



SPC News

NOVEMBER 2017

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Conscience—defend it, or just ignore it? Take Manus Island, for instance

Peter Whiting

This must surely seem an odd way to frame a commentary on conscience, but I am having great difficulty reconciling the Australian Government's position on the refugees on Manus and Nauru and any notion of conscience.

On 31 October, the Australian Government closed the Manus Island processing centre, requiring the 600 men detained inside it to relocate to replacement accommodation at nearby Lorengau, a town with a population of some 6,000. The refugees, with good cause, given their experience to date, are refusing to move, citing fears for their safety.

The spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called on the government to end the “unfolding humanitarian emergency” and allow the men to be transferred to Australia.

The New Zealand Prime Minister has offered to assist Australia by taking 150 of the refugees. The insistence by the Government that accepting the refugees will be an invitation to people smugglers rings hollow, with the recent movement of refugees to the USA and Cambodia not resulting in a new wave of asylum seekers coming by boat.

The UNHCR comments are damning. They remind both Australia and PNG that they are responsible, under international human rights law and the 1951 Refugee Convention, to provide access to shelter, water, food, and sanitation; the comments repeat previous concerns that Australia's offshore processing centres “are unsustainable, inhumane, and contrary to its human rights obligations”.

Russell Broadbent's challenge to the Coalition

Long-serving Liberal MP Russell Broadbent has

criticised the policies of his own party, arguing that we are at a T intersection, and that a change of policy is necessary. He reflects the view of many in the community when he says, “If you believe this country is what I believe this country is, this situation is

unacceptable. The situation on Manus is unacceptable...”. Reviewing the recent book by Tony Ward *Bridging Troubled Waters*, [Tony French](#), in our October newsletter, concluded that there are signs that we can bridge the community divide between those who would “keep them out” and those who want to “let them in”.

I sincerely hope he is correct in that observation, but it seems that achieving a change of policy in this area will require a reawakening of conscience among our commentators and politicians. We should never

have allowed these people to be demonised as they have, and we must in all conscience recognise their human rights and extend to them the care and protection to which they are entitled. To continue the current policy stance is surely to deny the relevance of conscience in public policy.



walk together. PROLouisa Billeter. flickr cc.

SPC AGM & Forum

Tuesday 5 December

AGM 7-7:30pm. Forum 7:30-9pm

YTU Study Centre 34 Bedford Street Box Hill
Donations welcome. Refreshments afterwards.

Professor Paul Smyth

Wiring social justice into the economy

Towards inclusive and sustainable development. New directions for social policy after the collapse of the neoliberal framework.





"Heyyyyyyyy!!!!"
internets_dairy.
lickr cc.

Challenge to Mr Turnbull by 200 scientists Bruce Duncan

Firstly, why is the government continuing to promote the mining, combustion, and export of coal and other fossil fuels, despite the stern warning by science, and the growing calamity of global warming, including the rise in hurricanes and wildfires around the world?

Secondly, there exist some 14,900 nuclear weapons threatening to be triggered by accident or design, with the probability for such an event growing with time. Why has the government decided not to sign the nuclear weapons ban treaty, despite the fatal consequences of these weapons?



Bermagui ANZAC.
Kevin Rheese.
flickr cc.

Why has Australia been almost continuously at war? Henry Reynolds

Our attitude to war is bound up with the cult of the digger, the conviction that the nation was born at Gallipoli, that war has been the defining national experience. These ideas have been inescapable during the cavalcade of commemoration we have experienced since 2014. They are promoted with variety and vigour, and lavishly funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the War Memorial.

But the strange thing is that, with the intense concentration on war, the focus is entirely on how the Australians fought, not why they fought.



Pope Francis under attack Bruce Duncan

Despite his immense popularity among most Catholics and many others, not just Christians, Pope Francis is meeting increasing opposition and outspoken criticism,

even from some cardinals and bishops, as well as from some prominent academics and writers.

Contention centres on his views on the pastoral implications of moral theology on divorce and remarriage, and strident opposition to his criticisms of how the international economy generates such extreme wealth and inequality. Stung his such criticisms, the very wealthy in the United States, in particular, have been pouring billions of dollars into right-wing think tanks and networks to discount church teaching on social justice.



World Peace. Ala Fernandez. flickr cc.

ICAN awarded 2017 Nobel Peace Prize Bill Frilay

ICAN started small, and with an almost overwhelming objective.

Despite this, ICAN considered the consequences of failing to achieve its objective (nuclear disarmament) as too catastrophic to ignore. It has worked, through its coalition, to lobby governments and the UN to this objective.

Social Policy Connections was part of the local ICAN coalition in the lead-up to the UN's consideration of a Nuclear Weapons Convention, in the preparation of which ICAN played a large part.



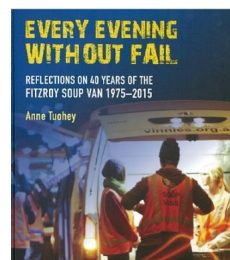
Warpipi Country, Tanami Desert, in Australia's Northern Territory. Rusty Stewart. flickr cc.

Government spending on Indigenous people is rising, so why do so many still live in poverty? Nicholas Biddle

Recent Census data suggest Indigenous employment outcomes have not improved over the last five years. And, every year, the *Closing the Gap* reports suggest most targets for improvements in the health and education of Indigenous Australians

are unlikely to be met.

Improvements in life expectancy, school attendance, reading, and numeracy are not on track. The target for early childhood education was not achieved; instead, a new target was set.

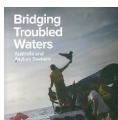


Sharing food & friendship: the St Vinnies soup van story

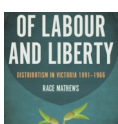
In June 1975, the Victorian Society of St Vincent de Paul's first soup van, a humble old Ford Transit wagon, the doors of which flew open when it took a corner, started offering friendship and food to the homeless men, at that

time mainly affected by alcohol abuse. It was initiated by a group of young people wanting to serve the homeless community around inner Melbourne. After more than 40 years of operation, the Fitzroy soup van has never missed a night.

Books for sale through SPC



Bridging Troubled Waters: Australia & Asylum Seekers. Tony Ward. A project of the Yarra Institute for Religion & Social Policy. Special SPC offer \$25.



Of Labour & Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891-1966. (Monash Publishing.) Race Mathews. \$30 plus postage.



Bonded through tragedy, united in hope. The Catholic Church & East Timor's struggle for independence. A Memoir. (Garratt Publishing.) Therese and Jim D'Orsa, with Hilton Deakin. \$25 plus postage, or at the SPC office.