact and did nothing to correct its mistake for the next two years.

We ignored the fact that David Hicks was being held and tortured in Guantanamo Bay by our allies, the USA. The Americans told him that even if he was charged and found not guilty, he would not be released from Guantanamo. We knew this.

Hicks was held without charge for five years and the Australian government did nothing to help him. The Howard government eventually interceded on his behalf when public opinion swung in his favour, and Howard saw that there was an advantage to be had from helping him.

Then Kevin Rudd became leader of the Labor Party and won government in late 2007. He promised a better, more humane policy concerning refugees. And he delivered it.

But then Tony Abbott became leader of the party that still called itself Liberal.

He re-started the anti-refugee rhetoric. Rudd responded by attacking people smugglers. He called them 'vermin' and the ' vilest form of human life'. He seems to have forgotten that his moral hero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was also a people smuggler.

The attack on people smugglers was ham-fisted at best and hypocritical at worst. For a start, it lumped all people smugglers into one irredeemable moral group: they were the 'scum of the earth'. When today's refugees wash up on our shores, Abbott and Morrison speak with concern about the boat people who die in their attempt to get to safety, but their concern is utterly false. Instead of attacking the refugees directly, which is their real purpose, they attack the people smugglers instead.

Because aren't people smugglers the worst people imaginable? We overlook the fact that Oskar Schindler was a people smuggler, and so was Gustav Schroeder, captain of the ill-fated MS *St Louis* that left Hamburg in May 1939 with a cargo of 900 Jews looking for help. He tried every trick in the book to land them somewhere safe, but was pushed away. He ended up putting them ashore again in Antwerp, and more than half of them perished in concentration camps.

We also overlook the fact that without the help of people smugglers, refugees are left to face persecution or death at the hands of whatever tyranny threatens them.

Many recent boat people are Hazaras from Afghanistan. They are targeted ruthlessly by the Taliban who are bent on ethnic cleansing. The Hazara population of Afghanistan has halved over the past decade, as Hazaras escape or are killed. The Taliban want to get rid of all of them. We have overlooked, it seems, that we are locked in mortal combat with the Taliban; and that my enemy's enemy is probably my friend.

For a couple more elections and a couple more fractured administrations, things kept sliding to the right. It is a striking fact that the Labor Party's stance on refugees is well to the right of John Madigan – a DLP Senator.

The Pacific Solution was begun by Howard's Liberal government in 2001; it was abolished by Rudd's Labor government in 2008, and it was re-started by Gillard's Labor government in 2012. In 2013, Rudd topped it with the PNG Arrangement.

Then, in 2013, we had an awful election campaign in which Rudd and Abbott competed with each other in their promises to mistreat asylum seekers. It's tempting to think that Pauline Hanson had been asked to help Rudd, she might have been concerned that he was too far to the right for her taste.

The Liberals won the election. Australia lost.

The Labor Party lost a lot of talent when half its front bench followed Gillard out the door.

The Liberals quickly showed their true colours when we learned that senior members of the new government had been rorting their parliamentary expenses. That was no surprise: but it was interesting to see that the new Attorney General was involved. Haughty, supercilious, self-righteous George Brandis had elbowed his way to the trough with the best of them.

After all, wasn't Brandis the one who had ferociously attacked Peter Slipper for visiting a winery and charging the taxi ride to the Commonwealth? Brandis went to a friend's wedding and billed the Commonwealth \$1600. When he was found out two years later, Brandis repaid the \$1600 but said he had done nothing wrong.

Peter Slipper is still facing criminal charges for much less.

And Tony Abbott has billed the Commonwealth for every fun run and lycra cycle fest, not to mention his Tamworth photo opportunity which apparently cost us about ten grand. Over the last couple of years, he has had his hands in our pockets for about \$3 million.

Just last week, Scott Morrison issued a directive to Immigration Department staff that boat people were to be referred to as 'Illegal Maritime Arrivals'. Calling boat people 'illegals' is now official Coalition policy, it seems.

It is a lie.

Scott Morrison and Tony Abbott know it is a lie.

But they lie to us deliberately in order to dehumanise asylum seekers. That way they can mistreat asylum seekers and gain political advantage from doing so.

What is striking about the 'illegals' lie is that Abbott and Morrison, and others in Cabinet, claim to be devout Christians.

But their stealing from us, and lying to us, and their claim to Christian belief smells like hypocrisy.

Since very recently, people held in our detention centres are again being addressed by use of their camp number, rather than by name. There are 1700 children



in detention – innocent children, jailed indefinitely. Ostensibly for our protection. It is monstrous.

