

DIGNITAS HUMANA

Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace

Christchurch Diocese, July 1998

The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace

The Commission for Justice and Peace was given a new constitution by Bishop Meeking in 1994. Up to eight members are to be named by the Bishop, one by the Catholic Women's League and one priest by the Council of Priests. All members serve for two years. Current members are Fr. Charles Drennan, Veronica Pyle, Margaret Sivertsen, Angela Woolstencroft, Mark Solomon, Dr. Arnold Parr, Assoc. Prof. Scott Davidson, Mervyn Nally, Msgr. Barry Jones and Bishop John Cunneen. Others to have been members are Martin and Susan Tuhakaraina, Vicki Summerfield and Fr. Rick Loughnan. The Commission's chief purpose is to help the Bishop promote knowledge and practice of the Church's social teaching.

The Church and Immigration

Some Recent History

In 1996 immigration to New Zealand reached an all time high. Over 29,000 more people came into the country than left. The number of arrivals over departures had been increasing since 1990, but for the previous fourteen years departures had exceeded arrivals. With the dramatic increase in the number of immigrants, an intense political debate started in mid-1995. There was a strong campaign prior to the 1996 election aimed at drastically cutting back the number of immigrants. In the mid-1990s over half the immigrants were coming from Asian countries. Entry for these immigrants had been made easier when the New Zealand government changed its immigration policy in 1987 by dropping the long-standing practice of accepting the bulk of immigrants from the traditional source countries of northern Europe.

Parish Survey

A Peace and Justice Commission survey of all parishioners in Our Lady of Fatima Parish in

May 1997 set out to measure the views of parishioners about immigration and knowledge of Church teachings bearing on this. It found that the human dignity of every person as an inalienable fact was considered to be one of the most important of the Church's social teachings in relation to immigration. In addition the requirements of the common good, the universal destination of created goods, preferential love for the poor, compassionate care for aliens and strangers, and the right of every person to emigrate and immigrate were other Church teachings about immigration which were widely accepted and strongly supported by the parishioners.

Attitudes towards Political Campaign

The political campaign to drastically reduce the number of immigrants did not have widespread support among parishioners in Our Lady of Fatima Parish. A majority of parishioners favoured maintaining or increasing the present rate of immigration. Favourable attitudes toward immigrants and immigration prevailed among the parishioners. When socialising between parishioners and recent immigrants at school, church and in the neighbourhood had occurred, it generally worked out very well. Considerable work and business contact had occurred between parishioners and recent immigrants and these relationships had worked out well almost all the time.

Compassionate Care for Aliens and Strangers.

Parishioners had been involved considerably in helping new immigrants feel at home in the community. Immigration was thought to have positively influenced developments at Our Lady of Fatima School over the previous three years. However, a strong majority of parishioners believes that more should be done by official agencies to welcome new arrivals and help them become settled.

Regard for the Common Good

In general Our Lady of Fatima parishioners were comfortable with the changes to New Zealand's population structure brought about by recent immigration. Parishioners did not think that New Zealand should keep itself as a country with a small population confined to those of European and Polynesian descent. A large number of parishioners supported the ideal that immigrants should be selected from anywhere in the world without regard to their race or ethnicity.

This liberal, open and welcoming approach to immigrants sat along side the fact that knowledge of state immigration policy was extremely limited for Our Lady of Fatima parishioners. Only 19% of the parishioners indicated that they were aware that New Zealand changed its immigration policy in 1987 with respect to the country of origin of immigrants. For most of these parishioners their knowledge consisted of only a general awareness of change. In fact, only 22 parishioners (6%) knew the exact change that the government made in its policy about source countries of immigrants in 1987. That is, very few parishioners know that until 1987 it was state policy that immigrants from northern European countries were preferred, and that in 1987 this preference was dropped and not replaced by any other specific country preferences.

In Catholic teaching, one of the proper functions of public authority in promoting the common good is to make accessible to citizens information suitable for social well-being and the development of society. In this respect, the political representatives of the parishioners had not been successful in consulting with them and explaining immigration policies.

What about Ngai Tahu?

