

# Do Justice!!

March 2025

*“Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly With Your God”*

*Micah 6:8*

## A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues from the Social Justice Group, Anglican Diocese of Auckland

Welcome to the March 2025 edition of Do Justice as the Social Justice Group continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective in the tradition of Micah and St Francis.

### **What has happened to the “leader of the free world”?**

President Donald Trump has managed to upset virtually all the “free”: world in just four weeks. The only countries that appear to be happy with him are Russia and Israel. This is quite an achievement but perhaps, more significantly, he has effectively relinquished the role of the USA being the “leader of the free world”.

For some eighty years, since the end of World War Two, America has [been] accepted as the leader of the free world; it helped to re-build the war-shattered Europe with the Marshall Plan, put together NATO when it became clear that the Soviet Union wanted to expand into most parts of Europe and continued to be committed to all the countries in NATO if they were invaded by any other country. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 the USA was quick to aid the Ukrainians.

The USA also understood that their failure to join and support the League of Nations after World War One was a major mistake and was one of the leading countries to form the United Nations after World War Two and provided a home for the UN in New York. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s the USA has been seen by most of the world’s countries as the world leader.

Even during Donald Trump’s first presidency the USA continued to lead, support Europe through NATO and did not get into any “armed struggles”. Despite all his idiosyncrasies in the domestic arena the world appeared to be able to live with him. He claimed to be “a man of peace”.

But things have changed very quickly. Within hours of getting back into office he turns on his closest neighbours Canada and Mexico, and perhaps not so surprisingly China, with tariffs on all goods coming from those countries. Donald Trump has used tariffs as

a way to get his own way in his earlier spell in power and he was up to it again.

He claimed credit for the ceasefire in Gaza agreed just before he was inducted, to the relief of most of the rest of the world, only then to declare that all the Palestinians in Gaza should move to other countries and he would develop Gaza as the “Riveria of the Mediterranean”. The only country to appear to support him was, not surprisingly, Israel. And now he wants to stop the war in Ukraine by doing a deal with Russia’s Putin and shutting out Ukraine and all the European countries and others including New Zealand, that supported Ukraine, after the Russian invasion.

All this in just four weeks. What more can we expect in the weeks, months and, yes, years to come? A deal with China so they can take over Taiwan? Maybe a deal with his “friend” Kim Jong Un? The opposition of Europe to any further encroachment by Russia into the Baltic area is likely but what about Greenland: can Europe actually defend Greenland from an American takeover?

And then there is the Panama Canal. And Canada becoming the “51<sup>st</sup>” State of the Union, maybe Mexico the 52<sup>nd</sup>? Where does it stop?

Does Donald Trump realise how much damage he has done in such a short time to the reputation of his own country? It appears that he is no longer “the leader of the free world”. But where does that leave the free world? To answer the question, we must first define what we mean by the “free world”. It is all those countries that have a clear, equitable and sustainable method of electing persons to a parliament or as an executive (president). Electoral terms are limited (three years, four years etc) and there is a regular change in executive leadership over time. Well over half the members of the United Nations meet this definition, it is probably easier to identify those countries that do not – China, North Korea, etc. In theory Russia has a democratic system however Putin has effectively held executive power for well over 20 years.

The American system is possibly unique in that the president, with substantial executive power, is not

directly elected, rather there it is an Electoral College system which gives significant preference to the smaller states. However, the length of term of American president is limited to two – eight years in all, which provides a limit. It will be interesting to see what happens in 2028 when Donald Trump's second term ends.

From some of the comments of both Donald Trump and his supporters, can we still consider the United States to be a “democracy”? Which other countries could be possible free world leaders? They would need to have a significant population and a strong military (this is unfortunate in this day and age but realistic). In Europe there appears to be no one country that fits these requirements although the EU has the population and most of the EU countries are members of NATO. If the USA were to leave NATO, then, maybe, the EU/NATO could take up the leadership role. Looking outside Europe there appears to be only three countries large enough to possibly be the leader of the free world slot – India, Brazil and South Africa. It is unlikely that any of these countries would seek the role.

What we could well see in the next few years is an unofficial agreement between the USA, Russia and China that each could expand in their own areas but leave the others alone – Russia into the Balkans area and the Baltic states, China, Taiwan and the USA, Greenland, Canada and Mexico.

One possible restraint could be trade. China is much more dependent on world trade than either Russia or the USA, who could both provide most of their domestic requirements from their own resources. But China would need to keep its relationships with the world in general good, so its trade could continue. Loss of that trade would detrimentally impact on a large proportion of the Chinese population and potentially lead to political instability.

One of the very first actions of Donald Trump on becoming president again was to withdraw the USA again from the Paris Agreement on climate change. This was not unexpected; Trump had been very vocal in his opposition to the very concept of climate change and had taken the USA out of the agreement in his first term.

Although there are states and cities within the USA that have a very strong commitment to addressing climate change, the call to “drill baby drill” by the president having a very negative effect on, not just the

USA, but the world. Regrettably some other right-wing governments are, and will, follow suit. We can see this already in our own country with many of the Coalition's policies.

For many of us the inauguration of President Barack Obama in January 2017 was a time of real hope for the future. A great orator, maybe the best since Winston Churchill, with a vision for a fairer and more equal society. So, what went wrong? Much of Obama's support came from those formerly middle-class workers who had lost their jobs and income as a result of the neoliberal policies of Ronald Reagan – the so called “Rust Belters”. After years of neglect by president after president they were finally going to be helped.

The first action of Obama was indeed aimed at helping this significant part of the population, that was Obamacare – providing health care for all who could not afford it. Unfortunately, the opposition by the health care industry and stiff opposition in Congress meant that Obama was unable to deal with any of the other issues that needed to be addressed. And then the world financial crisis came along and failing financial corporations cried out for help with the argument that they were “too big to fail”. And Obama stepped in to rescue them. Obama managed to get re-elected in 2012 but in the wings was a non-politician Republican who was promising to “Make America Great Again” and that included the deserted workers from the Rust Belt who had supported Democrats for generations. Donald Trump was elected in 2016 but did not deliver for the Rust Belt and lost to Biden in 2020. Biden also failed to make any real progress in addressing Rust Belt problems, so by 2024 Trump was ready to try again with the support of a cabal of billionaires lead by Elon Musk.

There must be leaders somewhere around the world who still believe that everyone should have a “fair go”? At least within the USA there are some as Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont who has made it very clear that the actions of Trump and Musk over the last few weeks are totally unacceptable. One very recent Sanders quotes about the actions of Elon Musk is an example “*Elon wants you to think the government “stinks” so he can privatise it*” and Trump agrees.<sup>1</sup> Does this sound strangely familiar? Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s? And who actually benefits from the “privatisation of government”, the very wealthy, that's who.

---

<sup>1</sup> [MSNBC]. (2025, February 20). *Bernie: Elon wants you to think 'government stinks'—So he can privatize it* [Video]. <https://www.msnbc.com/all-in/watch/bernie-elon-wants-you-to-think-government-stinks-so-he-can-privatize-it-232439365843>

And please don't believe that we could not do something like this in Aotearoa. David Seymour is already aiming this way, and the National Party could easily follow if the recent utterances of the prime minister mean anything. We must be continuously vigilant in the weeks, months and years ahead.