

JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

NOVEMBER 2023



COMMUNITIES ACROSS AUSTRALIA WELCOMING REFUGEES

In February 2022 we issued a letter-writing action requesting that you write to the Commonwealth Government urging an increase in the number of refugees settled in Australia. We followed that up with a postcard campaign in October 2022.

There was positive news from the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Andrew Giles, reporting on 19 September that Australians had supported resettling 250 refugees through the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP). The refugees came from Afghanistan, Syria, Congo, El Salvador and Guatemala.

CRISP involves community members welcoming refugees

into Australia by directly supporting their settlement and integration. The University of Queensland has evaluated CRISP. It found 88% of the refugees on the program reported they found it easy to get help from the community. Further, 98% reported feeling their culture was valued by others. For the community members supporting the settlement of the refugees, 92% said supporting a refugee household gave them a sense of purpose.

The Minister announced that the Government would seek to expand the CRISP program from 5,000 resettlement places for refugees annually to 10,000.

It is not too late if you did not get to sign and send off the postcard. If you need more postcards, please e-mail jim@victas.uca.org.au •

VICTORIAN GOV'T MOVES TO BAN NAZI SALUTE

In the last JustAct, we included a postcard for you to send to the Commonwealth Government asking that they include the Nazi or Hitler salute in their Bill to ban the public display of Nazi symbols.

On 29 August, the Victorian Government introduced to Parliament legislation that will ban the Nazi salute and other gestures and symbols used by the Nazi Party from being displayed publicly. Anyone who intentionally displays a Nazi symbol or performs a Nazi gesture in public will face penalties of up to \$23,000 in a fine or up to a year in prison. Holocaust survivors, Victoria Police and Jewish community

members were consulted on the Bill.

Exceptions apply if the performance or display of a Nazi symbol or gesture is done in good faith for a genuine academic, artistic, educational or scientific purpose. There is also an exception for making a fair and accurate report of the performance or display of a Nazi symbol or gesture that is in the public interest.

The Victorian Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes said of the Bill, "While we wish making these laws wasn't necessary, we will always tackle antisemitism, hatred and racism head-on – because all Victorians deserve to feel accepted, safe and included."

Recent calls for a ban on the Nazi salute escalated after a neo-Nazi group attempted to disrupt a First

Nations people mourning ceremony at Coburg Town Hall on Australia Day.

Australia's counter-terrorism intelligence agency has previously warned that cases involving neo-Nazi cells and other ideologically motivated groups are growing. Further, they now represent up to half of all anti-terrorism work by the agency in Australia.

In June, Tasmania became Australia's first state or territory to ban the display of Nazi symbols, flags and salutes.

It is not too late if you have not signed and sent your postcard to the Commonwealth Government to achieve a similar nationwide ban on the Nazi salute. More cards can be ordered by e-mailing jim@victas.uca.org.au •

VIC GOV'T PROVIDES MORE SUPPORT FOR YOUTH JUSTICE DIVERSION PROGRAM

Many of you have requested that we resource you to take action in support of reforms in the youth criminal justice system.

In October 2021, we asked that you write to the Victorian Government urging that they implement the recommendations from the 'Our Youth, Our Way' report. The report recommended reforms to reduce the number of First Nations youth in the criminal justice system. These measures included programs to divert youth away from the criminal justice system.

There was good news on 7 September 2023, with the Victorian Government announcing they would continue to fund the Pivot program in southeast Melbourne that keeps young people out of the criminal justice system. The Government provided an additional \$1 million to the program. The program runs across the Casey local government area and Dandenong and Frankston.

The Pivot program offers tailored support and family-based interventions for young people aged 10 to 23 who have frequent contact with government entities like family services and the criminal justice system.

A 2022 evaluation of the Pivot program found a 29% reduction in offending and a 24% reduction in severity of offending for participants who completed the program. More than 4,000 young people have been supported through the program since 2016.

