



## Do Justice!!

*"Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly With Your God" Micah 6:8*

### A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the last edition of Do Justice for 2017. This newsletter, prepared by Auckland Diocesan Social Justice Group, looks at various Social Justice Issues.

#### **How much "Foreign" interference is there in the Electoral Process.**

These days no country, with the possible exception of North Korea, exist in total isolation. During the "Cold War" the Soviet Union and its allies tried to limit news from outside but in the end failed as the fall of Communism demonstrated.

The combination of the international news broadcasters, the BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera etc and the internet makes it very difficult to suppress news. China does limit the impact of the internet, but the boundary is porous. We live in a global fishbowl! So why should we be surprised by the various accusations flying around that the Russians interfered in last year's American Presidential election. There are plenty of examples of American interference in other countries elections.

Over the centuries borders have been no barriers to the spread of ideas. The spread of Christianity is an excellent example of how new ideas and concepts can move rapidly across borders, even without international news organizations or the internet.

In some respects, the ongoing enquires into Russian interference appears strange. But it is also a warning to countries that have open and fair elections that foreign powers can, under the radar, significantly influence the outcome of an Election. Now there are reports that thousands of social media postings were sent to people in the UK, just before the Brexit referendum, supporting the "leave" proposal. These postings are reported to have come from a Russian source.<sup>1</sup>

Closer to home we had the Australian Government complaining about the involvement of a NZ Labour MP in confirming that the Australian Deputy Prime Minister had New Zealand citizenship!!

All this is actually no laughing matter. It raises questions about trust, particularly trust in the media, which these days includes the internet. If anything, it means that those of us who advocate for social justice have to be very vigilant and sure about our sources of information.

#### **TPP version 3**

Over the last couple of years, we have expressed our concerns about the TPP Agreement at Synod and in Do Justice. Now we have a version of TPP that we are told by some people who opposed the original agreement, that the changes deal with the issues of concern, and now we can support the third version of the Agreement.

One of the main areas of concern has been the Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses. We are told these have been significantly modified and that New Zealand has signed "side letters" with Australia and some other unnamed countries that exclude the clauses as far their corporations are concerned. The claim is that 80% of potential for ISDS action has now been excluded. This is fine but what about the remaining 20%. How likely is the New Zealand Government if they legislate in such a way that a foreign corporation can be disadvantaged will be sued. For example, what would happen if the Government wanted to restrict the sale of alcohol?

Before deciding on TPP version 3 we need much more information. Apparently, there will be Select Committee hearings on the agreement and a debate in the House. It is worth remembering that a majority of the voters supported parties that had strongly opposed the initial agreement. Perhaps a binding referendum is still needed.

#### **Housing**

Housing in all its forms has been an issue that the Social Justice Group has been concerned about for many years. We have been concerned about the changes to the Housing Corporation made over recent years that has resulted in a drop in the number of State houses and the selling off of houses particularly in areas that are slowly gentrifying such as Glen Innes. Lack of State houses has contributed to the rapid increase in homelessness over the last few years and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/14/how-400-russia-run-fake-accounts-posted-bogus-brexit-tweets>

the need for the then government to buy motels to deal with the problem.

The Living Wage Movement, during the various Electoral Forums that they organised in various parts of the country during the election campaign, included housing issues as one of the “asks” of the various candidates participating in the meetings. At the Manurewa meeting in August the candidates were asked to commit the following:

- If your party becomes part of the next coalition Government you will promote and support the building of 500 State Houses in South Auckland each year
- You and your party will commit to establishing an additional 200 units in South Auckland dedicated to emergency housing in the next term of Government
- You and your party will establish an advisory group within 3 months of the election involving members of the community and Government.

All the candidates who attended the meeting were given copies of the “asks” prior to the meeting so they could consult their leadership. The Labour, Greens and New Zealand First candidates all agreed to the “asks” and signed statements to that effect. The Labour and Green candidates who signed were elected to Parliament and a meeting with them and the new Minister of Housing Phil Twyford has been arranged for the beginning of December.