So here's the problem.

By 1998 we had stopped running from our fear of foreigners and our fear of Communism; we had come to enjoy the idea that the world saw us as part Crocodile Dundee and part Jack Thompson; part Kath and Kim, and part Edna Everage.

It's a strange mix, but kind of endearing. It was a good place to be.

Now we have a hard right-wing Liberal government led by

dishonest, self-seeking hypocrites.

Now we have a weakened, right-wing Labor opposition.

Now we believe it is good policy to mistreat people who are escaping persecution.

Now we are a country which is seen overseas as selfish, greedy, and cruel and we have no political leadership at all.

We are well into the process of redefining Australia and what it is to be Australian. Most of us have not noticed because, for most of us, life is good. But a surprising number of people have admitted to me that they are ashamed to be Australian.

The sight of the major parties competing in their promises of greater cruelty to boat people was new in Australian politics. We have never been perfect, but this was something without precedent.

It is painful to recognise that we are now a country that would brutalise one group in the hope that other people in distress will choose not to ask us for help.

What are we running from? No one can say.

It's not hard to see what we might be running to: but why?

The new path we are on has plenty of precedents in history. We know what can happen when governments conspire to break their own laws. We know what can happen when a society thinks it is acceptable to see one group as less human than the rest, and use that as an excuse to mistreat them. We know what can happen when governments start stealing from the people and lying to them.

We know where those paths lead.

Are we there yet? Not yet. Not quite.

It is not too late to turn back. ■

## PAYPAL ACCOUNT

The church has now opened a PayPal account. If you have access to PayPal – all you need do is log on and the church's PayPal address is [admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au](mailto:admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au) Visit our web page and click on the link. You will be able to pay your subscription and make donations.



AUGUST 2012:  
75 POINTS INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS (IPA)  
THINK TANK – RADICALLY REFORM AUSTRALIA

**WISH LIST**

**KEYNOTE SPEAKERS: Tony Abbott, Rupert Murdoch,  
Gina Rinehart, MC Andrew Bolt**



- Repeal the carbon tax, and don't replace it. It will be one thing to remove the burden of the carbon tax from the Australian economy. But if it is just replaced by another costly scheme, most of the benefits will be undone.
- Abolish the Department of Climate Change
- Abolish the Clean Energy Fund
- Repeal Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act
- Abandon Australia's bid for a seat on the United Nations Security Council
- Repeal the renewable energy target
- Return income taxing powers to the states
- Abolish the Commonwealth Grants Commission
- Abolish the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
- Withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol
- Introduce fee competition to Australian universities
- Repeal the National Curriculum
- Introduce competing private secondary school curriculums
- Abolish the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)
- Eliminate laws that require radio and television broadcasters to be 'balanced'
- Abolish television spectrum licensing and devolve spectrum management to the common law
- End local content requirements for Australian television stations
- Eliminate family tax benefits
- Abandon the paid parental leave scheme
- Means-test Medicare
- End all corporate welfare and subsidies by closing the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education
- Introduce voluntary voting
- End mandatory disclosures on political donations
- End media blackout in final days of election campaigns
- End public funding to political parties
- Remove anti-dumping laws
- Eliminate media ownership restrictions
- Abolish the Foreign Investment Review Board
- Eliminate the National Preventative Health Agency
- Cease subsidising the car industry
- Formalise a one-in, one-out approach to regulatory reduction
- Rule out federal funding for 2018 Commonwealth Games
- Deregulate the parallel importation of books
- End preferences for Industry Super Funds in workplace relations laws
- Legislate a cap on government spending and tax as a percentage of GDP
- Legislate a balanced budget amendment which strictly limits the size of budget deficits and the period the federal government can be in deficit
- Force government agencies to put all of their spending online in a searchable database
- Repeal plain packaging for cigarettes and rule it out for all other products, including alcohol and fast food
- Reintroduce voluntary student unionism at universities
- Introduce a voucher scheme for secondary schools
- Repeal the alcopops tax
- Introduce a special economic zone in the north of Australia including:
  - a) lower personal income tax for residents
  - b) significantly expanded 457 Visa programs for workers
  - c) encourage the construction of dams
- Repeal the mining tax
- Devolve environmental approvals for major projects to the states
- Introduce a single rate of income tax with a generous tax-free threshold
- Cut company tax to an internationally competitive rate of 25 per cent
- Cease funding the Australia Network
- Privatised Australia Post
- Privatised Medibank
- Break up the ABC and put out to tender each individual function
- Privatised SBS
- Reduce the size of the public service from current levels of more than 260,000 to at least the 2001 low of 212,784
- Repeal the Fair Work Act
- Allow individuals and employers to negotiate directly terms of employment that suit them
- Encourage independent contracting by overturning new regulations designed to punish contractors
- Abolish the Baby Bonus
- Abolish the First Home Owners' Grant
- Allow the Northern Territory to become a state
- Halve the size of the Coalition front bench from 32 to 16
- Remove all remaining tariff and non-tariff barriers to international trade
- Slash top public servant salaries to much lower international standards, like in the United States
- End all public subsidies to sport and the arts
- Privatised the Australian Institute of Sport
- End all hidden protectionist measures, such as preferences for local manufacturers in government tendering
- Abolish the Office for Film and Literature Classification
- Rule out any government-supported or mandated internet censorship
- Means test tertiary student loans
- Allow people to opt out of superannuation in exchange for promising to forgo any government income support in retirement
- Immediately halt construction of the National Broadband Network and privatise any sections that have already been built
- End all government-funded Nanny State advertising
- Reject proposals for compulsory food and alcohol labelling
- Privatised the CSIRO
- Defund Harmony Day
- Close the Office for Youth
- Privatised the Snowy-Hydro Scheme

