

The

Common Good

Taking a Preferential Option for the Poor

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Vatican endorses 'Robin Hood' Tax

Jim Consedine

Greed is Good! Gordon Gecko's famous declaration in the 1988 movie *Wall Street* has echoed down through the decades. Greed now forms a part of the very DNA of the global economic system. It sits at the heart of the financial crises of the past 20 years. 'Greed is good' has become an accepted market place ethic as witnessed by the obscene salaries and bonuses paid to the corporate, cultural and sporting elites in our time. Meanwhile the gap between the rich and poor has accelerated at breakneck speed.

The rage expressed around the world in recent months as the 'Occupy Wall Street' protests escalated is merely the latest expression of anger and disgust at an economic system that crushes the hopes of billions while rewarding a tiny elite who control the economic levers.

From New York to Rome, from Madrid to Sydney, from Toronto to Dunedin, on every continent and in hundreds of cities and towns in between, tens of thousands joined forces to vent their anger at the way democracies have been taken over by the rich and the super rich who exercise disproportionate power over peoples' lives.

Of course, such rage cannot be maintained over lengthy periods – especially in the face of water cannons, mobilised police and countless arrests. It has since died down to a large degree. But that doesn't mean anything has changed for the better.

New Zealand

In New Zealand, things were quieter. Multiple earthquakes in Christchurch, the aftermath of the Pike River Coal mining disaster and the Rugby World Cup sapped the energies of many. But the international economic virus that has affected so many parts of the world adversely these past months is alive and well here at home. The opening of the books by the Government in late October



Errol Flynn, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938)

showed we had no room for complacency. They did not make for hopeful reading.

Economic gloom leading to further hardship is here to stay for the foreseeable future. The suffering will be compounded by the fact that much of the infrastructure which has helped the poor to manage in an unequal world is being deliberately underfunded by a government still dedicated to failed neo-liberal economic policies.

The General Election was fought largely on the management of the economy. What we generally had was spin with neither of the major players willing to tackle the underlying causes of global financial insecurity. Both major parties are locked into a global financial system that has shown itself unable to change to

meet the huge inequalities it creates and the desperate needs of the poor and the disenfranchised.

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What can be done?

In Rome in October, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace produced a lengthy analysis looking critically at corporate capitalism, market values and the global



economic system. In a document entitled *Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of a Global Public Authority*, the idea of a financial transaction tax (FTT) or Tobin Tax was among recommendations it endorsed. (*Google – Vatican/Justice and Peace, for full document*).

In its damning indictment of the current economic corporate model, the document says, ‘The inequalities and distortions of capitalist development are often an expression not only of economic liberalism but also of utilitarian thinking: that is, theoretical and practical approaches according to which what is useful for the individual leads to the good of the community. This saying has a core of truth, but it cannot be ignored that individual utility – even where it is legitimate – does not always favour the common good. In many cases a spirit of solidarity is called for that transcends personal utility for the good of the community.’

This is all Vatican-speak to say we need a radical overhaul of how we conduct economic life. It calls for a restructuring of ideology whereby the common good becomes the primary focus not individual gain. It directly confronts the spiral of inequality and deprivation amidst abundance that characterizes global capitalism. And it

promotes some serious ways of dealing with the issues. One of them is the so-called financial transaction tax (FTT) or Tobin Tax. In Europe where it has a huge following, it is called the Robin Hood tax.

The Tobin ‘Robin Hood’ Tax

The original idea came from the late James Tobin, the Nobel Prize winning economist from Yale University, who floated the idea in 1972 for a financial transaction tax (FTT) on every payment across borders. It suggested a simple tax, for example of 0.1% - 0.25% but up to 1%, on all financial transactions across borders. Backers of the scheme today are advocating that it be introduced to a full range of financial markets, not just currency markets as proposed by Tobin. It is estimated that up to \$200 billion could be generated each year. Cf *Tobin Tax.org*

The money accumulated would be placed in a special fund, specifically air marked for agreed goals – poverty alleviation, climate control, environmental protection and disease elimination to mention a few. These are all issues which individual nations currently cannot grapple with because of their size and cost.

The Vatican statement pointedly condemns ‘neoliberal thinking’ and ‘the idolatry of the market’ and recommends ‘taxation measures on financial transactions through fair but modulated rates with charges proportionate to the complexity of the operations.’ The latter is pretty much what Tobin suggested 40 years ago. It is not promoted as a panacea for current problems. Only a complete restructuring of economic life accompanied by a radical shift in goals and values could attempt that.

This is substantive stuff. What the Vatican here is calling for is nothing less than an overhaul of financial sector and a reprioritizing of social goals. These goals are not new but have formed the content of the Church’s social teaching for the past several decades.

The Tobin Tax has won significant endorsements from a wide-ranging array of groups. It is now a worldwide movement. In April 2011 the European Parliament approved a report backing the Tobin Tax. It joined groups like the World Council of Churches, the AFL-CIO bloc of US trade unions, more than 100 NGOs like War on Want, Oxfam, the Rain Forest Action Network and many others.