Since the formation of the Coalition Government most of the media focus has been on how the new Government will facilitate the building of large numbers of houses, many of which are to be “affordable”: Issues of State Housing and Emergency Housing appears to be of lesser priority. The meeting with Minister Twyford and the MPs will be a timely opportunity to emphasise that State Housing and Emergency Housing are primary concerns to the South Auckland community and what are they doing about it?

### **Rates, Americas Cup and Super Yachts**

It seems that “fake news” is spreading. Auckland Council recently announced the updated rateable values of all the houses and other buildings in Auckland. As property rates are the primary source of local body funding, Reviews of the values of property must be conducted every three years.

As most people know, the price people are prepared to pay for a house has gone up significantly over recent years, particularly in Auckland. So, it was no real surprise that the average rateable value of a house in Auckland had increased by 46%. What was surprising was how this announcement was used by some politicians and interest group spokespeople to spread misinformation – “fake news!”. One example, Jo Holmes from the Auckland Ratepayers’ Alliance in a Morning Report interview<sup>2</sup> said that the revaluation would cause rates to go up by thousands of dollars a year, a surprising statement by someone claiming to represent rates payers. One would have thought that the spokesperson would know how rates are set.

Morning Report, to its due, did then interview the head of the section that sorts out rates at the Auckland Council, who explained that the amount we pay is determined by taking the total dollars the Council need to receive from rates and then dividing by the sum of all the rateable values of all the properties in the Council area. Changes in rateable value does not affect the total amount to be raised from rates.

What changes in rateable values can do is that if your property valuation has increased by more than the average your rates may increase, if less than the average your rates may decrease. Interestingly, the Council spokesperson pointed out that after the last review in 2014 half the appeals were from people who wanted their rateable value increased!

By some reports the Americas Cup regatta will bring great economic benefit to Auckland and New Zealand - from some 200 million dollars to up to 2 billion dollars. A representative of the Marine Industries Federation was interviewed, again on Morning Report, and claimed that the visits by Super Yachts would bring a benefit of \$500 million to Auckland alone. This would come from various sources including the purchase of large quantities of grocery and meat, dining out, and purchase of “toys” including runabouts for the yachts at \$2 million each!!

Super Yachts, and their visits to Auckland, raise some interesting moral and ethical questions. Super Yachts cost more than \$100 million and more to buy and millions a year to run. Only people with enormous wealth can purchase such items. Wealth that may have been either inherited or acquired from investments in companies that in many cases do not pay their fair share of taxes. In a world where gross inequality is the norm the very existence of Super Yachts must be questioned, this is extreme conspicuous consumption.

And Auckland Council is being asked to spend up to \$200 million providing facilities so that the Americas Cup can be run on our shores, at the same time subsidise the super-rich in their Super Yachts. Surely Auckland Council have more important things to spend our money on!

### **Governance and the Super City.**

The Act of Parliament setting up the Super City was passed in the early years of the last National Led Government with some interesting provisions such as Council Controlled Organisations that the Council could not control.

One of the lesser known provisions appears to give the Council CEO control over what motions Councillors can bring to the table. Recently two Councillors wanted to bring a motion that would require all air travel paid for by the Council for both Councillors and Staff must be in Economy. At present, if someone flies for more than 8 hours and is immediately be involved in business meetings they can fly Business. In the last year some half a million dollars was spent by the Council on Business Class air travel. The CEO was able stop the motion being considered. Strange.

<sup>2</sup> [https://thespinoff.co.nz/auckland/21-11-2017/a-tale-of-property-rates-and-bullshit/#.WhSU-\\_fRoGU.facebook](https://thespinoff.co.nz/auckland/21-11-2017/a-tale-of-property-rates-and-bullshit/#.WhSU-_fRoGU.facebook)