

Margaret Williamson on behalf of Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church

## **4 July rally, Melbourne 2021**

### **LOBBYING: IT REALLY IS ALL ABOUT WHO YOU KNOW**

Most of us would have seen the Honourable Christopher Pyne former Minister, on the news the other night, there he stood in all his doctoral regalia, hat on head and many coloured gown, at a podium in the hallowed halls of University of South Australia, addressing undergraduates.

But how did we see him on the news telecast, this man who enjoys portraying himself as a bit of a joker, with a bit of a swagger. No longer a minister of the Crown having taken his fat parliamentary former minister's pension, the Honorable Christopher Pyne stood before the nation, presenting himself now as an international affairs guru, a prophet, foretelling our future, telling us all that it was very likely that within the next five to ten years we would be at war with China. Using his Mr nice guy persona to tell the nation that he knew all about this. What he was doing was in fact war mongering. Failing to advise that he now spent his time working for his own company, which acts as a lobbyist to politicians, former colleagues and mates on behalf of arms manufacturers. Who was he acting on behalf of, those who profit from war or the people of Australia. Surely you would have to question that going to war with a country of the vast military capability of China would hardly be in the best interests of we the people of this nation.

His comments were said fairly blithely as if you go to war with a superior power every day of the week, as if all you do is say it, " we will be at war". As if there is no thought of what it could likely mean for a country such as ours. What death and destruction, what doom, what of our vulnerable, young and old, the destruction of cities, infrastructure, hospitals, food supplies, our jobs, our peace, our futures and our children's futures. Those of us that are left that is. I find myself asking what do you make of a man who can blithely make such a statements, has he not studied history and seen what war does to countries has he maybe not looked at what happened last century in two world wars, Vietnam and then Iraq, and this century in Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and the Yemen. Or is he the sort of person who shrugs off the awesome toll of those horrendous events, because, after all, they happened to other people and we white people of Australia didn't suffer so badly. Well in fact some did and from the repercussions for sometime and a couple of generations, but maybe not to him or those he knows.

So where did this declaration come from. If not in our interests then whose? It seemed that within a very short time of leaving his ministerial parliamentary position, days in fact he hopped from that ministerial job, straight into a job in his own company which he co owns with his former Chief of Staff Adam Howard, the company being GC Advisory P/L, listed on the Victorian Government Lobbyists list, it is a lobbying firm. Within days of his parliamentary exit nine days in fact, so this firm one could rightly assume was in existence while the Honourable Mr Pyne was working as a minister of Defence and previously as minister of defence industries.

Mr Pyne was in fact about to, through his company, act as consultant to another company becoming increasingly interested in military and military processes. The Company EY once

known as Ernst and Young. GC Advisory Pyne's company stands for Government Counsel and Advisory. According to its website this company has a policy which reads as follows:-

We specialize in knowing the right levers to pull to  
Clear obstacles that often lie between intent and delivery  
when it comes to the dealings of business and government.

It goes on to say that " the firm can offer businesses a wide range of services based on years of experience and expertise".

When it comes to expertise and experience you can't get much higher than a Minister of the Crown and his Chief of Staff. Mr Pyne's and Mr Howard's ownership of this company is shown on the Victorian Government's Lobbyist list along with other staff who are listed by name and former positions as either chiefs of staff, advisors, or advisors to a Commonwealth or State Minister or Parliamentary Secretary.

As the weekly e-magazine Michael West Media has pointed out the revolving door from parliament to business and vice versa has worked extraordinarily well in this case.

There are Ministerial standards for those which are meant to prevent former ministers from lobbying or holding business meetings with members of the Government, parliament public service or defence forces on any matters for which they held ministerial responsibility, for 18 months after leaving parliament. Ministers are also required not to use information they have obtained for their private gain. While the media may from time to time have a go when this standard is breached there is hardly ever any action taken against those who do so. It is said that Australia takes a very weak approach to dealing with such breaches.

Back to the company EY according to Katharine Murphy senior journalist for the Guardian on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2019, the global consultancy giant already makes enormous profits from its work for the Australian Governments. Tender records show that in the past four years it has won 838 contracts worth \$377m. That includes 138 contracts with the Defence Department, worth \$148m. More money still is available to EY through consulting with other corporations, to help them win and complete government contracts.

In relation to EY when questioned by the Financial Review about his relationship with EY, Mr Pyne stated, "I'm looking forward to providing strategic advice to EY as the firm looks to e paid its footprint in the defence industry".