The Vatican anointing the Tobin Tax is another step forward. This tax sits at the heart of the Gospel commitment to provide for the poor and marginalized. It makes sense in a world that deals daily in billions and trillions of dollars. Much of this is in the hands of speculators, financiers and international banks whose dealings create huge injustice and who are seemingly unaccountable.

God’s justice demands a better distribution of wealth and resources. The Tobin Tax fits squarely within the parameters of biblical justice and Catholic social teaching. Properly implemented, it provides a practical and realistic method of re-distribution of wealth.

Who are we?

Members of Te Wairua Maranga Trust, which publishes this paper, have since 1989 been operating as a community following a Catholic Worker spirituality. We view the Treaty of Waitangi as our nation’s founding covenant. We try, however inadequately at times, to live the Sermon on the Mount and its modern implications. We operate three houses of hospitality in Christchurch named after Suzanne Aubert, Thomas Merton, and Joseph Cardijn. We offer hospitality to people in need either on a temporary or more permanent basis. We have a continuing outreach to a number of families offering friendship and support. We usually receive back more than we ever give. We promote non-violence and a ‘small is beautiful’ approach to life, practise co-operative work and peace making, focus on issues of justice, support prison ministry, help create intentional communities, and try to practise voluntary poverty and personalism. We also engage in regular prayer and generally struggle along like everybody else.

We celebrate a liturgy every Wednesday at 6:00 pm at the Suzanne Aubert House, 8A Cotterill St, Addington, (off Poulson St, near Church Square), followed by a shared meal. Anyone is welcome – phone Francis, 338-7105.

We do not seek funding from traditional sources. We hope to receive enough to keep our houses of hospitality open and our various works going. Catholic Worker houses do not issue tax receipts since they are running neither a business nor a church social agency. We invite people to participate personally and unconditionally. Should you wish to make a regular contribution, you may do so through our Te Wairua Maranga Westpac Trust holding account (number 031703-0036346-02). Donations may also be made to **Te Wairua Maranga Trust, Box 33-135, Christchurch.**

Editorial

Kingdom Economics

A prominent Irish journalist, reflecting on Ireland's presidential election, said that the Irish people feel totally powerless to effect real change in their lives now because of the bail-out of their banks by the International Monetary Fund and the European Union. He felt the country had been bought like a chattel.

What a tragic comment! After the massive struggle for hundreds of years to rid Ireland of foreign oppression and win freedom, the Irish have found themselves now almost totally enslaved to a monetary system controlled in foreign capitals.

They have sold themselves cheaply for a few blankets and shiny trinkets! Ireland had an economic boom in the 1990s and few thought it would ever stop. They borrowed and went on a ten-year consumer binge, spending freely. Now they have paid for it with their very soul.

What would happen to the New Zealand psyche if we woke up one morning to find that we had had to be bailed out by foreign interests? The New Zealand economy is built on the same shifting sands as was Ireland's. We are borrowing to stay afloat. We are the same size as Ireland. We are following many of the same prescriptions.

As in Ireland during the 1990s, the gap in New Zealand between rich and poor is growing. Here too the rich keep getting richer. The *NBR* 'rich list' published earlier illustrated this. The country's wealthiest 151 individuals and families now have a combined wealth of a whopping \$45.2 billion, up \$7 billion on last year. The Government's entire tax take during 2010 was \$50.7 billion, barely more than the 'rich list's' combined worth.

In comparison, the average New Zealander's wage rose 1.9 percent in the year to March 2011 (*Statistics New Zealand*). The median annual income in New Zealand was \$529 per week, or \$27,500 per year.

CW Economics

What to do? Catholic Worker economics have usually been sneered at as being idealistic and unattainable. Yet there is much about them that makes terrific sense in a world which has finite resources and has rediscovered sustainability. On a manageable local scale, they make eminent sense. Peter Maurin's ideas of locally owned, locally produced, locally worked small enterprises and farms is a model that resonates with many today. Just ask at the farmer's markets on a Saturday morning!

EF Schumacher's book *Small is Beautiful*, long an

iconic testament in CW circles, has as much to offer now as it did when it was written in 1977. And the Tobin 'Robin Hood' Tax makes sense too – a small tax on each small cross border financial transaction. It is manageable and relatively painless and could accumulate a fund which, wisely used, really could attack some of the planet's major crises – climate change, hunger, pollution of air and waterways, among others.

Jesus proposed a way forward economically and socially for the human family when he walked the earth. Honour God by looking after one another. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give shelter to the homeless, protect the weak. Then the radical bit – love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, forgive those who persecute you. Be gentle, be kind, act justly. These are not beyond the reach of ordinary human beings. They provide a divine plan for living – now, in

this modern age.

We live at a time of almost total dominance by empire – economically by corporate capitalism; politically by the empire of the US and its allies. Jesus taught at a time of almost total dominance by the empire of Rome. Every facet of his life was influenced by the occupying power. People would have scorned his attempts to change their way of thinking to Kingdom economics and the Reign of God, not Caesar. I'm sure the power-brokers laughed at him and his ragged band of followers. Talk about tilting at windmills!

