

Frank Burton

Australia has had a history of supporting imperialist regimes, first the British, now the US. In our own interest we need to reassess and become a neutral independent country. We are clearly moving into a multi polar world, the US is losing influence economically and politically, whilst China is rising fast.

The costs of wars in the past 40 years have caused untold suffering not just in the countries it took place, but also amongst our war veterans - many suffering post traumatic stress, and a high number has committed suicide. Many others have been suffering from cancers and disease in their offspring caused by the chemicals they were exposed to in the wars they were sent to fight for the US imperialists. This is posing a huge cost to our health system. What is worse, not a single one of those wars has been won or has been a success. America has lost all credibility in the world and it's time that we have a good look at our relationship with the US.

I would like to see Australia be an independent nation, non-aligned, a force for peace in the world and at the same time have good relationships with all countries on the basis of respect for their culture and way of life and form of government. It's clear that our democracy is in name only, instead it's a corporate dictatorship, where money rules. We need to also look at a better way of government, our two party system is letting the country down, as is compulsory voting. Only informed people should vote and it should be a right and responsibility, but not mandatory for those who don't care. We should also follow the lead of the only democracy left in the world, Switzerland, and introduce public referendums so the people can truly feel empowered and as participants in the government.

With non-alignment come also other benefits, like a much reduced need to spend on military and defense. Costa Rica for instance only has a police force and has never been in a war. Switzerland does have a military but is not getting involved in any expensive wars in far off lands that are none of their business. Instead they happily trade with everyone and take their money to keep safe in their safe country. Australia is perfectly positioned, an island at the edge of Asia, the fastest growing region in the world right now. I can see huge benefits but we need to engage with our neighbours first and the world beyond. There are so many win win economic possibilities between just Australia and Indonesia. Indonesia could provide a vast pool of cheap labour for our farms in the north, they have a large manufacturing base which could help us to diversify from Chinese imports. They could also benefit from our expertise in mining and education.

In summing up, Australia needs to slowly and respectfully disengage from the US relationship, say no to any further war involvement and instead offer our help to work out peaceful solutions. I remember a time when Australia was instrumental in bringing peace to Cambodia under Gareth Evans as foreign minister. That was a time when Australia was respected in our part of the world. We need to rebuild that respect by working constructively with China and the rest of Asia and engage with ASEAN more actively. Our government needs to reflect our multicultural roots by having a lot more overseas born people in positions of power who can provide the insight and understanding in dealing with the world. Canada is a good example of that. It's an urgent time to make some fundamental changes before it is too late and we're involved in another losing war that has nothing to do with us and is causing more suffering on our planet.