Journalist Michelle Fahy writing for Michael West Media pointed out that "A disturbing number of Australia's military personnel, senior defence and intelligence officials and politicians leave their public service jobs and walk straight through the revolving door into roles with weapons making and security related corporations. Nowhere is government and industry more fused than in defence".

In yet another instance early last year the former director general of ASIO was appointed to the board of Thales the French multinational weapons and security maker. Major General Lewis had a long history of employment not just with ASIO but also with the military, the

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the defence department and also had performed diplomatic roles.

Personnel such as the Major General become a major asset to a company such as Thales bringing deep knowledge of government politicians and parties personally. They know who to talk to when relationships with former colleagues can bring about Government decision making on the purchase of billions of dollars worth of war equipment and weaponry.

While looking at Thales it is worth raising a further issue this time relating to the former Attorney General. Christian Porter. Thales was a tenderer to provide lightly armed vehicles to replace the aging land rovers used by the army. This was a \$2 b contract. In the case of such contracts the Auditor General has a role to ensure the value for money of such a contract. It appears that Thales was less than pleased with some sections of the Auditor General's report and sought to have those sections removed. Using a rarely used capability they went to the Attorney General who ensured the particular sections were suppressed from the report. This then meant that Parliament and committees, which were to look at the tenders did not have all the Auditor General's information. The Canberra Times saw this as setting a dangerous precedent.

So while we are contemplating being at war with China and listening to the nightly and daily issues raised in the media about China's human rights record. I would like to contemplate the old adage that people in glass houses should not throw stones. We should be looking at our own human rights record which is not at all fantastic when it comes to our relationship with armament manufacturers. Take Electro Optic Systems a company which obtains funding subsidies from the Federal Government for its growth market in the Middle East. EOS sells weapons to the United Arab Emirates and to Saudi Arabia. Both countries are accused of war crime over six years in the war against the Yemen. Shocking attacks on civilian populations, which have suffered horrendously. The sales of EOS weapons fly in the face of United Nations pleadings to the international community to cease supplying weapons to these countries.

And here is the conflict for while we need good paying jobs in manufacturing for workers starved of decent jobs and decent pay by this Government, would it not be better if such jobs were not in the production of weapons of war but in jobs transitioning to alternative and sustainable forms of energy, growth instead of the mass destruction of war jobs in the best interests of the whole community rather than those that advantage the war mongers.

In the USA such influence is now referred to as the might of the military, industrial, congressional complex. Congressional recently added. This relates to the number of US politicians and their staff who have been directly employed by the military or arms manufacturers, or who represent electorates where huge arms manufacturers or military bases form large numbers of their constituents.

I remember as many might that towards the end of the Vietnam war one of the arguments put to not end it, was that a recession would break out and thousands would loose jobs if the war came to an end. I can't help but wonder whether similar arguments have been raised over the ending of US and allied involvement in the never ending war in Afghanistan.

We recognise many of these same companies in Australia as they burrow into our communities to gain further influence. For instance the role of Lockheed Martin and BAE and others funding engineering and STEM faculties in Universities and even some secondary schools. Then there is the huge sum of money being provided for the refurbishment of the Australian War Memorial, where the policy has changed from the provision of commemorative memorial to those killed or maimed in white wars, to an edifice to the glorification of war complete with weapons of destructions and machinery and the names of the funding arms manufacturers emblazoned on the front of the building.

It would have to be said that lobbying and influencing bought and paid for by multinationals in this case arms manufacturers is a corruption of government processes and corrosive to our democracy. One can't claim democracy is working when decisions about who are friends and who enemies are made to suit the profits of the producers of weapons of war. For those who have bought their way into our three major parties to influence policy decision making, on banking, fossil fuel mining, pharmaceutical and chemical usage, the role of the media, they and their mates have no concern about whether we live in a democracy. They have it all stitched up. Their key interests are the making of more and more profit.

Lobbying and influencing governments are where where evil meets greed. When beating the drums of war is in the best interests of the share holders of the arms and weapons of war manufacturers

When the suffering of innocent vulnerable people in war torn countries is the outcome of that evil greed then we need to change the rules, ensure that in the best interests of the people we have strongly policed and acted upon laws that shut down the lobbyists and in particular make it illegal for politicians and public servants to obtain personal gain by working for these companies. And outlaw the making of donations to political parties by multinational companies and their cronies. And we need to have politicians to bravely expose who they are and stand up for our independence and peace and to act in the very best interests of the people of this country.

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