I am sure I have spoken about democracy from this rostrum before, but no matter, because it is such an important issue. Everyone supports democracy in theory; it is the deeds that create the problem. Democracy is probably one of the most complex and misunderstood of all the issues confronting us. For example, if I asked you whether we live in a democracy, you would probably answer yes, and in many ways we do. But do we in reality? And if we do, how adequate is it? Does it work for all or does it work well for some and not for others?

Generally, we don't talk about democracy. It is a given, we have it, it seems to work, and the old saying, *if it ain't broke why fix it, usually fits*. But it is my view that it is broke, it ain't working, and it does need fixing because you can't have democracy without truth.

Democracy describes a form of government with fundamental features such as competitive elections, freedom of speech (especially in political affairs), freedom of the press, and some degree of rule of law. We do have some of these, so why isn't democracy working for us? Let's start with the question: democracy for whom?

Does democracy in our society serve us all equally? Well, it doesn't serve the unemployed who can't get work, the hungry who don't get enough food, the sick who can't get adequate healthcare unless they are privately insured. It doesn't serve those facing court that can't afford legal representation. It doesn't serve the Aboriginal community and it certainly doesn't serve those seeking asylum in our country.

The separation of church and state has certainly disappeared in education and freedom of assembly is constantly under threat. There is little democracy for the homeless.

To understand the true nature of our democracy, I believe we need to differentiate between those who rule society and control our democratic rights and those of us who are ruled. Sissela Bok, a Swedish philosopher, said in 1982:

