



Do Justice!!

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

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the May 2016 edition of Do Justice. This newsletter, prepared by Auckland Diocesan Social Justice Group, looks at various Social Justice Issues.

Housing – a Basic Right

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes a right to housing for all. And the only way that this "Right" can be achieved for some is for the Government to provide affordable housing. For over 75 years this has been the case in New Zealand with the Housing Corporation providing housing for all who cannot afford to buy a house or pay high rents. But these days are over as was heard loud and clear at last month's Housing Hui in Auckland. Both current and former Housing Corporation tenants shared their experiences of the Government's new housing policies. State Houses being emptied in Glen Innes, moved and new houses built, many beyond the means of working people, because Glen Innes is becoming the new Ponsonby, great sea views and quick transport into the City Centre. There were also stories about streets in Invercargill with six of seven empty houses in them, houses owned by the House Corporation whose tenants had been forced to leave as they no longer met criteria for a State House.

Interestingly, many of the speakers spoke positively about the Housing Corporation service in the past, before National 'broke it'. The Ministry of Social Development becoming responsible for allocating and generally managing State Houses was a huge step backwards. Later changes included sweeping powers for the three Housing Portfolio Ministers. It became easier for State houses to be transferred to Redevelopment companies for intensification and development decision-making without consultation with Housing New Zealand, never mind its tenants.

We have heard much about the "Housing Crisis" in Auckland. The average house price now almost one million dollars, rental costs beyond the reach of many

in our communities. We are also told incessantly, that this is a supply problem and if only the Resource Management Act was changed and Auckland Council would grant consents quicker than all would be well. We have heard this for some four years now but still the price of houses increases and rents increase.

The problem is not a supply problem but an ideological problem. No longer does the Government accept the Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 25 and their responsibility to ensure that all the people of New Zealand are adequately housed. Now it is up to "the market" to provide shelter for New Zealanders.

But the Housing Crisis is not a unique event, a one off, it is part of a continuum of policy changes that we have seen not only in New Zealand, but in many other countries, to reverse all the gains made following World War Two. Gains that reduced inequality, significantly, improved the standard of living of the poor, reduced unemployment to very small numbers, enabled all to had a reasonable standard of housing and for a relatively short time allowed New Zealand really to be a near equal society. It is worth remembering that these were the gains that so many New Zealanders soldiers, sailors and airman fought for in World War One and Two. Many of these gains have been lost over the last 30 years thanks to the worship of "the market".

So what should be the roll of the Church in all this? Does the neoliberal religion that worships "the market" equate with Jesus commandment to "love ones neighbour as one self"? These questions need to be we grappled with in Synod, and all our church agencies, particularly the Social Service agencies, who need to consider how to respond as they are increasingly invited to work with Government, both national and local, in dismantling the caring society built over the last 50 years.

American Presidential Elections.

The primary races are slowly coming to a climax, and it could be Trump or Cruz to run against Clinton or Sanders. This month we thought that it would be helpful to provide some background on Bernie Sanders, someone completely unknown to New Zealanders prior to the primary campaign.

Whatever happens the next President could be either the first woman, or the first Jew and self-declared Socialist, or the first Cuban or the first(you can fill in!!).

Bernie Sanders was born in Brooklyn, New York City on 8 September 1941, his Jewish father emigrated from Poland to the USA in 1927; his mother was born in New York City to Polish and Russian Jewish immigrant parents. Many of her relatives who remained in Poland were killed in the Holocaust. Both his parents died relatively young and neither saw him graduate from the University of Chicago with a degree in Political Science.

Sanders was deeply involved in the civil rights campaigns of the 1950s and 60s and was, as a student organizer for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He joined the Young People's Socialist League (the youth affiliate of the Socialist Party of America) whilst at University) which explains why he refers to himself as a Socialist Democrat.

Sanders was part of the famous 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom when Martin Luther King gave his famous "I have a dream" speech. That same year he was convicted of resisting arrest during a civil rights protest and fined \$25.

He moved to rural Vermont in 1968 seeking a change from the streets of Brooklyn. He worked in a variety of jobs including making radical film strips and other educational materials for schools.

Bernie first ran for Governor of Vermont for the Liberty Union Party in 1972. The Liberty Union Party morphed out of the anti-Vietnam War movement and the People's Party. In 1980 Sanders ran successfully as an Independent for Mayor of Burlington, the largest city and capital of Vermont. He was subsequently re-elected three times winning against candidates from both the Democratic and Republican parties. During this time Burlington became the first city in the

USA to fund community-trust housing. In 1990 Sanders was elected to the US House of Representatives as an Independent, the first Independent to be elected for some 40 years. In 2006 he was elected to the US Senate again as an Independent, and was re-elected in 2012. He joined the Democratic Party in 2015.

Bernie Sanders has made much of his independence, particularly from the rich backers compared to many of the other Presidential Candidates, both Republican and Democratic. His Socialism, by most standards outside the USA, would be closer to Social Democrat or moderate labour in New Zealand's case. He has been able to tap into the growing concerns of many in the USA about the increasing imbalance in society between rich and poor, he sees himself as an advocate for the 99% against the 1%. Interestingly, Donald Trump appears to be appealing to a similar demographic but with dramatically different proposals.

In a country where candidates for public office tend to carry their religion on their arms, Bernie Sanders, as a secular Jew, is an exception. In a recent late night talk show he responded to a question about his religion as *"I am who I am, and what I believe in and what my spirituality is about is that we're all in this together. That I think it is not a good thing to believe as human beings we can turn our backs on the suffering of other people ... and this is not Judaism, this is what Pope Francis is talking about, that we can't just worship billionaires and the making of more and more money. Life is more than that."*¹

As far as we in New Zealand are concerned Sanders has made it very clear that opposes the current crop of so called Trade Agreements including the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, which he says was "written by corporate America and the pharmaceutical industry and Wall Street."²

Quote of the Day

JG Ballard: "Human beings today are surrounded by huge institutions we can never penetrate: the City, the banking system, political and advertising conglomerates, vast entertainment enterprises. They've made themselves user friendly, but they define the tastes to which we conform. They're rather subtle, subservient tyrants, but no less sinister for that."³

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernie_Sanders

² Sanders, Bernie (May 21, 2015). "The TPP Must Be efeated". *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved August 18, 2015.

³ <http://store.counterpunch.org/steve-horn-episode-38/>