This year, a bill has been introduced into Parliament aimed at settling the grievance of Ngai Tahu against the Crown. It represents the last stage of a long journey by Ngai Tahu's leaders. From the very beginning of organised European settlement of most of the South Island, (Ngai Tahu's area) tribal spokesmen have always asserted that what they and the Crown had agreed to, in terms of making provision for

the tribe, had not been honoured by the Crown. In 1984, the Waitangi Tribunal was given power to scrutinize past dealings of the Crown with the various tribes. Ngai Tahu submitted their case to the Tribunal. During 1987, 1988, hearings were conducted at various locations in the South Island at which evidence bearing on the grievances was presented by both Crown and Ngai Tahu. In 1991, the Waitangi Tribunal published its findings. In short, the Tribunal found that the tribe's grievances were substantiated in many instances, though not all.

Since then, the process has on been on-again, off-again. But, in recent years, the momentum has been recovered and a package of proposals for redress has been developed. It aims to compensate the tribe for the disadvantaging that has occurred due to the Crown's non-compliance with the commitments it made to the Ngai Tahu tribe under the Treaty of Waitangi. This disadvantaging of the tribe has been identified as economic, spiritual and cultural. Against its expressed wishes, the tribe lost much of the land it wanted to retain. As well, it gradually lost much of its access to traditional sources of food. Great impoverishment and hardship resulted, accompanied by the breaking up of tribal communities and a gradual weakening of the tribe's cultural traditions. The provisions for redress contained in the bill before Parliament (the Ngai Tahu Claims Settlement Bill) constitute a negotiated compensation for established injustices in past dealings of the Crown towards the tribe. While full restitution is not possible, the provisions are accepted by both parties as a final settlement. They contain measures to provide access to some economic resources. Restoration of tribal names for specified geographic features, alongside existing names, is granted. Aoraki/Mt. Cook is to be handed back to the tribe so that it can be handed over to the nation. Regulated access to specified, food-gathering locations is to be provided for. The tribe is to be given a significant voice in the management of conservation areas in its tribal area. It will have input into development approvals for areas of cultural or spiritual significance. The settlement includes a formal apology to the tribe from the Crown. The principles of this settlement accord well with Catholic teaching, which strongly upholds the right of native or indigenous peoples to exist and

sees that right as connected with their link with their lands. When they are deprived of their land, the Church teaches, 'they lose a vital element of their way of life and actually run the risk of disappearing as a people.' (To Build Peace, Respect Minorities.) In the proposals, the rights of all citizens are respected. No private lands or assets are involved. No unjust discrimination on grounds of race is established, but rather, some traditional rights are being re stored, e.g. the right to gather food. The tribe has always followed a path of patience, negotiation and legal recourse. The healing and reconciliation represented by the settlement and established by the present bill sit well with the coming celebration of the Great Jubilee.

Unemployment

As part of Government policy, a community wage is to be introduced from 1 October 1998. This will replace all employed benefits. The 'community wage' scheme would place unemployed people in suitable part-time community work or training in exchange for welfare support. People who refuse to accept work or training opportunity face suspension from their full benefit. The Commission does not oppose, in principle, the existence of community work and training programs but does not support the scheme that the Government has announced. The Commission considers that the Government should have been looking at:

- The need for real job opportunities. It is no good training or work testing beneficiaries for nonexistent jobs.
- The need to better meet the basic housing, health, food and clothing needs of low income people. People need to have some stability in their lives before they can be 'job ready.'
- The need for policies and programmes which promote employment for all who seek work.

The Catholic Church has extensive teaching on a wide range of social and economic issues. No. 2433 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that 'access to employment and to the professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination; men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants.' For its part society should according to circumstances help citizens find work and employment. The

Commission encourages all Catholics to consider this teaching carefully so as to find solutions to the social injustice of the rising unemployment that is presently pervading New Zealand. Unemployment attacks a person's human dignity, self-esteem and self worth. Not only does unemployment threaten the victim's equilibrium but also his/her family becomes very vulnerable and at risk.