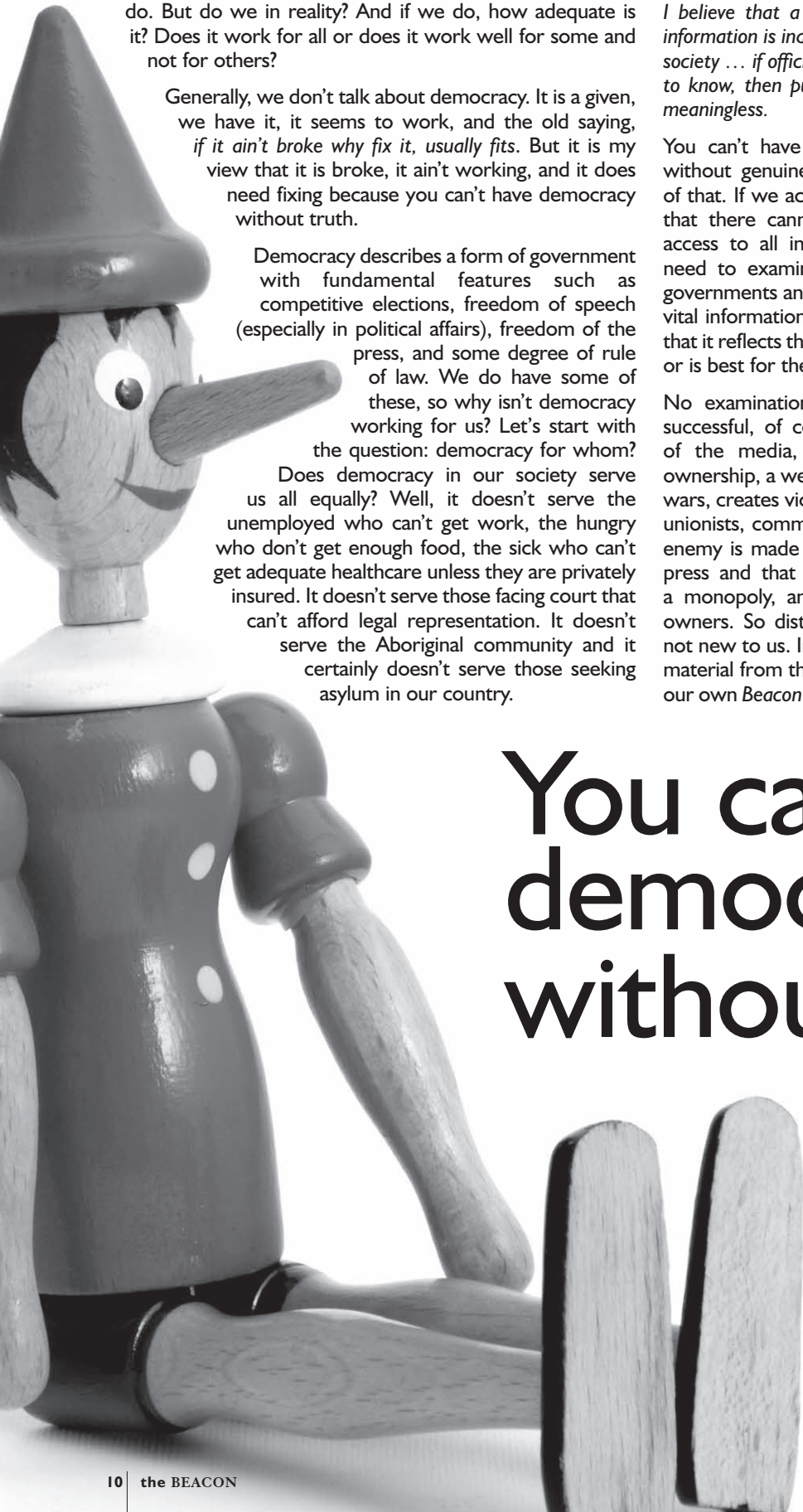
*I believe that a guarantee of public access to government information is indispensable in the long run for any democratic society ... if officials make public only what they want citizens to know, then publicity becomes a sham and accountability meaningless.*

You can't have democracy without truth or, it seems, without genuine information, and we get precious little of that. If we accept Bok's statement, and it seems logical that there cannot be a real democracy without public access to all important information that affects us, we need to examine whether in our so-called democracy, governments and those they represent are indeed keeping vital information from us, or are so distorting information that it reflects their aims and objectives and not what is true or is best for the majority of the people.

No examination of this subject of democracy can be successful, of course, without a recognition of the role of the media, that extraordinary weapon of private ownership, a weapon that decides elections, justifies unjust wars, creates victims for us to hate, such as Muslims, trade unionists, communists, so that our recognition of the real enemy is made more difficult. We know there is no free press and that our media is privately owned, is almost a monopoly, and reflects the reactionary politics of its owners. So distortions and suppression of the truth are not new to us. Indeed, in this church alone we have ample material from the 1940s onward to substantiate this claim: our own *Beacon* has proudly produced opposing material in

# You can't have democracy without truth

*by Marion Harper*



its search for truth, and with time, our position has always been vindicated.

Melbourne Unitarians know you can't have democracy without truth because our church has, over the years of its existence, sought the truth to serve humanity and consistently exposed the distortions of truth by many in power. We know that those in power have utilised many weapons apart from the media. These include historians whose skills they purchase to distort the truth, big business' control, corrupt politicians and, indeed, some corrupt union leaders. So, we can agree that for democracy to really work we must have the truth, but seeking and finding that truth is neither easy nor is it always palatable to us all when we do find it. Some would rather not know the truth because finding it places on us a responsibility to act. This is amply summed up in our church creed of not only seeking the truth but using that truth to serve humanity. Last year I was at the Hay Literary Festival in the UK with a journalist friend. We heard a South African politician speak of his personal experience with the corrupt arms industry. I commented, 'That was an eye opener', and her response was, 'I wish I hadn't heard him, I don't want to know, it's easier not to'. Some believe we don't have the right to know nor the right to pursue the truth. Or if we do, we should not reveal it.

