



## A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the September 2023 edition of Do Justice as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective in the tradition of Micah and St Francis.

### **Do we really have to live with gross inequality?**

Some years ago, a few people who had been involved in the Living Wage Movement came together to ask this question. Included were representatives of the diocese and other faith-based organisations, charities, and trade unionists. About the same time the Board of the JR McKenzie Foundation, who were providing some financial support for the Living Wage Movement, were also asking similar questions.

The result was the formation of Te Ohu Whakawhanaunga Charitable Trust with the diocese as one of the sponsoring organisations. The name was gifted by the Māori Women's Welfare League and brings together five key principles:

- Mahitahi - Working together for the common good
- Tautoko - Support
- Awhi - Embrace, assist
- Manaakitanga - Care, dignity
- Utu - Reciprocity
- Aroha – Love.

The JR McKenzie Trust through the Peter McKenzie Project agreed to provide funding to help set up the trust and form an Auckland assembly.

One of the things that we had learnt from the Living Wage Movement was that the community organising approach, successfully used in the USA and the UK, could also be successfully applied in New Zealand, when concerned organisations came together to advocate for serious societal change. In the USA the Industrial Areas Foundation was established in 1940 by Saul David Alinsky and a Board of Directors that included businessman Marshal Field, Roman Catholic Bishop Sheil and Kathryn Lewis, daughter of John L Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers. The mission of the new endeavour was to build from Alinsky's experience developing the Back of the Yards Neighbourhoods Council (BYNC) into other communities in the greater Chicago area and beyond. The BYNC was the first "community organization" in the USA and a groundbreaking venture that brought ordinary families a voice in the decisions impacting their lives. As a social entrepreneur Alinsky managed to bridge divisions of ethnicity, religion and political philosophy in the interest of community improvement. As a consequence, BYNC achieved a level of power, local accountability, and impact unheard of in metropolitan Chicago of that time.

Citizens UK is a similar organisation to BYNC and started a Living Wage campaign in 2001. The Living Wage Movement and Te Ohu Whakawhanaunga have close ties with both organisations and have helped to run five-day workshops on community organising for the leaders of organisations involved in social justice.

One of the initial objectives of the Trust was to establish an Auckland based alliance of organisations that would collectively work towards a future where children and families flourish without the restrictions of poverty.

Te Ohu Whakawhanaunga Manukau Tamaki (Te Ohu Tamaki) was incorporated in October 2022 with the diocese as one of the founding members. A Founding Assembly is to be held on:

**Wednesday 6th September 2023**  
**At Lesieli Tonga Auditorium, 143 Favona Road, Māngere**  
**6pm to 8pm**

Prime minister Chris Hipkins and the leader of the opposition Chris Luxon plus leaders from other political parties will be there to respond to our first campaign on the need for safe dry housing in Auckland. Bishop Ross will also be speaking on behalf of the diocese. It is anticipated that around 1,000 members from the over 40 organisations that make up Te Ohu Tamaki will be there. Anyone from the Auckland Diocese is more than welcome to attend.

No, we do not have to live with gross inequality and poverty, if we come together, we can make a difference. This is just one small step that we are taking together towards a fair equitable and sustainable world.

### **Misinformation and disinformation, something new or something old?**

In recent years much has been reported about misinformation and in the media, both traditional and social. Perhaps the most concerning has been the speculation that disinformation, in particular, has changed the results of crucial elections in various countries. The Trump success in the USA and Brexit in the UK in 2016 are often "explained" by disinformation and general manipulation of news. But it appears that disinformation is not confined to the "big issues" of the day. One example quoted by Sander van der Linden, Professor of Social Psychology, Cambridge University, in his book Foolproof: Why we Fall for Misinformation and How to build Immunity<sup>1</sup> involves an article that appeared in the New York Sun in 1835 claiming that "the one of the world's leading astronomers" had discovered on the moon lunar vegetation, moon bison and blue unicorns. The story was followed up with further articles including one about a "human-like

<sup>1</sup> Published by HarperCollins London 2023

creature with enormous bat-wings” and helped quadruple the newspapers circulation!

