

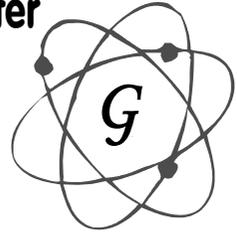
*Promoting justice, peace & the integrity of creation*

# Grapevine

action  
SC4J Newsletter

**Issue No. 61**

**Date Winter 2018**



## **Inequality Hunger Hate crime and Hope**



SWINDON  
CHURCHES  
TOGETHER



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# Letter from the Editor

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Welcome to edition 61 of Grapevine. We are sorry there has been such a long gap since the previous edition in autumn 2016.

Members of Swindon Churches Action for Justice (SC4J), a small sub-group of SCT, feel there is still a role for Grapevine as a magazine that explores social justice and peace building, both in the UK and internationally.

This edition contains articles reflecting the range of subjects individuals in SC4J are concerned about and have been researching. We start with a book review: “Age of Anger”, by an Indian author who considers the deep roots of current violent extremism. Our next article describes how “Swindon City of Sanctuary” provides a culture of welcome to those seeking refuge. We then look at three major, and related, challenges in Britain today: economic inequality; hunger and hate crime. Our final article is about a hugely significant, but little publicised, international event: the adoption at the United Nations of a treaty to make nuclear weapons unacceptable and illegal.

As editor of Grapevine issue 61, I hope you find reading it informative and thought- provoking.

**Elsbeth Wollen**

## *In this issue*

	Page
Age of Anger - book review	3
Swindon City of Sanctuary	5
How inevitable is inequality?	7
Hungry Britain	9
Hate Crime	11
Global Nuclear Ban Treaty	14

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# Age of Anger - book review

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In this 500th anniversary year of Luther and his 95 Theses we should remember that he might have fastened them to the church door at Wittenburg, but it was at a time when printing was the new technology. Thousands of copies spread out across Europe. The context of the Reformation determined the rapid spread of new thought, new theology and new faith.

Similarly the Graeco-Roman context of Paul's letter writing meant that he pleaded with his friends not to be totally subservient to their cultural context (Romans 12:2 'Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world.')

Pankaj Mishra is not a Christian, but his book, *Age of Anger*, is a fascinating analysis of our globalized context within which we live out our Christian faith. From being brought up in a semi-rural part of India, he moved to the West and became a writer, scholar and thinker. He writes of his personal awareness of the current global upheaval, the rupture of historical continuity, the 'emotional and psychological disorientations and abrasions of nerves and sensibility'.

The Prologue is a broad assessment of how foundations were laid in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for what he calls the current global maelstrom. He describes the significance of writers like Rousseau, Voltaire, and Russians such as Dostoyevsky and Bakunin. He shows how quickly the optimistic assumption about future security and progress following 1989 and end of the Cold War has now evaporated.

Mishra describes impressively the range of intellectual history across the whole of Europe and across the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. What we see now as the scary violence of ISIS is simply the globalized extension of ideological and social struggles.

For example, in a section headed 'The First Global Jihad' there is a list of outrages beginning with the Anarchist movement in Russia. Dostoyevsky and Bakunin were products of a country in which 'young

men were trapped between an oppressive elite and a peasantry’ with which they had no contact. ‘Violence came to be seen as the only form of self expression’.

Mishra shows how there followed a series of murders, bombings and outrages in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. His seemingly exhaustive account of anarchist groups and subversive violence, all through the western world, is a salutary reminder that current active terrorism has deep roots.

In his Epilogue, the writer notes that our Age of Anger is spiritually impoverished. He quotes the writer Eric Voegelin (*note*), ‘The revolutionary crisis of our age is distinguished from earlier revolutions by the fact that the spiritual substance of Western society has diminished to the vanishing point, and that the vacuum does not show any signs of refilling from new sources’.

I take this as a challenge to all people of faith in the twenty-first century to find ways and the will to deepen the spiritual dimensions of our living.

We need to deepen our spiritual sensitivity so that we are not contaminated by extremism, so that we are not prejudiced by ignorance, so that we are not motivated by aggression and so that we are not infected by fear.

*Note:* Eric Voegelin 1901 – 1985 political philosopher

Age of Anger: Allen Lane ‘Age of Anger: A History of the Present’ is a 2017 nonfiction book by Indian author Pankaj Mishra. Mishra accounts for the resurgence of reactionary and right-wing political movements in the late 2010s.

*Brian Eyles*



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# Swindon City of Sanctuary

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Swindon City of Sanctuary promotes a culture of welcome, support and inclusion for all, with a focus on those seeking refuge.