Like Jesus, we need to sow seeds of hope and radical change if we are to emerge from the current crisis. It is a crisis fuelled largely by rampant financial speculation, gross materialism, war and greed. Our times require a radical shift in emphasis and values. Jesus still provides the model and the teaching.

And 2000 years on, people worldwide still celebrate his ideas and seek to implement them.

—Jim Consedine



CW website

- Leading articles from the first 14 years of *The Common Good*
- Alternative funerals
- Restorative justice
- Other theological issues

www.catholicworker.org.nz

7 Reasons for Financial Transaction Taxes in NZ: A FACT SHEET

1. In 2008, prior to the global financial crisis, world trade in various financial commodities was 74 times higher than global GDP. Daily turnover for global currency trade as of April 2010 was \$4 trillion (\$1,460 trillion a year). This speculative activity is destabilising the world economy and creating speculative bubbles that ultimately hurt grassroots people.

2. The unprecedented level of financial speculation represents the desire of the world's super-rich to continue reaping super-profits. To achieve this, governments worldwide have removed all barriers to financial speculation and encouraged a supply of cheap credit by banks. A giant financial casino has been created, where everything that fluctuates in price has attracted the speculators.

4. The only mechanism that could make speculators pay tax, particularly overseas ones, is a tax on the financial transaction itself. There is growing momentum worldwide for Financial Transaction Taxes (FTTs) to be introduced to a full range of financial markets, not just

currency markets as proposed by James Tobin in 1972 (the Tobin Tax).

5. Only the very rich profit from speculation in financial markets, only the very rich shift large amounts of money around via the banking system. FTTs are a progressive form of taxation, as it's the rich, not the poor, who will be paying the tax.

6. A 0.1% general FTT could raise over \$NZ1.6 billion (0.88% of New Zealand's GDP). FTTs collected via the electronic bank settlement process would be impossible to avoid. Capital Gains Taxes (CGTs) are widely recognized as being easy to avoid

7. All trade in the NZ dollar, wherever it takes place in the world, has to go through a settlement process which is overseen by New Zealand's Reserve Bank. A FTT applied electronically at the point of settlement would be inexpensive and easy to do. If there was the political will there is no reason why NZ could not introduce a unilateral FTT.

Maori Party pledges Peace Week

On 5 November 1881, armed soldiers and militia invaded the peaceful settlement of Parihaka in Taranaki, arrested their leaders and shipped them off to prisons in the South Island. The troops then pillaged the village, raped many of the women and ruined the crops that Parihaka people relied on for food. No physical resistance was offered. Instead the troops were offered food and drink.

On 5th November 2011, a hikoī arrived at Parliament led by kaumatua from Parihaka. The **130 years Commemoration March o ngā tupuna o Parihaka** was to remember the grievances of all their tupuna throughout the motu and those who never returned home

The grievances are:

- Imprisonment without trial.
- The raping, thus interruption of whakapapa,
- The pillaging, torture and razing of homes,
- Gross and flagrant breaches of civil and human rights.
- The attempted genocide upon Tohu Kakahi and Te Whiti-o-Rongomai, their followers and succeeding generations.

The Maori Party has pledged it will establish a Peace Week, from 31 October to 5 November, to honour the heroism and the peacemaking heritage established at Parihaka. In a press release, co-leader Tariana Turia said that November 5th 'is a very important day to acknowledge a unique period of our cultural heritage.'

'We would like to encourage New Zealanders to learn about the heroic expression of peace that emerged from Parihaka, and to recreate 5 November as a national day to honour peace, respect and non-violence.'

'The people of Parihaka have long advocated for the 5 November to become a national day to learn our own history, and to recognize the significance of Parihaka in the promotion of peace and goodwill. Earlier this year, I had the honour of supporting a petition to Parliament which called for 5 November to become associated in the minds of New Zealanders as the starting point for a legacy of peace making.'

'I would be really surprised if anyone in New Zealand genuinely recognizes the commemoration of Guy Fawkes Day as a memorial to the infamous arsonist of some four hundred years ago in the English Parliament; or indeed whether the relevance of vampire, ghosts and ghouls linked to the American celebration of Halloween has meaning for our country.'

'The Maori Party believes that we should, instead, be proud of our own local response to violence as leading the world in the spirit of peace – to provide an opportunity for communities to celebrate the practice of passive resistance.'

'The events that happened at Parihaka on 5 November 1881 are not ones to be proud of – but the response led by Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi is one that we could all be proud of.'

The Occupation Movement

Shay Cullen SC

The protestors that are camping on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral in London and on the streets of cities around the world are part of a protest movement that hungers and thirsts for justice and equality and an end to corruption. It began in Spain a year ago when the central plaza was occupied. That sparked the Chilean student sit-ins in Santiago demanding justice in education and then came the 'Occupy Wall St.' protest in Manhattan against the corrupt bankers and global financial manipulators.

The inequality and ever widening gap between the poor and rich in developed and poor nations is the root of the problem. It always has been especially since the globalization of trade and neo-liberal capitalism, that is, business without a conscience, took over the world.