On announcing the funding, the Minister for Crime Prevention, Anthony Carbines, said, "Pivot gives people a chance to feel valued, to be heard, and to live a fulfilling, crime-free life."

Thank you to everyone who has written letters supporting reforms to divert children and youth away from the criminal justice system. •

FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

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All of the resources in this mailing can be found on the JIM website.

If you would like to subscribe (or unsubscribe) to either this hardcopy mailing (bi-monthly) or email update (weekly), contact the JIM Cluster.



VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT MOVES ON POKIE REFORMS

There was good news on 3 October with the Victorian Government announcing that it had introduced to the Parliament a Bill requiring all pokie venues to be shut between 4 am and 10 am every day.

Currently, pokie venues in an area often stagger their opening hours to ensure there is always a venue open in the area at all times of the day and night.

For many years, we urged you to write letters and send postcards

seeking reforms to reduce the harm from pokies in our community.

The JIM Cluster has continued to make submissions to the Victorian Government and Parliament on pokies reforms. We have also lobbied the Victorian Government on measures to reduce the harm caused by pokies.

Giving people a break in their gambling is an important harm-prevention measure, as it allows them to stop and consider the decisions they are making and whether they're prepared to

potentially lose more money. The required closing times will come into effect by mid-2024.

The Bill will also require that all pokies cannot be loaded up with more than \$100 worth of credit at any one time. The current limit is \$1,000.

The Bill also requires that Crown Casino provide people with cards they need to use when gambling. The cards will allow the person to set enforceable limits on their losses across all forms of gambling in the casino. •

TAX REFORMS CONTINUE TO CURB TAX CHEATING BY MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

For several years, we have resourced you to take action, calling on the Commonwealth Government to implement reforms to curb tax cheating by multinational corporations. We have been highly successful at seeing reforms introduced.

In early September, the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) announced that the government's Tax Avoidance Taskforce had secured more than \$26 billion of additional tax revenue from 2016 to 30 June 2023. The ATO had settled disputes with Chevron, Rio Tinto, Google, BHP, Apple, ResMed and Microsoft, promoting unprecedented transparency in the tax affairs of

multinational corporations.

In the 2021-2022 financial year, 2,468 corporations with revenues in Australia greater than \$100 million paid almost \$69 billion in corporate income tax, a 20% increase over the previous year.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the campaigning to curb tax avoidance by multinational corporations. •

REVIEWS OF BOOKS ON DEMOCRATIC REFORMS

The JIM Cluster has a focus on seeking reforms to our democracy to allow ordinary people more significant opportunities to participate and have their preferences represented.

In our view, popular reforms on too many social justice issues are held back by the ability of the wealthy to use their money in the system to skew laws and policies to their preferences.

We consider three books on the topic.



Jan-Werner Müller's **Democracy Rules**

warns of the rise of populism:

Broadly speaking, the authoritarian – populist art of governance is based on nationalism (often with racist overtones), on hijacking the state for partisan

loyalists, and , less obviously, on weaponising the economy to secure political power: a combination of culture war, patronage and mass clientelism.

He explores measures to reinvigorate democracy.

Müller points out that those in financial poverty are usually further alienated in democracies where voting is voluntary. Additionally, those with an agenda to shape the economy for the benefit of the already financially wealthy use “culture wars” as cover to distract parts of the population away from the economic changes that are contrary to their interests. He argues, “The wealthy’s commitment to democracy has always been conditional.”

Müller argues that democratic

reform needs to focus on the interests of the ordinary people and not those who seek to be elected. He quotes philosopher John Dewey, that “no government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few.”

He ends by exploring what are the conditions that justify civil disobedience. Quoting Martin Luther King Jr, he argues that disobeying laws must be done “lovingly” so that in the appeal to justice that justifies the breaking of the law, future cooperation with one’s fellow citizens will not become impossible.

With a length of 185 pages, Democracy Rules is an excellent read for anyone interested in positive reforms of our democracy.