Van der Linde also reminds us that misinformation and disinformation are not new. He quotes the way in which Octavian put out disinformation about his opponents Mark Antony and Queen Cleopatra in the prelude to the Roman Civil War in 44BC between Octavian and Antony that brought an end to the Roman Republic.<sup>2</sup>

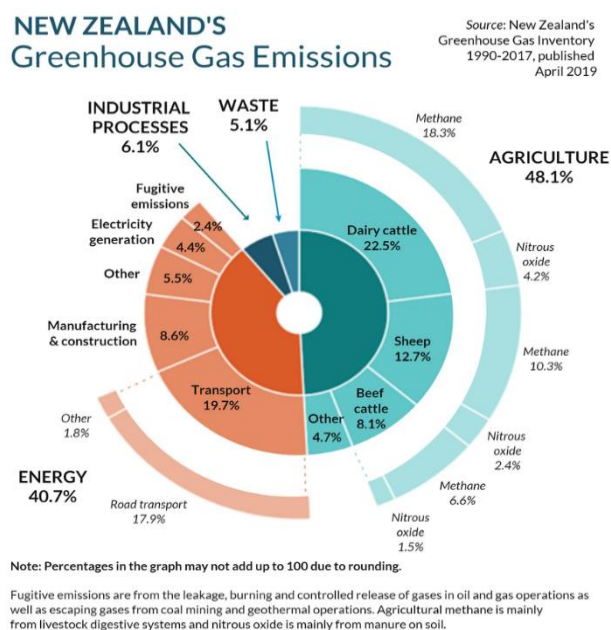
What is different now is the speed and reach that fake news in all its forms has. It can spread today, as a result of the internet and social media, around the world within seconds. Van der Linden gives many examples of how extensively and quickly news, including fake news, can spread and how misinformation and disinformation can be used against adversaries. He does not leave it there as he describes how the work that social psychologists and statisticians have developed ways in which we can both recognise and build immunity to fake news and its impacts.

He and his team in collaboration with experts around the world have developed a “vaccine” against misinformation that enables the “vaccinated” to quickly identify the signs and respond.

#### How do roads fit into a sustainable future?

Both National and Labour have indicated that if they form the next government they would have extensive new road programmes. Labour does at least include improved and new public transport in its proposals, while National wants four lanes between Whangārei and Tauranga.

Transport makes up close to 20% of New Zealand’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GGEs),<sup>3</sup> all from the use of fossil fuels (petrol and diesel) as can be seen in the diagram below.



Over the last two years electric and plug in hybrid cars have started to very slowly change this but it will be many years,

30 or more, before we have a sustainable fleet of cars on our roads. So, investing in new roads and increasing road maintenance does appear to make some sense from a climate change point of view. We have the cars, and they need roads to run on. However, experience around the world indicates that when roads become congested, building more roads to deal with the congestion does not work and only leads to more, worse congestion.

Do Justice has regularly raised climate change as a key issue and one that should be the most important issue for the upcoming election. Are there better alternatives to building more roads so that we can get around our country and not put more and more GGEs into the atmosphere? Two fundamental questions need to be asked when considering climate change and transport. What is the motive force (fossil fuels or electricity) and what is the per person fuel requirement? Electric vehicles will certainly reduce GGEs compared to petrol and diesel drive vehicles as long as we continue to increase sustainable electricity generation. But when it comes to per capita usage public transport is a much better option, but it must be public transport that is convenient, fast, safe and clean. Mayor Robbie had the right idea in the 70s for a comprehensive system for an Auckland with half of today’s population, only for the incoming National Government, under Robert Muldoon, to can it. Hopefully history will not repeat itself.

A recent TVNZ News poll indicated that climate change was only the fourth most important issue for the general election.<sup>4</sup> Only 7% of those polled considered climate change important compared to 48% responding the cost of living. Crime (14%) and healthcare (13%) made up the other top four issues. The short-term concerns of New Zealanders appear to come through very clearly in this poll which is a concern when we have experienced over the last nine months what our world will look like in 30 to 50 years time.

Whilst the concern about inflation and the cost of living is understandable surely it is not too much to ask for our political leaders to look into the future? Changes in the cost of living have been with us for decades but these changes do not cause cyclones, floods, road damage, droughts, forest fires and record high temperatures and unnecessary deaths all of which have been experienced worldwide in the last nine months.

Of the present political parties represented in parliament all claim to be concerned about climate change but only the Greens and Te Pati Māori are fully committed, the others qualify their support for substantial action with economic caveats and that is clearly coming through in the policy proposals the parties are putting up for this election. Roads and transport policies are just good examples of the shortsightedness of the major parties’ policies.

When will we get some real leadership from our politicians for the single issue that has the potential of destroying human life on this planet within the next 100 years? Leaders of our Churches are also challenged, what are they saying or not saying?

<sup>2</sup> Ip Page 84  
<sup>3</sup> climate emissions nz - Bing images

<sup>4</sup> Poll: Which issue is top-of-mind for voters? (1news.co.nz)