Bougainville

Until a permanent ceasefire and peace plan were agreed at Lincoln in January of this year, the island of Bougainville had been racked by a ten year civil war. Although Bougainville is politically part of Papua New Guinea, the majority of Bougainvilleans are ethnically and culturally closer to Solomon Islanders. The main cause of the civil war in Bougainville, however, was the foreign exploitation of the massive Panguna cop per mine which led to poor economic consequences for ordinary Bougainvilleans. This in turn led to the development of a national sentiment in Bougainville and a desire for independence from PNG. At the forefront of the armed struggle was the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). The PNG government's response to this was to increase the presence of the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) in Bougainville and to impose a blockade of medical and other supplies to the island. The result of this was an increase in violence and the commission of human rights violations by both the BRA and the PNGDF. Over the ten year civil war, it is estimated that over 10,000 people died as a result of the blockade and the violence.

In February 1997, realising that it was not winning the war in Bougainville, the PNG government decided to enlist the services of Sandline International, a group of mercenaries, to help it solve the problem. This led to an international outcry and prompted the Christchurch Diocese CCJP to write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Don Mackinnon, urging the government to redouble its efforts in the search for peace on the island. The CCJP asked Mr Mackinnon to recall that in Catholic teaching, peace is the prerequisite to respect for, and the development of, human life.

In July 1997 the New Zealand government called a conference of the parties to the conflict to be held at Burnham. The resulting Burnham Declaration led to a ceasefire in the conflict and to the establishment of a truce monitoring force which was led mainly by New Zealand troops. Further negotiations took place at Lincoln in January 1998 and a peace agreement between all the parties attending was reached. This agreement included a permanent and irrevocable ceasefire' and the need to discuss the political future of Bougainville. This peaceful outcome to the Bougainville conflict is welcomed by the Christ-church Diocese CCJP

East Timor

Conditions in East Timor continue to give concern to the Christchurch Diocese CCJP. Since 1975 East Timor, formerly a Portuguese colony, has been occupied by Indonesia. The native Timorese are Melanesian people whose religion is primarily Christian, while the majority of Indonesians are Javanese and Muslim. It has been the policy of the Indonesian government to resettle Javanese in East Timor and it has developed a strong military presence there. In cases of dissent or protest at Indonesian rule, the Indonesian government has been ruthless in using the military to enforce its will. This was particularly evident in Dili in November 1991 when over 250 protesters were killed by the army. Since then, there have been frequent and well-documented reports of human rights violations.

The Catholic Church in East Timor has been at the forefront of attempts to secure a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The role of Bishop Belo in this was recognised when he was awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize jointly with compatriot Jose Ramos Horta. The Commission for Justice and Peace which was established by the Church in East Timor only recently has begun to act as a repository for information on human rights violations. It is supported by Catholic aid agencies, including CARITAS New Zealand.

Although the conduct of the Indonesian government in East Timor has fallen far short of the standards required for the development of the common good, the recent departure of President

Suharto and the arrival of his successor, President Habibie, may signal a change for the better in Indonesian policy towards East Timor.

Something to think about

One activity of the Commission for Justice and Peace is to engage in dialogue with those making decisions about our society and those responsible for the legislation that governs our society. It writes to Ministers and makes submissions to Select Committees. One example where the Commission made a submission was in response to the proposal to open shops, etc. on Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Christmas Day. Another had to do with announced price increases for domestic electricity when open fires were being phased out. Such representations and submissions are always from an ethical standpoint and attempt to provide a moral analysis of what is proposed, as belongs to the Church's competence. Technical solutions belong to specialists.

Material from the Commission went before the Commerce Select Committee hearing submissions on the Electricity Reform Bill. We were greatly taken aback by the Government's decision to proceed with the reform of the electricity industry before the Committee had heard all the submission and developed its own suggestions for amending the Bill. A Government no longer interested in improving proposed measures by allowing comment and submissions would be something to worry about.

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(Latin for the dignity of the person) is the name for this newsletter because it expresses the cornerstone principle of the Churches teaching about society and social justice. Every human person has an intrinsic and unchanging dignity, conferred by God the Creator. 'The human person is and ought to be the principle, the subject and the end of all social institutions' (CCC, No. 1881).

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