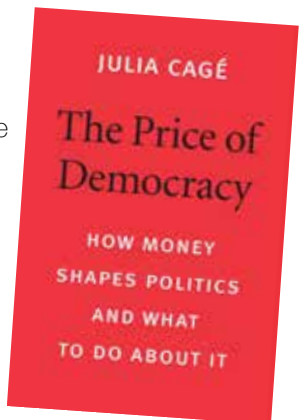


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Julia Cagé is a French Assistant Professor of Economics. Her work **The Price of Democracy - How money shapes politics and what to do about it** is a

comprehensive examination of how the financially wealthy use their money in democratic systems to ensure that laws and

policies reflect their preferences. Disturbingly, she points out that the more a candidate for an election can spend, the greater the likelihood they will get elected. In 2016, a victorious candidate for the US Senate spent, on average, more than US\$10 million. In France, the average victorious parliamentary candidate spent 41,000 euros compared to an average spend of 18,000 euros. In the UK in 2015, the average spend for a victorious



candidate was 10,000 euros compared to the average of 4,000 euros.

Her focus is mainly on the political system in France and other European countries. However, she also looks extensively at the US system and Brazil. In the

case of Brazil, the laws restrict political donations to a proportion of a person’s income, ensuring that the financially wealthy can donate more than people on low incomes.

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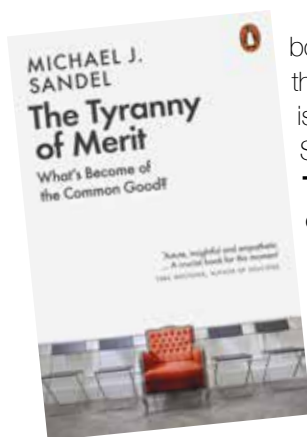


Cagé concludes:

... donations to political parties and election campaigns are a class phenomenon that by and large benefits the most conservative parties; a much larger proportion of the super-rich make contributions, and when they do, these are much larger than those of citizens on low incomes.

Such a system may potentially boost the capacity of the wealthiest social groups to win election battles and to “buy” public policies of their choosing.

The book is a longer read, at 331 pages. However, the rich detail makes the effort worthwhile.



The final book of this review is Michael Sandel's **The Tyranny of Merit**.

Sandel argues that Western society has moved from a culture

where people's social position was gifted to them by virtue of birth. If you were born into the aristocracy, you would be on top of society. Western thinking has

also moved to a meritocracy, where “the winners must believe they have earned their success through their own talent and hard work.” However, the reality is that your accident of birth will still largely determine where you end up in society. If you are born to wealthy parents, you are more likely to end up rich. If you are born to low-income parents, you are likelier to end up on a low-income yourself.

He argues that the belief we achieve our wealth and position in society based solely on our talents and efforts undermines social cohesion and any sense of humility. It leaves little room for solidarity

targets of discrimination – Muslims, people of Turkish descent living in Western Europe, people in poverty, the obese, people with disability and the less educated. They found that the poorly educated were disliked most of all.

The researchers concluded that well-educated people, as defined by Northern/Western education, are no less biased than less-educated people; “it is rather that [their] targets of prejudice are different.” Moreover, the well-educated are unembarrassed by their prejudice. They may denounce racism and

“**REFORMS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES ARE HELD BACK BY THE ABILITY OF THE WEALTHY TO USE THEIR MONEY IN THE SYSTEM**”

between people and makes those at the bottom of society feel their situation is entirely their fault. Such beliefs negatively impact the mental health of those at the bottom. Thus, Sandal argues, “merit is a kind of tyranny or unjust rule.”

Sandel points out one of the most significant prejudices, and sense of superiority, held by educated people from Northern/Western cultures is against those they regard as uneducated. In a series of surveys conducted in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Belgium, a team of social psychologists found that tertiary-educated respondents have more bias against less-educated people than they do against other groups that are targets for prejudice. The researchers surveyed the attitudes of well-educated Europeans towards a range of people who are typically

sexism but are unapologetic about their negative attitudes towards the less educated.

