



Do Justice

"Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the April Do Justice. Do Justice continues to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective in the tradition of the prophet Micah and St Francis.

Freedom: What is it?

Over recent weeks we have seen a number of groups advocating and, in some cases, protesting for 'freedom'. Much of this has been as a response to the mandates requiring people to be fully vaccinated before they can work, enter certain premises, etc. A number of these protestors claim to be Christians, followers of Jesus Christ. They claim that they have the right to decide what can and cannot go into their bodies, that they have the 'freedom' to choose. Others rely on the Human Rights Act and the right to refuse medical treatment.

Back in November last year we wrote about the relationship between individual freedom and community responsibility and the dichotomy between the Human Rights Act, the Bill of Rights and the Health and Safety Act. The Government had to walk a fine line between the apparently conflicting requirements of these Acts. They eventually made vaccination mandatory where there was a clear health risk, and required a vaccination passport for all who work in those areas where there is a clear risk. They also made it voluntary for businesses with direct contact with the public to choose. However, if unvaccinated people were allowed in, they had to abide by rules to limit the possibility of transmission of the virus.

Requiring health workers, border workers, and others to be vaccinated did not appear to raise too much opposition but requiring a passport to enter a café or pub did, despite the obvious dangers.

The Rev'd Norman Brookes, writing on the front page of the March edition of Touchstone, the Methodist Church's monthly newspaper, compares the similarities and differences between our situation with the situation in Galatia when Paul writes to them about the need for non-Jewish Christian men to follow the Jewish requirement to be circumcised in order to be true Christians. Some Christians have argued that vaccination is like circumcision, which Paul makes clear is not required to be a Christian. But they lose sight of the differences. Circumcision only affects the individual circumcised; vaccination has a much wider impact and involves the whole of society. Vaccination is to protect not just the individual but your family, your friends, and your neighbours.

Norman Brookes ends his article with a quote from 1 Corinthians 13. *"And now abide three things: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."* Christians are people who are set free to love.

War and peace

Possibly one of the greatest fiction books of all time is Leo Tolstoy's magnum opus *War and Peace*. Published in 1869, it chronicles Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in 1812. Tolstoy explores the impact of war on various people from various strata of a very stratified society but not the serfs or peasants. He brings out the horrors of war in a way not previously written – horrors that we are now seeing night by night on our TV news as Russia's Bonaparte invades Russia's neighbour Ukraine.

Tolstoy's characters are mainly from the Russian aristocracy, and we learn little of the impact of war on the peasants and working classes except for a few who actually do the fighting.

In contrast, what we are seeing each evening is the impact of the invasion on all the citizens of Ukraine which brings back, for those of us old enough to remember, memories of World War II. But unlike in Tolstoy's time, this war is being fought as much with words and pictures as it is with bullets and bombs.

What to believe? Is the Ukrainian government neo-Nazi and repressing Russian-speaking people in Ukraine as Russia claims? Does Russian President Putin want to reclaim all the territory that made up the old Soviet Union? A Soviet Union where Putin was a senior member of the KGB, the Soviet secret police.

And what about the United Nations, an organisation that was set up immediately after World War II to ensure that we would never have another world war but in setting it up, the five victorious powers from World War II reserved for themselves a veto.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the run-up to World War II and today is globalisation – not just trade globalisation but the globalisation of communications and travel. It is globalisation that has enabled the Western Powers to react to Russia's invasion of the Ukraine with sanctions that we have never seen before, designed to bring the Russian economy to a grinding halt. Although most of the sanctions appear to be aimed at Putin and his oligarch friends, they will also impact the Russian public. The West is relying on the

impact of sanctions on the whole Russian population to force a change of heart by the Russian leadership.

Let us hope that the sanctions are successful, not just in this instance but for the future when a country is tempted to use armed force to get its way. That country's leadership will know that the rest of the world may apply crippling sanctions. In the long term, the use of sanctions may become a more powerful tool for peace as long as control of sanctions is within a body like the United Nations (with no vetoes). Maybe, just maybe, something good may come out of this human disaster if a non-lethal way of settling issues can be shown to work.

Housing: Human rights and social justice

In the September 2021 edition of Do Justice we discussed the human rights aspects of adequate housing, stating that, *"If the Government was really serious about solving the housing crisis, they could get Kāinga Ora to build enough houses to provide adequate housing for all."*

If you agree with this statement that housing is effectively a human right, then we would encourage you to sign a petition that is being promoted by Alternative Aotearoa.

"PETITION FOR AN INDUSTRIAL-SCALE STATE HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME

We, the undersigned, are calling in Aotearoa New Zealand's parliament to affirm housing as a basic human right and insist the government **adopt an industrial scale state house building programme to end the housing crisis for citizens on low incomes**. Specifically, we are asking parliament to insist on:

1. The government acknowledge that 50% of the current state house waiting list of almost 25,000 are Māori tenants and families and provide iwi and Māori organisations the funding and resources to meet the Crown's responsibility to provide housing under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
2. The government funding and building state house on the same scale as the first Labour Government (1935 to 1949) to deal with the housing crisis so as to build in the short term at least another 20,000 additional state houses to raise the state house provision from 3.6% of total housing stock to 5.4%.
3. The establishment of a state-run house-building ministry (e.g. a Ministry of Green Works) to implement this industrial scale state house building programme by utilising:
 - lower borrowing rates and Reserve Bank credit available to the government
 - economies of scale in the purchase of housing materials
 - access to crown and local body land and properties
 - the ability to fast-track planning, design, development, and infrastructure for the programme,

and providing an extensive apprenticeship training ground for the next generation of trades people (carpenters, joiners,

drainlayers, roofers, electricians, painters and related building trades)."

If you go to [Housing Petition 2022 — Alternative Aotearoa](#), you can sign the petition.

Alternative Aotearoa is working for an alternative Aotearoa based on values of social justice alongside environmental and human sustainability.

When the new becomes old and the old new

It almost seemed inevitable that when the brand-new leader of the Opposition gave his 'state of the nation' address that the headline-catching part would be tax cuts, even though the actual beneficiaries of his proposed tax changes would be those earning over \$180,000. But he did touch on one important part of the income tax system that does need reforming, and that is the income tax bands. These have remained the same for many years with no allowance for inflation. This may not have been a big problem for the last 10 years but with the cost of living rapidly increasing because of COVID-19, central banks around the world printing vast amounts of money, and now a war in Ukraine, something should be done to correct the situation.

So, we suggest that Finance Minister Robertson in his budget proposals in May 2022 makes some adjustments to the income tax system, including a zero-income tax rate for the first \$10,000 and an additional tax band at over \$300,000 of 45% to pay for the changes at the lower end.

Even with these changes, we would still have some of the lowest marginal tax rates in the world. For instance, Australia has a top marginal rate of 45% at A\$180,000, the UK 45% at £150,000, France 45% at €160,000. Hence the argument that our top earners would leave for greener pastures does not appear to be valid, particularly when virtually all the OECD countries except New Zealand have capital gains taxes and inheritance taxes. Overall, our top income earners get a pretty good deal compared to most other OECD countries. It is the lowest earners that get stung. Every single dollar a person earns in New Zealand is taxed, yet every single dollar that comes from a gain in capital is tax-free.

In New Zealand someone on the minimum wage and working 40 hours a week will be paying about \$6,700 a year in income tax; on the Living Wage, more than \$7,000. Does this seem fair? It is time for the Government to have a very hard look at the income tax rates and bands. Our system is becoming more and more regressive each year.