New sit-down and 'occupy' protest groups are springing up around the world to protest and change this. It is a reawakening or a continuation of a world-wide protest movement that began twenty years ago in the 'March Against Poverty, Make Poverty History' campaigns that called for justice and debt forgiveness for poor nations. These young generations of protesters are not marching; they are sitting down and refuse to move. They are inspiring millions to act for justice and that gladdens the hearts of all who have worked all their lives to bring about global equality. The spirit lives on, the hope remains, the love of justice will overcome evil.

The protesters are expressing the worldwide disgust with corrupt politicians of the G20 nations who made promises to end poverty and suffering but did not keep them. Famine grips East Africa, food prices soar, the US oil giants are turning corn into ethyl-alcohol to fuel more cars instead of providing food for the hungry. Sex slavery thrives and human trafficking continues with impunity. The millennium goals to reduce poverty and disease and increase education will not be met. These are the challenges that must be confronted.

The Middle East is in protest and rebellion too against tyrants and their backers. Some have won liberation. These are great signs of hope yet thousands have been killed in Syria as the people demand freedom.

The resurgence of that voice of compassion for the poor and the demand for global social justice and is once again challenging those most responsible for world hunger and inequality, namely the super rich bankers, currency manipulators and corrupt politicians. Nothing new in that line up of suspects but what's new is the globalization of the protest.

Thanks to the internet and web sites like Facebook, Twitter and You Tube, the protest action is relayed around the world in a flash. The demand for a 'Robin Hood' Tax is gaining worldwide popular support by which every large scale global financial transaction will pay a tax to fight global poverty, hunger and disease. It is opposed by the money moguls of Manhattan, the wizards of Wall Street that make pension funds and taxpayers money disappear into their pockets – a conjuring act



of global proportions.

The 'occupiers' want radical change, a peaceful revolution that will change how the world economy is managed and structured. They are calling for an end to elitist crony capitalism and a structural change so economic power and wealth are more democratically shared and regulated, not concentrated in the hands of a greedy elite of billionaires who buy elections, and fix the legal and trading system in their favor and exclude the majority.

This is best illustrated in the way the ruling elite of the Philippines (where I have worked for forty years), are grabbing the mineral rich lands of the indigenous tribal Filipinos for destructive open-pit mining. They do it in partnership with multinational mining and investment corporations and because their family members, relatives and cronies are the lawmakers, justices, enforcers and bankers the get away with it.

The local elite in pseudo-democracies get their relatives or friends in government to approve loans of foreign borrowings or taxpayers' money (seldom repaid) and sign environmental clearances and mining permits. They bypass requirements like community acceptance and eliminate opponents and proceed to devastate the land with open-pit mining. The result is flooding, toxic waste, logging and land slides on ancestral lands.

Italian Missionary Father Fausto Tentorio in Mindanao and many more journalists, environmentalists, priests and pastors, have been killed for speaking out and opposing the corrupt system. There is no greater love than this than to give their lives for others. They are the true courageous Christians and while they die for the farmers and the forests, for the poor and the oppressed people those protesting in the plazas or on the footpaths are united in the same just cause. We too are part of this work for justice through prayer, action and giving support.

Fr Shay Cullen SC is a Columban priest who has worked among the poor in the Philippines for 40 years.

Ban Fracking in NZ!

Kathleen Gallagher

FRACKING (Hydraulic Fracturing) is used by the oil, gas and coal seam gas industry to extract oil or gas from deep underground. A mixture of water, sand and chemicals is injected at high pressure into a well, creating a small earthquake that fractures rock and releases pockets of oil or gas trapped inside the rock formations.

Fracking wastewater is contaminated with methane gas and over 40 chemicals, many of them highly toxic. Fracking uses over 20 million litres of water in one frack job. This water can never be used again.

Fracking wastewater is contaminated with methane gas and over 40 chemicals, many of them highly toxic. Fracking uses over 20 million litres of water in one frack job. This water can never be used again. About half flows back out of the well and is stored in huge plastic lined wastewater pits and in tanks. In the US, contaminated frackwater is disposed of by injecting into disused wells, spraying on 'landfarms' and roads, diluting and pumping into rivers/streams and illegal dumping. During the fracking and disposal processes both accidental and deliberate frackwater spills have occurred. The plastic lining of wastewater pits often fails and contaminated frackwater leaches out, polluting land and groundwater. Wastewater pits are bulldozed over with topsoil, leaving contamination in the ground.

Geologists concur there is a high correlation of fracking with earthquake swarms, even in seismically inactive areas. New Zealand is seismically active. More earthquakes are the last thing we need in and around Christchurch. The National Government has already given permits for shale gas exploration drilling and fracking throughout most of Canterbury. There is little information about fracking in NZ but it has taken place onshore in Taranaki and perhaps offshore on oil/gas rigs during 'workovers'.

The National Government has granted permits for shale gas exploration and fracking throughout NZ. The Labour Party has no policy on it to date. The Green Party proposes a moratorium on all shale gas exploration and fracking until investigation by the Ombudsman for the Environment.