We are part of a national movement called City of Sanctuary which now includes over 90 cities, towns and villages across the UK and Ireland.

Swindon City of Sanctuary was launched at a sold-out event in October 2016, where 200 people came and joined us.

With a year gone by, we have started to reflect on what we have achieved since that wonderful evening which left us full of hope and positivity for our welcoming, supportive town.

With a member of staff and an intern working for us, plus a very active board of trustees and an incredibly pro-active group of volunteers, we have managed to get a lot up and running in a year.

Since launching our pledge forms last year we now have 27 businesses and community groups and 112 individuals who have pledged to actively do something to make Swindon a welcoming place for all, and to support and include refugees and asylum seekers in their activities!

We launched our Schools of Sanctuary project in January 2018. To become a School of Sanctuary, Swindon schools sign up to follow three simple principles. These are: to learn what it means to seek sanctuary; to embed concepts of welcome and inclusion within the school and to share your knowledge, vision and achievements.

We now have a number of projects such as our hosting scheme. We match homeless refugees to volunteer hosts with spare rooms, to stay rent free for an agreed period of time. We have successfully piloted this scheme and are now taking new referrals.

Our weekly evening event at the Darkroom Espresso in town, called 'We're Open', is very well attended. It's open to everyone in our Swindon community. It's a relaxed get together where you can drink wonderful

coffee, play board games, listen to live music and meet new people. Come and join us every Thursdays 6.30 -8.30pm at SN1 5AR.

Our first year leading on events for Refugee Week 2017 was a huge success. Events were happening throughout the whole week in June, from a Global Tea Party to Art exhibitions and even a community cinema screening, to name but a few. We are already planning for next year and hope to collaborate with many organisations and community groups in Swindon to help make next year another huge success.

We also have a new project called ‘Welcome Walks’ in which we will be organising walking tours for those newly arrived to Swindon or those wanting to discover more about our town. We hope this project will help us to celebrate all the things our town has to offer as well as creating a space for our community to meet and get to know each other. The walking tours will be open to everyone, so please do get in touch if you would like to find out more.

I urge you to look on our website to discover more or to contact us if you would like volunteer and support our work.

We must say a huge thank you to everyone who has supported us this last year, especially Swindon Amnesty, Volunteer Action Swindon, The Joffe Charitable Trust and our sister organisation The Harbour Project.

*Nicola Johnson*

**Website:** <https://swindon.cityofsanctuary.org/>

Facebook search for [@SwindonCOS](#) Twitter: [@SwindonCoS](#)

Or contact us by:

Email: [info@swindon.cityofsanctuary.org](mailto:info@swindon.cityofsanctuary.org)

Or call our Development Worker: 07850941666



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# How inevitable is inequality?

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Talk given by Stewart Lansley, economist, academic and author

On 30th March 2017, a large audience in Gorse Hill Baptist Church listened with interest to Stewart Lansley explaining why, in Britain, we are experiencing extreme income inequality and what could be done to close the gap between the very rich and the very poor.

Inequality is an issue that has been rising up the political agenda. In 2013, President Obama described it as “the defining challenge of our age”. In 2017, The World Economic Forum said, “Inequality is the biggest danger facing the globe”. Our own prime minister pledged to bring about “an economy that works for all.” Yet the UK remains one of the most unequal countries in the developed world. Research has shown that this damages everyone, creating a divided and distrustful society that suffers worse health and social problems. How did we reach a situation where the average worker would need to work 209 years to earn just one year’s pay for a top company executive? Can anything be done about it?

Through graphs, Stewart showed that for 3½ decades after the War, the UK was becoming a much more equal country, but from the end of the 1970’s this changed, with the pay gap between the top and the bottom widening. Globalisation and technical change can only account for about a third of this rise in inequality. “Domestic decisions,” i.e. political and business choices, have been the main drivers. In particular, Stewart cited: the move, since the mid 1980’s, to a more market-based economy; the deregulation of industry; the increased power given to the finance industries; privatisation and the weakening of the trade union movement. The overall effect of these changes has been to increase the share of GDP going to profits, rather than to the workforce, and the growth in dominance of large firms. Britain has become a low paid economy, with a resulting impact on poverty, which has almost doubled.

This model of market capitalism has failed to produce the “trickle down” effect that was expected. In other words, the poor have not

benefited from “a bigger cake” because the question of how we share the cake has been ignored.

Stewart said that when one looks at different groups within the population, it is apparent that inequality is not “levelling off”, as the Government has asserted. Among pensioners inequality has fallen in recent years, but within the working population it has got worse. In April 2015, the hourly median wage (adjusted for inflation) was 60% lower than in 2007. Real wages of ordinary workers have been falling while top executive pay has been (and still is) rising.