Sandel points out that the assumption that people earn their position in society through their own talents and efforts has negatively impacted our democracy. Such an assumption provides an ideological justification for Parliaments making laws to favour the preferences of the financially wealthy.

Sandel does spend time considering reforms that would improve our societies and global justice. For example, he argues all people need to be given “an opportunity to win the social recognition and esteem that go with producing what others need and value.” •

SUPPORTER PROFILE

REV VALENTINA SATVEDI



For the supporter profile, Mark Zirnsak interviewed Rev Valentina Satvedi Leydon, in placement in Launceston.

Mark: Tell the readers something about yourself

Valentina: I was born in India and came to Australia from the US. I am the product of Anabaptist missionaries and am a fourth-generation Christian from my mother's side. I was an ordained minister in the US for 15 years and have been living in Australia for 10 years.

I am a "fire in the belly" kind of girl.

I studied in a seminary in Chicago, which later relocated to Indiana. I was called to an Anabaptist congregation in Southern California. After placements at a couple of churches, I was called to work with a Mennonite bishop as Director of School for Urban Mission. During my time in the greater Los Angeles area, I had the opportunity to engage with a wide diversity of migrant and immigrant communities.

Later I worked with Mennonite Central Committee and was Director of the Anti-Racism Program.

Mark: So, is that when you first supported migrant workers?

Valentina: Yes, I had dealings with migrant workers who lived on the church property in Southern California. It was painful to watch people trying to get across the US-Mexico border risking their lives. It was a very dangerous thing to do. People would undertake the risk because they hoped for a better life or wanted to reunite with family

already in the US.

Mark: What motivates you in your ministry?

Valentina: I have a heart for undoing oppressions, whatever the context. I believe in ethical Christian discipleship. Being raised in the colonised context of India has impacted upon my response to the processes and structures of colonisation, patriarchy and racism.

Mark: Having come to the Uniting Church from an Anabaptist tradition, are you still a pacifist?

Valentina: Yes, I am. I continue to practise my pacifist stance even though I find myself particularly challenged by the Australian ANZAC Day tradition to which people are beholden. As followers of Christ, we are called to be peacemakers reconciled to God, each other and the world.

I believe in restorative justice and conflict transformation modelled on Matthew 18. In Uniting Church terms, this implies seeking right relationships.

My hope is to continue to be a part of peace-making ministry in Australia. My ongoing commitment is to the work of decolonising the word and undoing racism.

Mark: Tell us about your transition to the Uniting Church.

Valentina: When I came to Australia, I visited many congregations: Baptist, Churches

of Christ, Catholic, Anglican and Uniting. Brunswick Uniting and Reverend Ian Ferguson drew me into the Uniting Church along with Fairfield Uniting, where Rev Alex Sangster was minister then. Both congregations had a social justice-focused ministry.

In 2020, I answered the call to ministry at Brunswick Uniting Church as supply minister for a period of three months. Prior to that, I worked there as an Interim Student House Support Worker at Brunswick Uniting Church.

I am now in Launceston, in placement with a congregation. There is a form of transitoriness among the congregation. It welcomes and engages with all who walk in on a Sunday morning, including the unhoused.

Mark: In that context, what are some of the missional activities of the congregation?

Valentina: We provide emergency relief to the community. We have a small food pantry and provide some food and vouchers. We have been known to rent a space for an unhoused person and assisted with rent.

We work in partnership with the City Baptist congregation. We jointly provide meals at the Red Dove Café on Saturday nights for those who need them. The café is used by another group to provide a free meal on Friday nights

We assist Pacific Islander seasonal workers in the area. We recently held space and hosted the funeral for a Samoan worker who died in Australia.