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Aotearoa/NZ

- In 1937 the government took ownership of all oil, gas, gold and uranium through the Crown Minerals Act 'for the benefit of all New Zealanders'.

- The Government has opened up most of the country for onshore oil, gas and coal seam gas extraction by carving the land into 'blocks' and offering these blocks for gas, oil and mineral exploration. Offshore 'blocks' are also up for grabs.

- Gas extraction is taking place in Taranaki and TAG Oil Ltd says their Cheal gas well near Stratford is the first onshore well to use fracking techniques in New Zealand.

- TAG Oil is also prospecting for onshore gas and oil in the East Coast and Hawkes Bay. Other companies are prospecting in the Waikato, King Country, Northland, Bay of Plenty, Wairarapa and other parts of both the North and South Islands.

- There are no regulations specifically governing fracking. The government has opened up vast blocks of land for oil/gas extraction with no rules to safeguard our water, land and air.

- Government royalties from the gas/oil extracted is around 5% of the dollar value. The rest stays with the drilling company.

Fracking is something we need to learn about. It is not a nice word and it is an equally ugly concept. We need to watch carefully as mining firms seek contracts in this country. Fracking should be something that is simply not allowed in New Zealand. It is not too late to stop the development of it.

Fracking has spread like wildfire across the USA in the past ten years, contaminating water supplies and causing air/land pollution. Wherever fracking happens, people and animals get sick. Fracking has been banned in France and Ireland. It was halted in Blackpool, England, after earthquakes struck in a previously non-seismic area after fracking had begun.

Fracking is something we need to learn about. It is not a nice word and it is an equally ugly concept. We need to watch carefully as mining firms seek contracts in this country. Fracking should be something that is simply not allowed in New Zealand. It is not too late to stop the development of it.



Waihopai Ploughshares Reflection

Gerard Burns

The actions of the Waihopai 3 have aroused much comment about the moral legitimacy of their actions. Some have taken the position that this is a simple case of vandalism, that government property has been damaged and that the Ploughshares group deserve to suffer the full force of the law including paying repair costs.

There has also been criticism of the jury that found the trio not guilty and that the 'claim of right' defence is dangerous to good order. Following the first trial Sir Bruce Ferguson and Warwick Tucker, current and past heads of the Government Communications Security Bureau, put out a statement. They said Waihopai is not a US spybase in our midst, that it is totally operated and controlled by NZ and is not contributing to torture, war, use of weapons of mass destruction or other unspeakable evil. Quite the reverse they say.

How are we to evaluate these various claims from a Catholic viewpoint? How can we draw on the Scriptures, our Catholic tradition and teaching to assess Aotearoa New Zealand intelligence and military links? This country is part of a politico-military-intelligence network under the leadership of the West's superpower, the USA. This US-led alliance does not totally direct all aspects of our politico-economic direction (eg, NZ's nuclear-weapons-free policy).

However in terms of intelligence gathering we are very much part of the Echelon network involving the UK, USA, Canada and Australia. Research done on this system shows electronic intelligence is gathered through bases such as Waihopai and shared with other Echelon countries. NZ seems to have gathered intelligence on our Pacific and Asian neighbours and on non-Echelon members who are part of the Western alliance (eg, France).

This could mean that the intelligence gathered here in NZ is actually passed on and analyzed in other Echelon countries for their own purposes. We know that certainly the US and UK have been involved in things like extraordinary renditions and torture (sometimes in third countries such as Libya, Morocco, Poland, etc). We know they have collaborated with authoritarian regimes (eg, Libya, Colombia) which have imprisoned and tortured human

rights and Church workers. We know the US has worked to overthrow democratically-elected regimes (eg, Chile).

The Echelon system is tied in to these practices. It may be that some restrictions have been placed on what is done on NZ soil at different times but it is hard to argue that NZ is only involved in morally irreproachable activities. Waihopai is a spybase after all. It is part of a power system that may bring some good but is still designed to guarantee US/Western dominance. This inevitably has a military component (thus Iraq and Afghan wars). It has an economic component (thus pressure on NZ over its Pharmac drug-buying agency). It has an environmental component (access to oil, minerals).

How do we make a moral evaluation of NZ's participation in the US-led Western alliance? How do we evaluate our intelligence services part in that alliance? Do we just accept it blindly? Do we say that it's a sad but necessary price for the good life we enjoy? Do we say it's that it's not perfect but it's better than the alternatives? Have we been sucked into the narrative that the threats to 'us' are many and that we must accept a creeping securitization and surveillance of our society? Is this what has led to the suspicion of movements for social change as evidenced in the recent Urewera trial arrests?

Certainly NZ's participation may bring benefits to some or even to many in this country. But for Catholics does this tie our country into practices that are unacceptable? Can we take the word of the heads of NZ's security services that they are involved only in good activities?

I think we would be naive to do this. The Australian, US and NZ intelligence services knew about the Indonesian military invasion of East Timor in 1975 and its atrocities but let it happen because it suited the West's strategic priorities. Some 200,000 people died as a result of that cold political calculation. Better that they die for the greater (Western) good. How much has this changed?