Some years ago, the Peter Abrehart and I were at an ANZUUA Conference in Adelaide. It was just prior to the invasion of Iraq by the governments of the West. We went armed with a resolution from our church opposing an invasion of Iraq based on what we believed at that time were lies (our views were later vindicated). A delegate from the Sydney Church told us that the conference shouldn't support our resolution because it was not the business of churches to discuss political issues. Some in our own church may share a similar view. I would argue that a church consists of people who are all affected by political decisions and that we need the truth about these decisions if we genuinely seek democracy. Because you can't have democracy without truth!

Take the Vietnam War – it taught many of us many lessons. There are no better examples of duplicity, doctoring of information, media manipulation and lies than those that abounded at that time. This was another war that was to bring democracy to the people, we were told. If we didn't act, Australia could be invaded by the Chinese, they told us. The democrats were in the south; the yellow hordes (yes, they really used that expression) were the north. Few were the voices ringing out with the truth. That this was an imperialist war, that it was never justified, that men, women and children died savagely and for nothing, that a small country was violated, decimated and almost destroyed and continues to suffer from chemical weapons (yes, they were used by the US) and we supported the vile and reactionary leaders who pretended they were democratising Vietnam and defending us from communism. *Beacon* exposed the duplicity, but most didn't.

We now know that our words and actions were the truth because time and released information tell us so, but those who bravely spoke out at the time, including this church, were vilified and our words rejected as unpatriotic and communistic. Those voices ringing out with the truth, many in the Labor movement, and of course *Beacon*, were accused of disloyalty to their country. Democracy seemed far away when young Australians were selected by lottery to die in a war in Vietnam that they mainly opposed and to murder young Vietnamese just like themselves.

Martin Luther King Jr said: 'Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable ... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.'

Indeed, it does take courage and determination to seek the truth and thus defend people's democracy. Those that do so are often marginalised, vilified, their character attacked, and feverishly the ruling class, and their tools the politicians, the media, courts and police are used to this end; we need only look at Bradley Manning and Julian Assange to see examples of this. When people emerge to speak the truth a concerted campaign begins, not just to deny their words, but to undermine their character so that their truths can be hidden in a deluge of personal abuse and lying character assassination. This is the way democracy is undermined by propaganda.

'The enormous gap between what US leaders do in the world and what Americans think their leaders are doing is one of the great propaganda accomplishments' (Michael Parenti).

You can't have democracy without truth: It is the concealment or consistent distortion of truth that destroys democracy in our society. Fortunately, sometimes those who do speak out are difficult to vilify and their truth emerges unchallenged. Such was one of America's genuine heroes, Major General Smedley D Butler, who revealed in his memoirs the true, abhorrent nature of Washington's foreign policy. Awarded twice with a Medal of Honor, Butler in his later life was scathing about official US government ideological pretensions, such as the 'Manifest Destiny'. In the United States in the 19th century, Manifest Destiny was the widely held belief that American settlers were destined to expand across the continent. The belief has been described as follows: Historians have for the most part agreed that there are three basic themes to Manifest Destiny:

1. The special virtues of the American people and their institutions.
2. America's mission to redeem and remake the world in the image of America.
3. A divine destiny under God's direction to accomplish this wonderful task [that presumed to enlighten the rest of the world on the principles of democracy, human rights and international law].

Under the veneer of maintaining foreign policy relations, Butler knew from his own sordid experience that Washington's conduct was in essence to provide the military wing of American capitalism.

Butler led countless military operations in Central America and the Caribbean as a US Marines Corp commander in the era of 'gunboat diplomacy' during the early 1900s. Years after his retirement, he spoke out candidly and ruefully of his highly decorated military service in a book entitled *War is a Racket*. Here is how Butler characterised with unsparing words his service for country in 1935, five years before his death and now playing his role in bringing the truth and supporting genuine democracy:

*War is just a racket. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of people. Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses.*

*I believe in adequate defense at the coastline and nothing else. If a nation comes over here to fight, then we'll fight.*

The trouble with America is that when the dollar only earns 6 percent over here, then it gets restless and goes overseas to get 100 percent. Then the flag follows the dollar and the soldiers follow the flag.

I wouldn't go to war again as I have done to protect some lousy investment of the bankers. There are only two things we should fight for. One is the defense of our homes and the other is the Bill of Rights. War for any other reason is simply a racket.

There isn't a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It has its 'finger men' to point out enemies, its 'muscle men' to destroy enemies, its 'brain men' to plan war preparations, and a 'Big Boss' Super-Nationalistic-Capitalism.

It may seem odd for me, a military man to adopt such a comparison. Truthfulness compels me to. I spent thirty-three years and four months in active military service as a member of this country's most agile military force, the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from Second Lieutenant to Major General. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.