We have been supporting the 'Yes' campaign for the Voice to Parliament. We invited churches in Launceston to an ecumenical conversation to encourage people to vote 'yes'. Several members worked with the 'Yes' campaign. We have noticed people have copped racism around the referendum.

The community in and around Launceston have pockets of diversity, represented by people in the Hazara and Chin communities, to name a couple. Racism is experienced by many migrants and refugees. We are in the process of engaging with the Refugee Resettlement Groups. Finally, we walk alongside the First Nations Peoples as called.

Mark: So, what are your future plans for your social justice mission?

Valentina: I will continue to engage in social justice as long as I have the energy. The life experiences of having encountered marginalisation, racism and misogyny are what have led me to do the work of undoing oppression in the first place. I do get frustrated at times. I lean into a small support group of people who share the call to work on issues of social justice that are part of living our faith. Their support helps me find my strength. There is always more to do! •

JUSTACT RESOURCES PROVIDED IN 2023

Each year, we survey you as our supporters on the issues you would like us to resource you to take action on.

We seek to provide resources on those issues. However, with five editions of JustAct each year, it is challenging to cover all the issues. Further, we also prioritise resources based on the opportunities at that time. We assess which actions we believe will have the most significant impact and which were the areas that

supporters most wanted to take action on collectively. We have taken action on issues even if we did not produce resources for supporters to take action. We may have made submissions to government inquiries, generated media stories or lobbied decision-makers directly on the issue.

The table below outlines the number of resources produced for each issue area in JustAct for 2023 to provide accountability back to you as our supporters. •

ISSUE	NUMBER OF RESOURCES PROVIDED IN 2023
Climate Justice	7
Support for human rights in Myanmar	5
Modern slavery	4
Overseas Poverty	4
Housing and homelessness	3
Trust in democracy	3
Creating more secure work	3
Support for people with disability	2
Refugees and people seeking asylum	2
Justice for First Peoples	1
Family Violence	1
Ending Racism	1
Tax reform	1
Peace in Israel/Palestine	1
Gambling reform	0
Alcohol reform	0
Human rights in the Philippines	0
Reform of the youth criminal justice system	0
Support for human rights in West Papua	0
Rights of LGBTIQ+ people	0

PRAYER FOR CHILD SAFETY

The JIM Cluster has continued to resource you to take action to curb the sexual abuse of children as facilitated through the online world.

Much progress has been made by introducing more effective laws to force online corporations to assist in detecting and reporting online child sexual abuse on their platforms. We will continue to provide resources to make children and other vulnerable people safe online.

Here is a prayer from the President of the Uniting Church, **Rev Sharon Hollis**, for child safety in the church and the wider world.

.....
Holy One, Sacred Three
God of community,

We pray for the children of our church community.
May they grow in faith, secure in the knowledge that this
Community strives to be a safe place to learn about Jesus,
To grow disciples and become who we are meant to be in Christ.
May they know we welcome their wisdom and gifts.
Help us not to be complacent about safety and make us
Always ready to work to make this community a place of
Safety and welcome for all children.

Holy One, Sacred Three
God of community,

We pray for the children of our neighbourhood.
May we work to create fair opportunities for all children
That they might have the opportunity to thrive.
Help us to be participants in your way which seeks to raise up
Those in greatest need.

Holy One, Sacred Three
God of Community,

We pray for the children of the world community.
May our commitment to being a safe church for all expand
Our hearts and minds to work and pray for children in the
Global community who lack safety and peace.
Help us to hear the cries of children around the globe.
Amen

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THANKS TO LONG TERM JIM VOLUNTEER

The JIM Cluster would like to sincerely thank Jesse Cain who has done the graphic design for over 100 issues of the JustAct newsletter, mostly as a volunteer after he left the JIM Unit. He often provided the Cluster with his talents at short notice. Jesse has a young family and the demands of full-time employment, so needs to retire from the graphic design work. The JIM Cluster offers its best wishes to Jesse and his family in what the future holds for them.