I have met members of the security services of great personal integrity and who have shown me personal kindness but this question is one of NZ's structural alliances. At that level this country is an integral part of a controlling and militaristic system.

That system is dependent on arms production and use. The NZ government may have put some restrictions on NZ's military and intelligence involvement in the Iraq war but we are still involved in the Afghan war and perhaps other wars. The individual heroism of some soldiers does not take away the question: what are we really part of?

As followers of Jesus Christ who was put to death at the hands of an occupying military power we should have an automatic suspicion of empires. As Catholics whose papal leadership has taken a strong stand against war, nuclear weapons and arms production we need to evaluate our military and intelligence links.

This is not to say that the actions of the Waihopai 3 are beyond critique but it is to say they are asking Gospel-based questions and are seeking to live out the social justice teachings and traditions of our Church. It is not enough to say that they are law-

breakers and therefore clearly need to be punished, without looking at the bigger context. It is not enough to criticise their acquittal as due to the ignorance of the jury. The jury considered seriously the case and came to a legitimate conclusion.

If we are worried about the example that is set for our children then we should also be worried about uncritical acceptance of our country's alliances. I have been impressed by the spirit of prayer, fasting and courage shown by the Waihopai 3. This has been attractive to the young especially. It also impressed the jury. Why is it so threatening for many Catholics?

Mgr. Gerard Burns is the Vicar-General of the Archdiocese of Wellington and a prominent peace and justice advocate. This article first appeared in Welcom and is reprinted with permission.

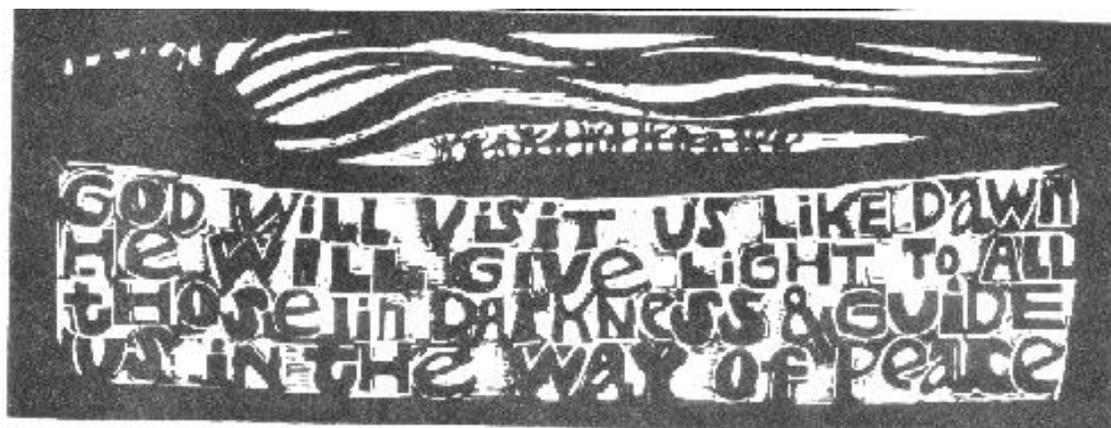
Around the Traps

The exhaustion experienced generally by Christchurch people has affected us too it seems. Wednesday night gatherings are a little down on last year and many of us are feeling that this year can't finish soon enough. Sr Judith, Jock, Vilma, Francis, Kathleen, Sally and Jim have all taken turns at leading our liturgies, so there has been some variation. There is always enough food for the shared meal afterwards and our thanks go to Leoney and Raewyn in particular for their faithful service in the kitchen.

Many of us participated in the Parihaka Day commemoration at St Mary's Church, Addington. It was an excellent gathering, coming as it did immediately after the seminar in the morning where Robert Consedine, Don Rowlands and Anne Parkinson gave very perceptive presentations on different aspects of the 1881 invasion

and its effects. Jim presided over the afternoon service and Richard played guitar. Neighbouring young people from Addington provided the muscle for the barbeque afterwards. All in all, it was very enjoyable.

The world is still on track to significantly lower poverty rates despite setbacks from recent economic, food and energy crises. The overall poverty rate is expected to fall below 15% by 2015, well below the 23% target set in the millennium development goals (MDG) in 2000. This fulfills the target of halving between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people living on less than \$1 per day. That still leaves 900 million a day in developing countries living in extreme poverty (less than \$1.25 per day). *Guardian Weekly*, 15 July 2011



Meinrad Craighead

Paul Dobbyn

‘TOO radical’ is often the tag given to people like United States activist Kathy Kelly, soon to begin a series of talks and workshops in Brisbane based around her 35-year struggle to promote world peace.

It’s a crusade which put the former Catholic high school teacher in jail for nearly a year for planting corn on Missouri nuclear missile sites. The three-times Nobel Peace Prize nominee has also risked life and limb to live with civilians in war zones in Afghanistan, Gaza, Bosnia and Nicaragua.

The 58-year-old activist, described as ‘probably the most respected leader in the American peace movement’, has faced death and imprisonment during her long opposition to war.

