**November 2017**



**Do Justice!!**

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

**A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues**

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

**The Twelve Days of Winston**

This year’s Election has been full of surprises, twists, turns and dirty tricks. Andrew Little’s resignation, Jacinda mania, the demise of Metiria Turei, Peter Dunn and the Maori Party, at least from Parliament. Winston Peter’s super problems and who leaked the information, Steven Joyce, the mathematically challenged Finance Minister and Chris Hipkins unsetting the Australian Government. And then there was Bill English wanting to outbid Labour on Child Poverty

Then on Election Night National seemed so close to retaining power, all that was needed was to have a cup of tea with Winston. But Winston wanted the full results so there was a two week wait.

Then the fun really started as Winston wanted to tie down both National and Labour to specific policies any coalition would follow. He kept saying “policy is vital”. As we wrote in last month’s edition “*During the election campaign, there appeared to be more synergy between Labour, the Greens and New Zealand First on many issues. Just one example they all supported a Living Wage for the core Public Service at meetings in Auckland and Wellington and party representatives signed statements to that effect at those meetings. National has made it clear that they do not support the Living Wage for anyone!* “

So, it was not altogether a surprise that Winston after 12 days of negotiations, meetings with caucus and Boards announced in the late afternoon (Australian Time, as promised) on Thursday 19th October that he had decided to go with Labour and by inference the Greens.

Those 12 days did seem tedious, deadline after deadline apparently missed but, on reflection, the process used by Winston does appear to have been both rigorous and fair.

Maybe the big surprise was one of Winston’s comments in the press conference announcing the decision:

 *“For too many New Zealanders, capitalism has not been their friend but their foe,” Peters said, claiming vulnerable people had been left behind while the political elite got richer. “We believe capitalism must regain its human face, and that conviction deeply influenced our decision. The biggest issue is, we have heard and read many comments about poverty and the concertation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands ... That has to change”*

For the last seven or eight years the Social Justice Group has continually advocated for a more equal society. And we have regularly questioned the ideology behind neoliberalism and the free market. It is good to know that reducing inequality will be a major thrust of the new Government’s policies. We will be watching this space!

**Party Conferences – A tale of two cities.**

The British Conservative and Labour Parties hold their annual conferences in Northern Autumn. This year Labour was in Brighton and the Conservatives in Manchester and there could not have been a greater contrast between the two meetings.

In June there was a General Election and the Conservatives managed to win the most number of seats in Parliament and continued in Government thanks to an agreement with the Democratic Unionist Party and its 10 MPs from Northern Ireland. Labour did make significant gains in the June election but are still in opposition. The Election was called by Prime Minister Therese May, at a time when the Labour opposition appeared to be weak and split. She saw this as an opportunity to increase the Conservative majority in the House of Commons to strengthen her position as the Brexit discussions continued. Instead she lost her majority but remained as Prime Minister.

The Labour Conference in Brighton was held first and it seemed like a victory celebration!!! Labour had found in Jermyn Corbyn a very effective election campaigner despite some major policy differences with many of his Labour MPs.

Jeremy Corbyn campaigned for an end of neoliberalism and the free market, free tertiary education and major changes in taxation and benefits: a strong progressive platform with a major emphasis on addressing inequality. Corbyn was rejecting Thatcherism that had become imbedded in both the Conservative and Labour Parties for the previous 30 years. Although Labour did not manage to get a majority at the election they did make substantial gains, not least in support for the party from many younger people.

The impact of the new members of the Party was very apparent at the conference with many young people involved in the debates. In addition, changes to the Party rules on the process for electing both the Leader and the National Executive reduced the influence of the Parliamentary Party and, to a lesser extent, the Trade Unions and an increased influence of the constituency parties with many new members. It was reported that Labour Party membership was over 500,000 thanks mainly to Jermyn Corbyn. In contrast, the Conservatives were down to around 120,000.

Jeremey Corbyn was adulated as the new messiah, less than 12 months after having to fight to retain his position as leader. The main focus was on the next election and a Labour Government.

In contrast, the Conservative Conference was dominated by rumours of plots to force out Theresa May. One of the possible replacements for her, Foreign Affairs Minister Boris Johnson, had stirred the pot with an article in the Sunday Telegraph the week before the Conference, outlining his vision for Brexit that differed in main ways for the May’s position.

Rather than present a vision for the future of Great Britain, the Conservative leaders spent most of their time attacking Corbyn. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Phillip Hammond, made a major defence of the free market as Ryanair was cancelling thousands of flights to the inconvenience of thousands of passengers and the demise of Monarch Air, a holiday operator and airline, stranding even more people.

But it was the final leader’s speeches by the two leaders where the real contrast between the two conferences was most dramatic. Jeremy Corbyn gave his conference a vision for the future that, to the delegates was clear, rousing and exciting, with a call to be ready for a new election anytime. Theresa May, in contrast, started by apologising for calling the June election, she was then interrupted by an interloper and finally letters on the sign behind her started to fall off. She was also hampered by a bad cough which only contributed to her poor performance.

Speculation continues about the future of Prime Minster Theresa May but the sad thing, as far as the Conservative Party is concerned, is it that the alternatives appear even worse. How long the Democratic Union Party can continue to support the Conservative Government remains to be seen.

**Do we really need and Army, Navy and Air Force?**

Professor Richard Jackson of Otago University recently asked this question during the Peace and Justice Conference at the Holy Trinity Cathedral. Professor Jackson starting point was the current review of the “Just War” doctrine, a doctrine that goes back to Augustine of Hippo who lived some decades after Constantine, and is credited with advancing the concept of a “Just War”. Thomas Aquinas, in the 13th century developed criteria for a “Just War”

* *First, just war must be waged by a properly instituted authority such as the state. (Proper Authority is first: represents the common good: which is peace for the sake of man's true end—God.)*
* *Second, war must occur for a good and just purpose rather than for self-gain (for example, "in the nation's interest" is not just) or as an exercise of power (just cause: for the sake of restoring some good that has been denied. i.e. lost territory, lost goods, punishment for an evil perpetrated by a government, army, or even the civilian populace).*
* *Third, peace must be a central motive even in the midst of violence. (right intention: an authority must fight for the just reasons it has expressly claimed for declaring war in the first place. Soldiers must also fight for this intention).[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Professor Jackson argued that not only is it extremely difficult to meet the criteria for Just War – virtually all conflicts in recent times do not meet the criteria – but the alternative “civil resistance” is more effective. Professor Jackson mentioned the fall of the Berlin Wall and the overthrow of communist regimes in East Europe around 1990 as examples of very effective civil resistance which did not resort to violence.

One example of a country that has turned its back on War is Costa Rica, a country in some ways similar to New Zealand in size and population. Costa Rica in 1949, after a bloody civil war, decided to do away with the Armed Forces and wrote a new democratic constitution. Since then 14 Presidential elections have been held with no violence.

One big advantage that New Zealand has over Costa Rica when it comes to defence, is that we are far more remote, 2000km from Australia and some 7,000km from South America compared with Costa Rica’s land borders with Panama and Nicaragua. Plus, the United States has regularly pressurised Costa Rica to reverse its pacifist stance but to no avail. If Costa Rica can reject war and armed forces why cannot New Zealand and save millions of dollars a year? After all, as Christians, Jesus tells us to love our neighbour.

1. Justo L. Gonzalez (1984). The Story of Christianity. HarperSanFrancisco [↑](#footnote-ref-1)