I suspected I was just part of a racket at the time. Now I am sure of it. Like all the members of the military profession, I never had a thought of my own until I left the service. My mental faculties remained in suspended animation while I

obeyed the orders of higher ups. This is typical with everyone in the military service.

I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

During those years, I had, as the boys in the back room would say, a swell racket. Looking back on it, I feel that I could have given Al Capone a few hints.

Major General Butler learned from his own experience that you can't have democracy without truth. We live in a society, indeed in a world based on profit, exploitation, aggression, suppression of the majority and constant unjust wars: Iraq, Lybia, Afghanistan and now Syria. These are the antithesis of democracy. That is why the role of our church is so very important. Small though we are our voice must be loud and must continue to ring out through Beacon, Social Justice Committee and as individuals in defence of peace, truth, social justice and genuine democracy. As Albert Einstein said: 'The important thing is not to stop questioning.' ■

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## THE FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF MILWAUKEE

### Unitarian Universalists Celebrate Christmas? Why?

#### *The Reverend Andrew C Kennedy*

*'I don't get you people,' exclaimed the Episcopal priest. 'Eleven months of the year Jesus Christ is practically taboo, and then in December you folks go all out: Christmas anthems, Christmas carols, Christmas pageants, Christmas Eve candlelight services. What gives with you people, anyway?'*

This, it seems to me, is a perfectly legitimate question – one that you may well have asked yourself. I hear variations on it every year. Most of us, as Unitarian Universalists, are not Christians, after all. That is, we tend not to regard Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

That said, we need to be careful here. That is, we need to remember that, in fact, some of us do regard Jesus as our Lord and Savior. But it is factually true that Jesus, for most of us, is regarded as a great spiritual leader, but not

as our Lord and Savior. So, if all this is true, then how can we legitimately celebrate Christmas – literally, the Christ's mass? What right do we have to celebrate Christmas? Isn't it sort of like showing up at a birthday party when we hardly even know the guest of honor and we haven't been invited?

Well, to answer these questions, first of all, let us briefly look at the history of Christmas.

In ages past, tens of thousands of years ago, long before Jesus, our ancestors feared the winter. As the sun diminished and the days grew shorter and colder, life diminished and the shadows grew long. As the sun retreated, all nature seemed to shrivel and die. Our ancestors, understandably, grew anxious. In their anxiety, many turned to various magical rites, which they hoped and believed would somehow encourage the sun to return to a more favorable position. As the years went by,

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they remembered and watched for the day when the sun would start to increase its light. That day (when it came) became a special day, the Winter Solstice.

In northern Europe great bonfires were lighted that day to defy the winter and to encourage the sun. The sun was thought of as turning on a wheel, 'huel' it was called; and, thus, 'the turning time,' the 'Yuletide,' was celebrated with fires and lights, as it is even today.

The Druids on this special day of the Winter Solstice honored the mistletoe plant, for they believed that there clearly must be some magic in a plant that stays green and fruitful during the winter, while the others die.

Indeed, there grew to be an amazing variety of cults and observances related to the decline of vegetation in winter and its revival in the spring, and understandably so, since no other phenomenon of nature was as critical to their survival.

Around the Mediterranean – in Persia and Egypt, in Rome and Greece – people celebrated the rebirth of the sun and the return of vegetation in dramatic myths of the Great Mother Goddess and her son or consort. These myths, dramatized in ritual 'mysteries' and elaborate festivals, had a powerful popular appeal. In Egypt, the sun at the winter solstice was represented as a baby born that day. The priests retreated into cave shrines, out of which they came at midnight crying, 'The virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!' The birth of the immensely popular Persian sun deity, Mithra, was celebrated on none other than December 25. Mithra's miraculous birth was said to have been witnessed by shepherds come with gifts to adore the wonder-child.

In Rome, there developed a great holiday, called Saturnalia, full of feasting and special foods, and accompanied by the exchange of gifts.

Now, most of these customs (many of which are quite familiar, of course) were established long before Christmas had even been given a thought.

In fact, it wasn't until 337 AD that the authorities of the Christian church succeeded, finally, in refashioning the ancient pagan Winter Solstice celebration into a Christian celebration of Jesus' birthday. They had tried, in fact, to halt these great winter celebrations because they were directed towards the pagan nature gods. But customs of thousands of years do not die easily. So compromises were made, with the pagan gods and goddesses eventually being discreetly transformed into various Christian saints and the whole holiday being ever so gradually transformed and incorporated into the Christian calendar. No one really knew when Jesus was born, so December 25, the day long associated with the birth of the sun, was decided upon as the date of Jesus' birthday.