The social effects of inequality have been well researched and are documented in *The Spirit Level* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009). However, there is growing evidence that inequality harms the economy too. There is “orthodox economic establishment opinion” that the current model is not working: high levels of inequality are not necessary; they have in fact slowed growth and contributed to the economic crisis in 2008. This is because high inequality contracts demand and leads to a fall in wages and a collapse in investment. We also see very high levels of debt.

Given that it is so damaging, is inequality inevitable? Stewart said it is not. Reliable measures that could be taken to tackle inequality - if we really want to - include:

- Creation of “social wealth funds”
- Strengthening Labour institutions
- Reform of shareholder values
- “Positive money” – new forms of credit control
- Land reform
- Progressive tax reform and a shift to capital taxation.

He also mentioned the more controversial idea of a universal basic income. Following this talk, there was a lively and wide ranging discussion on the human effects of inequality and rising poverty.

Sources of further information:

Books: “*The Cost of Inequality*” by Stewart Lansley (2011) and *Breadline Britain – The Rise of Mass Poverty* by Stewart Lansley and Joanna Mack (2015)

The Equality Trust: [www.equalitytrust.org.uk](http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk)

Swindon Equality Group (SEG): [www.swindonequality.btck.co.uk](http://www.swindonequality.btck.co.uk)

SEG Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SwindonEquality>

Since December 2016, SEG, working with 'Spirit of Swindon', has had a series of articles in the Swindon Link magazine on aspects of inequality and how they impact locally. See, for example, <https://swindonlink.com/spirit-of-swindon-a-roof-over-my-head/>

*Elspeth Wollen*

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## **Hungry Britain**

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St Paul's term *the household of faith* (*cf Galatians 6:10*) describes the community of those who follow Jesus Christ at Galatia. His injunction to the church there to *work for the good of all, and especially for those of the household (or family) of faith* is unlikely to spark thoughts of inequality of economic opportunity, except perhaps in terms of the Christian imperative to charitable giving. Yet the word 'economy' has its roots in the Greek 'oikoumene', Paul's 'household' or 'family' here in the epistle. May we then understand that the science of economics is about how the creation of wealth is made to work not just for some, but for all members of the 'household' or 'family', whether the nation or all humanity, and where each person has an equal and honoured place as in a healthily functioning household or 'oikoumene'?

As a non statistician I become confident in the reliability of the stories statistical surveys tell only when a number of them seem to agree. The opening paragraph is my theological comfort zone and backdrop to the currently disturbing figures about food insecurity in the UK. The theology compels us, or me, to take the 'stats' from different sources with more than glancing interest. Here are some.



The **United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)**, in a report published in June 2017, shows that one in five under-fifteens in the UK live with an adult who is *moderately or severely food insecure*, with one in ten in the severe category. 'Moderate' for this purpose means the worry that there may not

be enough to eat, leading to compromising quality, variety and quantity, with ‘severe’ meaning going without and consequent hunger.

Analysis from the **United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** concludes that the UK experiences the highest level of food insecurity among the countries of the European Union, followed by Romania, Ireland, Cyprus and Portugal in the top five.

Our own UK **Food Standards Agency**, in March 2017, produced figures showing that 3.9 million adults in the UK, including 7% of all those in work, are food insecure, defined as *lacking sufficient and secure access to food because of lack of money*. A further 13% of all adults are found to be marginally insecure.

Dr. Rachel Loopstra, Lecturer in Nutrition at King’s College London, has commented:

*‘Since food bank usage has risen in the UK, there have been urgent questions about how many people struggle to afford enough to eat..... As a critical public health problem, household food insecurity requires regular population monitoring in the UK and urgent intervention at the policy level to address why so many people with low incomes and who are unemployed do not have enough money for food.’*

Robin Hinks, Research and Policy Officer at the Food Foundation said: *‘These data are truly shocking. To take so many British people off the breadline, the Government must drive up uptake of the Healthy Start programme for young and low income mothers, tackle gaps in food provision during school holidays, and review our welfare policies to protect the diets of society’s most vulnerable.’*

These figures and quotations are sourced from the website of the campaigning organisation for food justice in the UK, End HungerUK – [info@endhungeruk.org](mailto:info@endhungeruk.org).

The argument that the soaring numbers using foodbanks since 2010 is primarily the result of jobcentres and DHSS information points being allowed to advertise their existence is disputed by such providers as the Trussell Trust, which calculates that such referrals account for about 5%

ONLY of its clientele. ([www.trusselltrust.org](http://www.trusselltrust.org)) The Trust issued 1,182, 954 emergency food packs to people in crisis in 2016.

