

# Talking Cents

November 2015

**Talking Cents is an ecumenical group charged by the Auckland Anglican Diocesan Council to promote an alternative to current political and economic thought, and to encourage debate within the church. Ministry units are encouraged to distribute these articles. This issue is contributed by Jean Brookes of the Auckland Anglican Social Justice Group.**

## LEAP OF FAITH

We would be foolish to disregard neoliberal ideology and climate change in our analysis of the big world picture, particularly the refugee crisis in Europe that has profoundly shocked us all.

In 1989 the Soviet controlled Eastern bloc in Europe was broken up and the Berlin Wall fell. Right wing ideologues in Washington partly reacted to the role of peoples' movements in these changes. They mounted a huge attack on alternatives to deregulated capitalism.

In the 1990s two agendas vied for world attention: so-called 'free' trade agreements, and negotiations about climate change. They ran separately, and voices, particularly in the third world, who raised questions about the effect of the trade proposals on the climate were ignored.

Reflecting on this new economic era, Naomi Klein wrote: 'The three policy pillars of this new era are familiar to us all: privatising of the public sphere, deregulation of the corporate sector, and lower corporate taxation paid for with cuts to public spending. Much has been written of the real-world costs of these policies.

“...Very little has been written about how market fundamentalism has, from the very first moments, systematically sabotaged our collective response to climate change...”<sup>1</sup>

Advocacy for the earth was derailed and

climate change concerns became subservient to Trade Agreements. The *July Talking Cents* gave two examples of this pattern of domination: provisos that favoured the interest of business over the common good; and environmental concerns at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and in the Kyoto Protocol.

Core elements of neoliberalism have especially oppressed the poor, indigenous peoples and women, and austerity measures can bring nations to their knees. However, nothing can stop the hope of people of faith that economic and environmental life should be organised differently

The *October Talking Cents* reminded us about the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace that came from the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2013. It called Christian churches to work together on today's most pressing issues.<sup>2</sup>

On 4 September 2015 the WCC hosted an event at the Church Centre for the United Nations in New York. Participants included the Islam Relief Worldwide, World Vision, Caritas Internationalis, and the World Evangelical Alliance. They promoted *Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative*. This was launched in April and signed by 39 leaders of world religions and global faith-based organisations. The document called for an end to extreme

<sup>1</sup> This Changes Everything, Allen Lane, 2014, p19

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>.

poverty by 2030, and commented, 'We must state unequivocally that ending extreme poverty without mitigating climate change and combating inequality will be impossible'<sup>3</sup>

In 2014 Naomi Klein wondered what crisis might force the world to seek a new economic paradigm and respond adequately to climate change. Millions of refugees trapped in camps and arriving in first world countries could be that sort of tipping point. While we may think we need lots of time to transform economic policies, environmentally there may only be a small window of opportunity. 'The International Energy Agency warns that if we do not get our emissions under control by a rather terrifying 2017, our fossil fuel economy will “lock” in extremely dangerous warming'<sup>4</sup>.

In all of our social justice groups we need to work towards building a movement of movements. In Aotearoa we have done it before and can do it again. National and provincial protests around current issues are energising work on alternative social and economic models while similar movements develop overseas.

In September a Regional workshop of members of the WCC and the Pacific Conference of Churches met in Auckland. The October Touchstone<sup>5</sup> reported their list of priorities for the Paris Climate Change Conference, 30 November – 11 December. One was that global warming be limited to LESS than the suggested 2°C. Is this Conference Of Parties (COP21) committed to the transformation of economic, financial and environmental policies, and will it support the voices from the Pacific? Similar calls from the Pacific Climate Warriors Programme<sup>6</sup> that is walking from Rome to the Paris talks.

And from Bishop Mark McDonald

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oikumene.org/en/press-centre/news/faith-based-actors-explore-ways-of-ending-extreme-poverty-and-advancing-SDGs>.

<sup>4</sup> This Changes Everything, Allen Lane, 2014, p23

<sup>5</sup> [www.methodist.co.nz/touchstone](http://www.methodist.co.nz/touchstone)

<sup>6</sup> [www.peoplespilgrimage.org](http://www.peoplespilgrimage.org)

(Indigenous Bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada and WCC President for North America) recently called the Arctic “the epicentre of climate injustice”.

The proposed US – European Union Transatlantic Trade & Investment Agreement (TTIP) and the Canada – European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) are closely related to the TPPA. 250,000 people protested against the transatlantic pacts in Berlin on 10 October. Questions to ask these so-called 'Free Trade' agreements include whether the participating countries will enforce environmental rules against their trading partners, and whether they will be prevented from imposing environmental standards at home?

The 'Leap of Faith' is to believe that millions of people, including among the middle class want a new vision other than the capitalist corporate model which threatens our common good and endangers the earth. Questioning whether Christians should be involved in movements for change is long past. The question has become where we join the journey, collectively, and how we participate with spiritual humility knowing that we are still part of the problem.

Some possible resources for this Leap of Faith include: ***The Public Good Aotearoa NZ*** gives voice to three themes: *A strong public sector; Strong democracy and engagement; Community Wealth* <[ask@publicgood.org.nz](mailto:ask@publicgood.org.nz)>

A national conference was held in Wellington 9 – 10 October with the theme *Information, Ethics and the public good*.

**Centre for Theology & Public Issues, University of Otago** <[ctpinz@otago.ac.nz](mailto:ctpinz@otago.ac.nz)>

On 3 October, Bryan Bruce spoke on, '*Poverty, Inequality & Ethical Decision Making*'. For further material see: [bryanbruce.co.nz](http://bryanbruce.co.nz)

**St Paul's Institute London**

<[institute@stpaulscathedral.org.uk](mailto:institute@stpaulscathedral.org.uk)>

On 3 November a Panel will discuss Paul Mason's Thesis – *Post-Capitalism: A Guide to our Future*, 2015, Penguin Books.

***Together for the Common Good*** <[website@togetherforthecommongood.co.uk](http://website@togetherforthecommongood.co.uk)>

*It hosts conferences, gathers material and does research. The September Newsletter explores: Ideology vs the Common Good.*