So, at least in terms of its ancient origins, Christmas is not primarily a specifically Christian celebration. As one scholar put it, 'Christmas is a microcosm of world religions ... It is a river into which have flowed tributaries from every side, from oriental religion, from Greek and Roman civilization, from Celtic, Teutonic, Slav and probably pre-Aryan society, all mingling their waters so that it is often hard to discover the far-away springs.' ■

## from our readers



### Dear Editor

Please find enclosed my yearly sub and a bit extra.

Thank you for all the wonderful articles in the *Beacon*.

It brings some sense to the mad, mad world.

I really didn't want to vote; however, on reading your article of the August edition, the decision not to vote is not an argument for intelligent people.

You are so right – there is bad but there is worse.

**B Fuller-Quinn, NSW**

### Dear friends

Please find enclosed cheque for \$10 subscription to the *Beacon*.

The articles re Edward Snowden are so valuable.

Regards

**F Whitwood, Vic**

### Dear Editor

Many thanks for your informative, thought-provoking publication – the hard work, dedication of all involved in the *Beacon* is much appreciated. Long may you continue to seek the truth.

Regards

**K Harris, NSW**

### Dear Editor

Love your illuminating magazine – would love to attend one of your concerts.

After the last few years of 'gobbits of spew', I wonder if something could be written about 'solutions to some of today's problems e.g. homelessness, or our culture of drunken behaviour concerning young people who are perhaps too young to see the consequences of this behaviour.

I'm told that in a village, Duras, in France, young, old (indeed all the folk) gather to enjoy Friday night together without the need to be drunk. Could we do that in Australia?

Thanking you

**S Angus, Vic**

# from our readers



## Dear Editor

Without the *Beacon*, I doubt if I would know what is going on in the world today. I have enclosed \$50 for a donation, plus \$10 for a sub for my sister (pensioner) who can become aware also.

**D Bruce, WA**

## The Beacon Board

Re your request for new members appeal, may I submit the name of a potential client, a relative, and recipient of lots of *Beacon* copies that I have passed on to him over the last six months. I rang him tonight and quoted your appeal letter and the first article in the October journal, 'Syria (another Iraq in the making)', plus the irradiated food item, being a family with a keen interest in healthy living, this stole the show.

As an orchardist and gardener, I have depended on dimethoate and fenthion to protect my tomatoes, capsicum, stone fruit, apples, pears, quinces against the ravages of fruit fly and have found them successful always. They were taken off the market because of a perceived health risk. However, if used correctly, mixing the right quantity, wearing overalls, face mask and goggles, washing after use, self and clothing, and not spraying on a windy day and maintaining the accepted withholding period. At 91 years and a gardener all my life, the potential hazard of these sprays is negligible compared with the unknown effects of irradiation.

**B Yates, NSW**

## To the Editor (or Editors) of the Beacon

Please send an introductory full year's subscription to the *Beacon* to an associate in Launceston. This erudite gentleman and long-term member of the Theosophy Society in Launceston is currently languishing in hospital but should be feeling a lot better by the time the first copy of the *Beacon* reaches him.

Please send a friend in Perth (Tasmania) the offer of three free copies of the *Beacon*. He is also a long-term member of the Theosophy Society in Launceston and I think he might be very interested in receiving the *Beacon*.

All the best with the readership drive.

Regards

**P Haslem, Tasmania**

## Beacon Editors

I have recently renewed my subscription to the *Beacon*. In response to your letter asking readers to nominate others for a free three-issue trial, I have been asking people I know who I think might be interested.

A friend has recently finished and received her doctorate and is settling into post student life after long years of hard study for her PhD. She emailed that she has more time and energy for other things now and would be interested to receive three free issues of the *Beacon*.

I hope that the readership drive is successful.

Regards

**P Haslem, Tasmania**

## Beacon Editors

Thanks for all your good work.

Included is the renewal of my subscription for the *Beacon*. I also include an introductory subscription for an associate. He does good work for the Theosophy Society and Tasmanian Greens here in Launceston and was interested in the *Beacon*.

Regards

**P Haslem Tasmania**

## Dear Editor

A simple way to reduce carbon emissions. In the fight against climate change, one largely forgotten culprit is cows. They may look innocent, but they're responsible for huge amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. Adding up the acres of land razed for pastures and growing their feed, plus the massive amounts of methane bovines emit from both ends, cows leave enormous carbon hoof prints.

