



## Do Justice!!

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

### A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

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

#### **Is this a threat to democracy?**

Early in February President Trump agreed to release a document written by the Republicans on the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee stating that the FBI is biased in its investigation of the links between Russia and the Trump team during the 2016 election campaign. The document was then declassified by President Trump and used by him to justify his denials of any connection between his campaign staff and representatives of the Russian Government during the 2016 election campaign. The Democrats on the same committee wrote a sort of rebuttal memo that has not been released to the public, blocked by both President Trump and the majority Republicans on the Intelligence Committee. This seems a strange way to conduct political business in a democracy.

The accuracy or otherwise of the document on the FBI investigation is not the underlying issue here but the potential undermining of the justice system. The Republican document appears to have been designed to call into question the possible results of the Special Prosecutor's investigation into the alleged links between the Russian Government and the Trump campaign in the run up to the 2016 election and Donald Trump is certainly using it to support his continuing denials of any wrongdoing in the affair even though the Special Prosecutor has yet to formally accuse anyone.

One of the bedrocks of democracy is that the investigation of potential wrong doing and the testing of the investigations conclusions in court is completely separated from the work of the executive running the country.

No democracy has completely separated the functions as police have to be paid from public funds (taxes) and judges must be appointed. In New Zealand judicial appointments are made by the Governor-General on the advice of the Attorney General or other senior ministers after a process of vetting that includes comments from the Law Society and the Bar Association. Political factors are not a consideration in the appointments although the Attorney General is a politician. The New Zealand process is generally similar to the UK, Australia and Canada.

The process in the USA is much more diverse ranging from direct election of judges in some States to nomination by the President and confirmation by Senate. Judges of the US Supreme Court are all nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. This process is not politically neutral. Once Judges take office they cannot be removed except for those directly elected principally in the USA.

So, what is the problem with the Republican document on the FBI released by the White House? If the release of this document is followed by the sacking of the Special Prosecutor looking into the links between Russia and the Trump campaign and major changes in the senior ranks of the FBI then it will be clear to any USA law enforcing agency that they should not investigate anything the President does not want investigated. Effectively the President will be above the law.

It is not too difficult to see where this could potentially lead to. Law Enforcement Agencies could become agents of the President and any opposition to the President's will could be prosecuted. In addition, the President potentially could ensure that the Supreme Court would not declare against the President. The nightmare scenario would be a President who managed to circumvent the two-term restriction and become President for Life. In other words, the USA could become a dictatorship.

This may appear alarmist but remember that last year President Trump sacked the then Director of the FBI because he would not agree to stop the investigation into the links between the Russians and his campaign team. The concern for us in New Zealand is the prospect that in the future we may be faced with the prospect of the three most powerful countries in the world – USA, Russia and China, all being run by autocratic dictatorships.

#### **Child Poverty can it be eliminated?**

For those who have been concerned about the increasing inequality and resulting increase in the number of children that are living in poverty, it was heartening that both Labour and National during last year's Election Campaign made commitments to address the issue.

The Labour led government introduced measures that they hoped would move 88,000 children out of poverty although

there is now some doubt about this figure thanks to a mistake in Treasury's computer model. Whilst these measures are welcome as a short-term solution to the child poverty issue we need to ask when the Government will start to address the underlying structural issues that entrench poverty and child poverty.

Back in the early 1970s Child Poverty was not an issue in New Zealand. There was virtually no unemployment, wages were sufficient for families and individuals to feed themselves, live in reasonable accommodation and for families to contribute to local society and live in reasonable dignity. Salaries of senior corporate executives were about two or three times the wage of the "workers" and the income tax system was basically progressive.

Admittedly not all was right with New Zealand. Imports were very tightly controlled by the Government and it was difficult to buy a new car, local manufacturing was protected, and unemployment was close to zero. Relatively, New Zealand was a high wage economy.

All this changed in the 1980s and New Zealand went from a very controlled economy to one of the most open in the world. Unemployment and underemployment increased – now less than 5% unemployed is considered full employment. The income tax system was made flatter, controls on imports virtually disappeared and inequality rapidly increased. A legal minimum wage was introduced to ensure that workers had some protection. And senior corporate executives are paid many times the minimum wage. New Zealand is now a low wage precarious economy with close to 300,000 children living in poverty and many thousands of people working less than full time on the minimum wage.

Increasing Working for Families, Accommodations Allowances and other benefits are only band aid solutions to child poverty. We cannot, and should not, just go back to the early 1970s but there are changes to the basic structure of our society today that can be changed. The Housing Corporation could be empowered to actually provide warm dry accommodation for all people who cannot afford to buy or rent a house. A truly progressive income tax could be introduced, plus a capital gains tax. A Universal Basic Income could be introduced to replace all benefits including the Super.

Corporations would continue to operate, farmers would continue to farm (maybe with less dairy farming and more arable farming) Capitalism would not be outlawed but employers would be required to work with unions to ensure that employees were paid sufficient to live with dignity.

Radical – yes. Christian- definitely, this is what is meant by "love your neighbour."

#### **What Corporate Power means in Practice.**

We have regularly commented in Do Justice on the dangers of the Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses in the various versions of the TPPA. An example of Corporate

Power and what it can do has recently come to our attention.

AVAAZ is an on-line justice advocacy group that describes itself as "a global web movement to bring People Powered Politics to decision making everywhere". AVAAZ has many millions of supporters around the world. It has conducted a very successful campaign against Monsanto and the long-term re-licencing of glyphosate, an herbicide that can cause cancer.

Now, Monsanto has filed a 168-page court subpoena against AVAAZ requiring, amongst other things, that AVAAZ provide the names and addresses of the millions of people around the world who supported the petitions to ban glyphosate. The USA is not a party to the CPTPPA, but the door is open for them to join. And Monsanto, like many other large American corporations, has branches all over the world including signatories of the countries signing CPTPPA.

This does illustrate what some global corporations will do to protect their products that are shown to be a danger to the public and shutdown criticism. New Zealand law is not as corporate friendly but could become so as a result of actions under ISDS clauses in Trade Agreements. Let us hope that the pledge by the government that there will be no ISDS clauses in any future Trade Agreements can be carried out. This should particularly apply if the USA should join the CPTPPA sometime in the future.

The sad thing about Monsanto suing AVAAZ is that precious AVAAZ funds will be spent in defending the action. AVAAZ is totally dependent on supporter funding – they receive no government or large trust funding.

#### **Kristine Bartlett New Zealander of the Year.**

What a breath of fresh air when Kristine Bartlett won the 2018 New Zealander of the Year. Kristine Bartlett had been the face of the long campaign to recognise that aged-care workers were underpaid because aged-care workers are mainly women. The result of the campaign was that some 55,000 workers received significant increases in their wages from around the Minimum Wage to over or close to the Living Wage.

It was also encouraging that neither of the other two nominees for the award were neither sports people nor politicians. Mike King has campaigned to raise awareness of mental health issues and to shed much needed light on the high level of suicide, particularly youth suicide, an issue that had for too many years been hushed up and not talked about. The other nominee is Dr. Siouxsie Wiles, who raised awareness of, and is working to find solutions to, the growing threats of antibiotic-resistant superbugs.

Also encouraging was the award of 2018 Senior New Zealander of the Year to Kim Workman who has tirelessly raised justice issues, including the extremely high number of New Zealanders, particularly Maori, who end up in prison compared to most other countries.