In response to the scandal that up to three million children reliant on school meals would have gone hungry during this past summer holiday, a cross-party group of MPs and peers chaired by Frank Field presented the *School Holidays (Meals and Activities)* bill in the House of Commons. This legislation would ensure that no child need go without nourishment during school vacations. Local authorities would have a legal obligation to ensure food and activities are provided, using funds raised from the sugar tax.

Already voluntary organisations such as Feeding Britain and the School Junk Project are doing sterling work in pilot areas to support families in crisis during school holidays. The Bill, which comes before the Commons in January, will ensure the financial support to enable their work to be expanded, in liaison with local government and other agencies. Please encourage your MP to lend their support to this legislation so that we can put an end to hunger among children, at least during these times of the year which should be enjoyed and become part of their good memories of growing up, and not spoilt by the anxiety of wondering where the next meal will come from.



Moreover, let us demand and work for an economy that will truly enable the whole household, the 'oikoumene', to thrive.

*Tony Barnes*

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## **Hate Crime**

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Around the time of the 2016 EU referendum there was a spike in hate crime. Amnesty International decided to look into this. Much of what follows comes from their briefing document.

What is Hate Crime?

Definitions vary in the different jurisdictions in the UK but in England and Wales it is "Any hate incident, which constitutes a criminal offence, perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by

hostility or prejudice”. This sounds comprehensive enough but, as we shall see, the law is no good unless it is enforced effectively.

Bijan Ebrahimi was an Iranian refugee living in Bristol. He had learning difficulties and a physical impairment. He was a quiet man who loved tending his flowers. He was subjected to years of abuse and harassment from people living on his estate. Tired of seeing his hanging baskets vandalised he decided to take photographs of the young people who hung around outside his flat. He thought, mistakenly as it turned out, that if he could produce evidence the local authority would move him to a safer place. Instead, he was branded a “paedophile” by a group on the estate. Relations with his neighbours deteriorated to the point where Bijan dialled 999 as he was in fear for his life. However, when the police arrived they arrested and detained Bijan for breach of the peace. He made many calls to the police saying his life was in danger and at 12.12 AM on Sunday 14 July his neighbour, with an accomplice, broke into Bijan’s flat, beat him unconscious, dragged his body outside and set light to it.

The police failed Bijan in treating him as a potential culprit rather than a victim. He was labelled a “pest” and an “idiot”. Despite the neighbour pleading guilty and receiving a lengthy prison sentence, the court failed to take into account the racial and disability hatred that campaigners felt were factors in the case. This meant that the enhanced sentencing powers allowed for such offences were not used. This case shows the disconnection between the intentions of legislators and practice on the ground.

The effect of being a victim of hate crime can be devastating. People lose confidence, become fearful and anxious and become isolated.

Monique, (not her real name) and her children, originally from Ghana, have lived in the UK for approximately ten years. They settled well, learning English quickly and making friends. In the weeks before the EU referendum, the children experienced racist hostility at school. They were told they would be “kicked out of the country”. The children became withdrawn at school and at home. Fortunately the school dealt with the situation very well. However, after the referendum result the family began to suffer explicit racist abuse. Monique was verbally abused, spat at and told to “F... off back home ...” Monique became anxious, stopped

going out alone and lost her job because her physical health was affected. She also lost faith in the friendships she had forged previously.

It has to be said that the rhetoric at the time of the referendum was often inflammatory and we need to urge our politicians to moderate their language when talking on sensitive issues such as immigration. This doesn't mean the subject cannot be discussed, but talk of "floods" of immigrants and the UK being "overwhelmed" does appear to have increased racial tension.

The existence of mobile phones and social media can help in the battle against hate crime but can also be the medium by which it occurs. Grace (not her real name) was subjected to foul racist and sexist abuse on social media after she married a white British man. However the case of Hanane Yakoubi shows social media as a force for throwing light into dark corners of our society. In October 2015, Hanane, who was 34 weeks pregnant, was travelling on a bus with her two-year-old child and two friends. A woman on the bus spouted a torrent of abuse at Hanane and her friends because they were not speaking English. They were called "Isis bitches" and were accused of hiding bombs in their clothing. Hanane was told, "You're lucky I don't kick you in the uterus ...". No one on the bus intervened but a passenger filmed the incident on her phone and uploaded it to Facebook. It went viral. After the perpetrator saw the film she handed herself into the police and pleaded guilty to causing racially aggravated distress.