But Robert Goodland, author of a new article called 'A fresh look at livestock greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation potential in Europe', has some very good news. According to his analysis, if we replace just 25 per cent of livestock production with alternatives, we can meet the goals of recent international climate treaty negotiations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is applicable throughout the world, including in Australia.

And we don't have to wait for government, industry, or new technology to make this happen. While industry incentives would help, a major change can happen right on your dinner plate. Reducing meat consumption not only lowers that carbon hoof print, but also frees up land that can be reverted to grassland and forest habitat to give wild species back their homes.

**Steven Katsineris, Vic**

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.

# from our readers



## Dear Editors

Please find enclosed my cheque for \$40.00 for 2 magazines for the next year (new addressee above). Here is a letter I drafted last July and obviously did not send! I thought I would divide my comments so you could pick one out if you needed to.

Every time I read your magazine I want to write. Why? Your magazine is inspiring. It not only informs but it does, as it says, seek the truth and serve humanity. Just like your publishing house did in 1974, stick its neck out to publish The Pentagon Papers, when no other publishing house would touch them. Beacon Press was not intimidated by the courts or the FBI who used all sorts of tactics to stop you publishing them as reported by Unitarian leader Robert West on [democracynow.org](http://democracynow.org) who retold your story, and together with Daniel Ellsberg and Senator Mike Gravel helped to bring an end to the Vietnam War.

Your June cover story really does point to the truth of where our so-called health system is heading. If any of your readers saw Michael Moore's film *Sicko*, they will understand that we are being forced into a copycat American health system.

I live on the Gold Coast. On the 8 December 2008 a letter was sent to the Gold Coast Hospital from my optometrist informing them that the cataract in my left eye needed to be removed as my sight had worsened. I paid well over \$3,000 to have my right cataract removed privately in 2006, so I thought I would try the public health care system, thinking I may have to wait up to a year.

It was finally removed on the 6 March 2013, 4 years and 3 months after the letter was sent, by this time my left eye was almost blind. In Britain, the waiting time on the NHS is no more than 3 months. According to the Fred Hollows Foundation, the operation costs \$25! I remember him saying that the cost of a lens was 5 cents.

Here are the costs I was quoted, had I had my cataract operated on privately in 2011:

Theatre fee – \$1,445 – In 2012 this fee had gone up to \$1,800.

Surgical fee – \$1,200 – This amount had to be paid at least one week prior.

Anaesthetist – \$350

Total: \$3,995

The 2006 private operation took (from the moment I filled in the form at the reception desk to my release after the cup of tea and 2-biscuit pack) approximately 1 hour. The operation itself lasted a few minutes – less than the length of 2 Strauss waltzes on my iPod (very calming by the way). The anaesthetist forgot to give me an injection 20 minutes prior, so as I was being pushed into the operating theatre he remembered to give me one, which of course did not work till after the op! But I paid him \$350 for it! That's private health Australia for you. I was far better looked after by the public system.

One has to wonder how on earth Cuba, with all those terrible sanctions imposed on her for 60 years, manages to provide her citizens with free health and dental care. One thousand two hundred doctors graduated this year – their 6-year training is free. Citizens pay for their medication but don't break the bank paying for them. Yes, the average citizen's pay packet is very much smaller than ours but with it comes free health, education through to university and the arts. There are more classically trained ballet dancers in Cuba per population than anywhere in the world. They don't pay to be buried or pay to be born, and as for insurance, they don't need it. If one's house is destroyed, the government helps to rebuild it. Prisoners make the blocks; I saw them do it. At least people can sleep at night and not worry about a roof over their head or what will happen if they or their children get sick. They are sending 3,800 health workers to Brazil in the next few years. Maybe they have a different code of ethics?

Ann Jurrjens, Qld



## Compliments of the Season

On behalf of us all here at the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church, please accept our thanks for your continued support for our journal *Beacon*. The *Beacon* has been produced for almost 74 years, and in November of this year, we celebrated the 161st anniversary of our church in Melbourne (1852).

Our 'little church in East Melbourne' has a proud history of 'Seeking the truth and serving humanity', which is not a passive declaration but rather a call for action in working towards, in the words of the American Unitarian hymn, 'A world made free for all her people one'.

When we wish you all a happy and peaceful festive season we cannot fail to remember that joy and peace are, at best, a distant dream for a large part of humanity. We must continue to work towards a world free of exploitation, intolerance, and war, and not forget the words of Martin Luther King Jr:

*We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.*

**Peter Abrehart (Chairperson of the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church and President of ANZUUA) on behalf of the Beacon Editorial Board.**

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## Beacon Editorial Board

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Marion Harper

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Julie Stafford

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