As part of peace team working in several countries, she has travelled to Iraq 26 times, notably remaining in combat zones during the early days of both US-Iraq wars. She has been arrested more than 60 times at home and abroad, and written of her experiences among targets of US military bombardment and among inmates of US prisons.

After college in 1978, and while working on her MA in Religious Education at Chicago Theological Seminary, Ms Kelly began volunteer work in Chicago’s Uptown neighbourhood (where she still lives), working at a local soup kitchen with a circle of activists centred around Chicago’s Francis of Assisi House, a homeless shelter in the Catholic Worker tradition.

In 1980 she began work as a teacher of religion at St Ignatius College Preparatory School where she stayed for several years. In 1982 she married fellow activist Karl Meyer and began a lifetime of ‘war tax resistance’ (refusal to pay federal taxes on pacifist grounds), asking her employer to reduce her salary beneath the taxable income.

In August 1988, Kelly participated in the Missouri Peace Planting, trespassing at a nuclear missile silo near Kansas City, Missouri, to plant corn on it. For this action she served nine months in a Lexington, Kentucky, maximum security prison. Some, commenting on Ms Kelly’s way of life, have said: ‘Jail is the only place she can rest.’ Certainly she made the best of two of her longer terms of imprisonment. ‘Both times, I was able to study languages, read many books, and write hundreds of letters,’ she

said. ‘What’s more, I discovered a world of imprisoned beauty. Women helped me understand conditions they faced, on ‘the outside’. In a year I could best describe as the most educational year of my life since I first learned to read, I gained a more acute awareness of how impoverishment affects people. It was good to slow down, to focus on forming friendships, and to find time for reading and study.’

Despite these unexpected benefits, she is careful to emphasise that her sentence and others which followed were comparatively brief. ‘I must clarify that for most prisoners the long sentences constitute a harsh and dreadful separation from loved ones. This is especially for those who long to see their children and who will be separated from them for many years.’

In 2005 she helped found the group *Voices for Creative Nonviolence* to continue challenging US military and economic warfare against Iraq and other countries. Since then further arrests and imprisonment have followed.

Inevitably the question comes back to what those of us of a less radical bent, those of us who don’t necessarily want to spend time in jail for our beliefs, can do to bring about a war-free world. ‘People desiring positive change can find kindred spirits, build community, and slow down, taking more leisure time to think about how to solve the problems we face,’ Ms Kelly said. ‘The greatest terror we face is the threat of what we’re doing to our own environment. How can we live more simply, share resources more equitably, and show that we prefer service to dominance?’

The Catholic Leader, Brisbane, October 23, 2011.



Gandhi's Lesson for Today

Kathy Kelly

In a soon-to-be published book entitled *Gandhi and the Unspeakable: His Final Experiments with Truth*, Jim Douglass contrasts the deadly machinations of Gandhi's probable killers with Gandhi's own incredible bravery and that of his followers, whose mantra during campaigns for independence expressed their absolute commitment to resist injustice openly, lovingly and fearlessly: with their whole lives. Their mantra was 'Do or die.'

By 1946, the longed-for independence of India had become a reality, but Gandhi was deeply dismayed by the slaughter taking place as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs massacred each other. He determined to visit the villages most affected by the violence, beginning in the Noakhali region where the population included 1,800,000 Muslims and 400,000 Hindus. In this region, 'the minority Hindus were landowners and professionals,' Douglass writes. 'They had ignored grievances from Muslim workers who, incensed by tales of Hindus killing Muslims elsewhere, carried out vicious attacks.'

Gandhi and a handful of his friends fanned out, going singly to the Noakhali villages where savage butchery had taken place, and agreed to live alone, in the midst of the violence, and do their best to clean up the debris, rebuild homes and be of general service to the community.

Douglass focuses on the image of Gandhi walking 116 miles to visit 47 villages, forced to balance as precariously in travel as he had in his politics and his life: 'Walking against a background of sky and vegetation, Gandhi could be seen crossing the shankos of Noakhali, narrow bamboo bridges held high on poles.' Many parts of this trip he made entirely alone. He was 77 years of age.

Ordinary people responded positively to the pilgrims who came into their villages. The experiment moved on to Bihar, Calcutta and eventually to New Delhi, attempting to combat the terrorism of both Hindu and Muslim ethnic violence. Eventually, in Delhi, he undertook a final fast for Hindu-Muslim unity. 'I shall terminate the fast only when peace has returned to Delhi,' said Gandhi. 'If peace is restored to Delhi it will have effect not only on the whole of India but also on Pakistan. When that happens, a Muslim will be able to walk around in the city all by himself.'

Gandhi's assassins were plotting violence in secret, both against Gandhi and his vision of Muslim safety in the heart of India, even as Gandhi repeatedly risked all, employing his 'truth force,' the astonishing power of truth, of transparency and nonviolence, that had liberated India. What relevance do Gandhi's tactics of choice have in these times of night raids, drone warfare, and, as the new centerpiece of our foreign policy, a tightening net of abductions and assassinations aiming to cover the globe?