Hate crime is believed to be massively under-reported as many victims fear the police will not take them seriously or, worse, treat them as troublemakers. The police often don't follow the guidelines laid down for them. Whilst legislators mean well, often the funds are not there to improve police training, support victims adequately or educate the public. We all need to be vigilant and be prepared to speak up for victimised groups. As can be seen from the small sample of cases above, the problem is widespread and serious. We need to urge our MPs to take hate crime seriously, lobby for funding to be put into the agencies concerned and moderate their language.

*Judith Furse*

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# Global Nuclear Ban Treaty

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On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017 the United Nations adopted an international treaty banning nuclear weapons, with 122 countries voting in favour. This historic treaty makes it illegal under international law to develop, produce, test, stockpile, transfer, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons. It also makes it illegal to assist or encourage anyone to engage in these activities. Fifty States signed the treaty as soon as it opened for signatories. Any nuclear weapons state may sign and ratify it at any time, having agreed to cooperate with the relevant international authorities for the purpose of verifying the irreversible elimination of their nuclear weapons programme.

Such a momentous event was hardly mentioned in the British press and there must be many people who are still unaware of it.

Shamefully, in my view, the UK government did not participate in the treaty negotiations, whilst maintaining that it believes in working towards a nuclear weapons free world. In a UK Government poll, 75% of adults who were asked said that the UK should be at the talks.

Some 150 civil society representatives were also present, alongside governments. This summer I had the opportunity to hear Tim Wallis, a Quaker, describe his experiences. He took with him to New York a powerful statement from five major churches commending and upholding the participating countries from across the world for their moral courage in joining these important negotiations. Part of that statement reads:

*“We believe that the possession and threat of use of nuclear weapons is a sin against God and humanity. We repent of our complacency in allowing this state of affairs to continue for so long.....The very existence of such weapons are, in the words of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, “a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed”.*

Each day of the negotiations began with an interfaith vigil outside the UN buildings. On 17<sup>th</sup> June this was led by the World Council of Churches.

At a time when dangerously aggressive rhetoric between the leaders of USA and North Korea makes the frightening possibility of nuclear war ever closer – the “Doomsday Clock” of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists is now set at 2½ minutes to midnight – it seems incomprehensible that anyone thinks the possession of nuclear weapons makes us safer. They surely make us a target. Tim said the risk is that North Korea will use its weapons first, fearing the USA is about to attack. The risk of nuclear weapons being fired through an accident or misunderstanding is also very real.

What can Churches or individual Christians do? These are a few suggestions:

- Inform ourselves. “The Truth about Trident: Disarming the Nuclear Argument” (2016) and “Disarming the Nuclear Argument; the Truth about Nuclear Weapons” (2017), both by Timmon Milne Wallis, are well researched and set out the facts clearly. The Network of Christian Peace Organisations ([www.ncpo.org.uk](http://www.ncpo.org.uk)) has a Briefing on the Ban Treaty (2017) and other resources.
- Have conversations with family, friends and neighbours.
- Support local and national organisations that work for a nuclear weapons free world e.g. CND.
- Write to/meet our MPs asking them what steps the Government is going to take to achieve multi-lateral nuclear disarmament, since this is its declared aim. 2018 is the 50th anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: in 1968 the British Government promised to negotiate “in good faith” the complete elimination of its nuclear weapons.
- Ask our MPs for their views on the Nuclear Ban Treaty. Urge our Government to sign up to it.

*Elspeth Wollen*

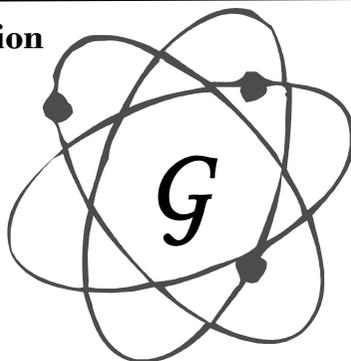
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# Social Action

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Published by **Swindon Churches Action for Justice** because *‘Peace will follow when Justice prevails’*.

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50 donations of £5 would cover the cost to produce our next edition.



Any donation, however large or small, will be gratefully received and will enable us to continue publishing this magazine. Please send your gift to Martyn Cook, Treasurer, SCT, 26 St Philip's Road, Upper Stratton, SN2 7QH. Cheques should be made payable to 'Swindon Churches Together' please and it would help if you could mark your donation "for Grapevine".

The Editor is always pleased to receive articles for publication in the magazine which has a widespread readership with 1,200 copies being distributed across Swindon, Marlborough, Highworth, Wroughton and various places in between! Plus it is available on the SCT website.

[www.swindonchurches.org](http://www.swindonchurches.org)

Views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily the views held by the majority of the members of SC4J or the Editor.

*This is what the Lord requires of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.*

*Micah 6:8*

