



Do Justice!!

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

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the July 2018 edition of Do Justice. This newsletter, prepared by the Auckland Diocesan Social Justice Group, looks at various Social Justice Issues.

Some American Church leaders are Reclaiming Jesus.

There have been many reports in the New Zealand media about President Trump and his supporters including many from the evangelical churches. For many Christians outside the USA, the reports of the support for the President's policies and lifestyle by evangelical Christians have been difficult to understand. We are not alone in our concerns and at the beginning of Lent a group of church leaders from the mainline and evangelical wings of the church met to discuss and pray about the situation. Jim Wallis, President of Sojourners wrote about the meeting:

We came to feel an obligation to speak as "followers of Jesus" into the moral and political crisis in which we find ourselves — where our faith values are being politically exploited while our democratic values are being dangerously threatened. We felt we had to respond but had no clear sense of how other Christians in our churches would react to any "declaration" from us. We were astonished as views of the video of Reclaiming Jesus declaration signed by 23 elders were quickly climbing into the millions and have continued to climb.

The video is worth watching, it is only just over 4 minutes long. To view in Facebook just press Ctrl and click on the title above.

On 24 May 2018 a Pentecost Service was held in two large churches close to the White House with video feeds around the USA. After the service, some 3,000 Christian leaders marched to the White House to show their support for the Reclaiming Jesus declaration.

Sadly, our media appeared to be silent on these events. But you can read the full article by Jim Wallis at <https://sojo.net/articles/its-time-respond-answer-call-reclaiming-jesus>

More violence on the Israeli/Gaza Border.

The Palestinians living in Gaza wanted to mark the 70th anniversary of being ejected from their homeland when the State of Israel was established. The plan was to peacefully protest on the Gaza side of the border. Many thousands came out to the scrub land that was on the Gaza side of the border and protested whilst the children played. From the media reports none of the Palestinians attempted to cross the border and they did not threaten the Israeli guards but the Israelis felt threatened and their soldiers were ordered to open fire with the result that many hundreds of Palestinians were killed or injured.

On virtually any other border between states the actions of the Israeli military would have been considered an "act of war" and the aggressor would have been condemned in the United Nations Security Council and harsh action taken against them. But not in the case of Israel, the USA vetoed the Security Council Resolution condemning the killing of hundreds of Palestinians by the Israeli military and that was that!!

In addition, critics of anything that Israel does are met with charges of Anti-Semitism. It is as if the Jewish people who live in many many countries around the world including New Zealand, are somehow embodied in the State of Israel – and the State of Israel can do no wrong. Anti-Semitism is actions against the Jewish people, the State of Israel is not the Jewish people.

Whose confidence is important?

One of the interesting debates in the media after a left leaning government takes office in New Zealand is the "confidence" of the business community. Over the last few months we have see regular reports that the confidence of the business community is dropping and what is the government going to do about it. The fact that other surveys measuring business intentions show no significant changes, businesses continuing to invest, to trade and to provide products and services for the New Zealand people. So, what must the government do to restore "business confidence"?

Interestingly, when right leaning governments take office we do not see the media reporting about a drop of confidence of working people and that they would not work as hard. And what will the government do about it.

Whilst on the subject of the media the headline on page 2 of the Business Section of the NZ Herald on Saturday 9th June 2018 cannot go without comment. "Ardern's Orwellian move to ban exploration" with the sub head line of "One makes the revolution to establish the dictatorship".

To insinuate that the government's decision not to ask for bids for offshore exploration permits is "the revolution to establish the dictatorship" is provocative. The government is totally within its right to ask for or not ask for exploration bids. It seems obvious to everyone, except for the fossil fuel industry and climate change deniers, that continuing to look for more oil and gas when it is almost certain that some 80% of known oil and gas fields will never be exploited is silly. Not to ask for bids is common sense. Hardly a step towards dictatorship.

Has Trump been trumped?

The meeting between President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-Un of North Korea in Singapore last month was a grand example of world drama. Thousands of reporters converged on Singapore, saturated TV coverage and \$50 million was spend by the Singapore Government on security.

And just 48 hours earlier Trump was engaged in a stand-up argument with Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada and was under heavy criticism at the G7 meeting in Quebec from virtually all of the USA's friends and allies for his arbitrary actions on tariffs

Trump praised Kim Jong-Un lavishly in Singapore, he obviously believes that Kim is someone he, Trump, can do business with. This leads to the interesting reflection that Trump does not want to do business with Justin Trudeau of Canada but is happy to "do business" with Kim Jong-Un the ruler of a country described in a 2014 UN Human Rights Commission Report as:

*the North Korean government was perpetrating "unspeakable atrocities" against its own people on a vast scale and committing "widespread, systematic and gross" violations that amounted to crimes against humanity. The Chair of the Commission called these atrocities "strikingly similar" to crimes committed by Nazi Germany in World War II. Crimes included execution, enslavement, starvation, rape and forced abortion.*¹

The other significant report that came out of the G7 meeting in Quebec was Donald Trump continually pressing the other G7 members to invite Russia back to their meetings despite the Russian invasion of the Crimea.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that Donald Trump feels more at home dealing with dictators and authoritarian rulers than with the democratically elected leaders of the USA's long-standing allies.

The Singapore meeting was certainly a public relations triumph for Kim Jong-Un but was it such a triumph for Donald Trump. Trump announced after the meetings that the USA/South Korea annual military exercises would stop. Kim has agreed to start to "denuclearise" with no time table or definition of what it means and who will verify North Korea's actions, all things the USA was insisting on prior to the meeting.

From all this it is probably fair to conclude that Trump was probably trumped in Singapore.

Fairness, is it important?

David Blanchflower, a Dartmouth professor of economics, was recently asked during a recent Planet Money episode by one of the hosts "Is that fair?". He replied, "*Economics is not about fairness*".²

One can only conclude from this statement that if economics is not about fairness than it must be about unfairness, about selfishness and inequality.

For many economists and politicians, who subscribe to "free market theory" or neoliberal ideology, fairness is not something to be considered. The market, as envisaged by them, is made up of individuals acting in "self-interest".

Denise Cummins response to David Blanchflower's dismissal of "fairness" in the same article is interesting:

Economists alternately find alarming and amusing a large body of results from experimental studies showing that people don't behave according to the tenets of rational choice theory. We are far more cooperative and willing to trust than is predicted by the theory, and we retaliate vehemently when others behave selfishly. In fact, we are willing to pay a penalty for an opportunity to punish people who appear to be breaking implicit rules of fairness in economic transactions.

It is encouraging to know that the ideology of Milton Freeman and the "Free marketers" that assumes that everyone acts in their own self-interest is not universally accepted.

Denise Cummings is not an economist but a cognitive scientist working on the way people think, solve problems and make decisions. Her conclusions, shared by many other cognitive scientists, are based on careful research.

We can choose between the assumptions of the free market economists or the research of the cognitive scientists as we try to determine what is fairness.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Report_of_the_Commission_of_Inquiry_on_Human_Rights_in_the_Democratic_People's_Republic_of_Korea

²http://economics.com/what-happens-when-you-believe-in-ayn-rand-and-modern-economic-theory/?utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=organic