Gandhi the truth-teller died at the hands of his killers, some of whom, Jim Douglass alleges, walked away scot-free under cover of self-preserving lies. Gandhi's assassins believed they were working for the betterment of a country which Gandhi had already moved mountains to liberate, uplift, and enrich, and which they proceeded to help destroy. I think of the United States' tactic of seemingly universal war, to be waged indefinitely throughout a world, where no Muslim will be able to walk in safety if, according to perpetrators of Islamophobia, our nation is finally to prosper.

Consider the contrast between Gandhi's precarious, defenseless efforts to reach his fellow humans, traveling alone and armed only with truth, and, in contrast, weigh U.S. reliance on a massive arsenal of weapons and armed warriors, costing the world \$2 billion dollars per week in lost productivity.

Aged Gandhi walked alone into a nightmare of fear on those bamboo bridges, and his payment for it was death, but his path was one through sunlight that redeemed his country; while his scheming jingoistic killers devised a doom for India which is still bloodily unfolding. Many patriots claim to love the U.S., but the darkness and the blood will corrupt this love, will make us doom our country: our safety will not survive the determination to find it in arms, in numbers, and in the cover of night.

Gandhi's solitary sunlit path, his path against the sky, was by far the less precarious. As we may learn through occupations of town squares across the U.S., truth, and only truth, can keep the balance.

Kathy Kelly is a co-coordinator of *Voices for Creative Nonviolence* <http://vcnv.org/>.

Letters

Federal Correctional Institute
5701 8th St., Camp Parks
Dublin, CA 94568
10 August 2011

Dear Jim

What a happy surprise to get your letter. Thanks so much for writing to me. This time round here in the prison I am teaching ESL, and actually just teaching one class, so I have time to prep work and other things in the prison too. I am enjoying the teaching. It is what I did for years on the outside.

Lots of compromises in my life. My co-defendant Steve Kelly SJ is in solitary and makes no compromises with the prison authorities. Makes me think about what I am doing every day.

I've been reading (Archbishop) Francis Chullikat, the Vatican's representative to the UN. He is so clear on nuclear weapons. He said that the indiscriminate destruction of entire cities is a crime against God and merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation. He talks about the hundreds of billions spent on nuclear weapons being sinful, the grossest misplacement of priorities and a theft from the poor. He talks about how it isn't morally sufficient to draw down stocks of superfluous weapons while modernizing nuclear arsenals and investing vast sums to ensure their future production and maintenance. Not bad for the Church hierarchy! I'm thinking of writing to him but I'm not sure what I'd ask him to do. Support us who are on trial, up for sentencing or in prison? Come to Bangor or the Pentagon with us?

The judge had a lot of good things to say about us during sentencing, and cut all our sentences in half. In a way, that's OK. But in another way, I don't care. There is plenty of work to do here as well as outside. More of a problem is the year of supervised release that is tacked on. I probably won't co-operate with that, and so it makes things harder when I get out.

The prison continues to be a crucible of injustice. Story after story of women who didn't have much of a chance as children and then here for long sentences, not learning much of anything that will help them when they get out.

Thanks for sending news, for writing,
Love,

Susan Crane

Christchurch
23 August 2011

Dear Friends

Thank you for producing *The Common Good* supporting the Church's 'option for the poor', opposing violence and promoting peace. It was St Teresa of Calcutta who said that 'the greatest destroyer of peace in the world is abortion.' What greater poverty is there than to be deprived of your life while still in the womb? New Zealand has the highest rate of child abuse in the OECD. Is not the violent dismembering of a child in the womb the ultimate in child abuse? For a doctor to force his way into the womb of a woman to dismember her child is violence perpetrated on women who are the second victims of abortion.

It is painfully disappointing that I have never seen in *The Common Good* a voice raised to protest the killing of God's precious infants. *The Common Good* has an important role in promoting a just society and ensuring that laity appreciate that we are all called to defend life, promote a culture of life and oppose a culture of death.

Yours sincerely,

Ken Orr

Secretary – Right for Life (*letter abridged*)

The Common Good takes its position on 'right to life' issues from its own traditions and guided by the NZ Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter of April 1997 on A Consistent Ethic of Life – Te Kahu-o-Te-Ora, which highlights eight pro-life inter-related issues including abortion. We believe this document to be a helpful integrated response to complex life issues, well suited to the age in which we live. Writers in The Common Good have on occasion written opposing abortion. In addition, on no fewer than three occasions we have republished the bishops' pastoral in full. We choose to regularly highlight other life issues of war, poverty, racial discrimination, the arms race and economic injustice partly because they are largely ignored elsewhere. We commend Ken Orr for his continued commitment to the unborn and his faithfulness to that cause. Ed.

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The Common Good

Te Wairua Maranga Trust
 Box 33-135
 Christchurch 8244
 New Zealand



And so we walk the narrow path of Gospel non-violence. We are becoming Beatitude people, Sermon on the Mount people, a new breed of Christians. We go forward filled with hope into the new life of resurrection, the promised land of peace. Each step forward brings blessings upon blessings upon blessings.

John Dear SJ - *A Persistent Peace*