



Thick as thieves

Anna Pha

The appearance of the CEOs of Australia's Big Four banks last week before the House of Representatives Economics Committee was a charade from start to finish. One by one the CEOs lined up to be questioned about the behaviour of their bank, the scandals, what action they had taken to rectify injustices and illegal practices, and why all too often no one had been sacked.

The CEOs were questioned on exorbitant credit card and mortgage rates, bank bill swap rates, refusal to pay insurance claims, financial planning scandals, remuneration of financial planners, lack of independence of financial advice and massive profits on different products and other concerns.

The stock reply from each bank was to sound apologetic for the actions of individuals; to reassure the MPs that thorough internal investigations had been carried out; that any necessary changes had been made; and that criminal and unethical practices were not systemic or related in any way to the bank's culture.

"Poor outcomes sometimes come from human error. No one company or individual is perfect," said Commonwealth Bank CEO Ian Narev, playing down the seriousness and systemic nature of some of these "poor outcomes".

"We will ensure that we put our mistakes right and learn from them," he added.

The message: No Royal Commission!

The ANZ, Westpac and National Bank of Australia all sang a similar tune.

The CEOs tried to win friends and sooth public anger by acknowledging some mistakes and illegal activity. They went through the motions.

Too big to touch

The Big Four between them have over \$2.5 trillion in assets under management, either directly or through their subsidiaries. This is approximately 140 percent the size of Australia's GDP. The wealth managed by the Big Four is almost six times as much as the \$418 billion the government spent in 2015.

Along with management of such massive amounts of wealth comes power. The sort of power only enjoyed by some of the big insurance companies like AMP and to a lesser extent the mining magnates.

So it is not surprising that the CEOs didn't feel threatened by this, the first annual review of Australia's four major banks – Turnbull's alternative to a Royal Commission. The Fairfax media headline "Money Talks" summed it up.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced the holding of annual reviews in a desperate attempt to stave off calls for a Royal



Commission into banking. We are supposed to believe that it will make the Big Four publicly accountable?

Farce

Murdoch's *Australian* newspaper described the review as a "damp squid" and "truly pathetic". But it was not referring to the damp and pathetic failure of CEOs to take the hearings seriously but to the parliamentarians' questions!

The *Australian's* coverage could be described as "truly pathetic", playing up diversions from the key issues, in effect covering up for the banks and their actions. Transferable accounts, tribunals, etc will not address the criminal and unconscionable conduct of banks.

"... it is through the combination of strength and fairness that we build and sustain trust," Narev told the review panel.

"... we have also needed to balance the interests of many stakeholders in a way that is fair and that is seen to be fair," Narev said.

It is this question of "balancing" interests – the drive for profits – that is behind the scandals and unethical approach to customers by

financial planners, insurance arms of the banks, mortgage loans, etc.

The drive for profits is behind such methods as rewarding employees for selling customers products that they cannot afford; refusing to pay out insurance claims on the basis of outdated medical definitions; not providing financial services that have been paid for; the list goes on.

Bank customers are the targeted victims of such crimes and unethical practices.

Talk about competition protecting customers' interests is nonsense, especially when a monopoly of four work almost in unison. The concentration of capital managed by the Big Four is one of the highest in any industrialised country. In July 2016, they held almost 83 percent of loans to households and 80 percent of systemic risk in the financial system.

The litany of complaints associated with the Big Four confirms profits come first.

Scales tipped

There are three bodies where customers can seek redress in the financial system – the Financial Ombudsman, the Superannuation

Complaints Tribunal and the Credit and Investments Ombudsman.

A one-stop banking tribunal covering all three areas was raised in the hearings. The banks appear to accept the idea and the government looks like pushing it: a further diversionary tactic giving the false impression that the government is taking some real, direct action.

At present the scales are not balanced in a horizontal position but hang vertically – weighed down by bank profits. There is a conflict between the banks and their drive to maximise profits and the interests of the people whose savings they invest and exploit.


The only way of eliminating this conflict of interest is to remove the private profit motive that drives their corporate appetite.

This can only be done through public ownership. The Communist Party of Australia calls for the establishment of a publicly owned and democratically controlled People's Bank with a strong social charter.

This would provide real competition through the force of a publicly owned and publicly backed true alternative to the profit gouging banks. ✪

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Guardian

Issue 1752

October 12, 2016

Devastation, cause and response

Statement, Central Committee Secretariat CPA

The Communist Party of Australia expresses its sorrow at the loss of nearly 900 lives and the mass homelessness caused by Hurricane Matthew, which smashed through the Caribbean last week. Particularly hard hit was the long-suffering nation of Haiti, which has nearly one million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance as a result of the storms. Cholera threatens the population.

While Cuba and the Florida coast of the US have also been hard hit, it is Haiti's plight that cries out for the greatest commitment of solidarity. Given the track record of developed countries best situated to provide relief, there is little cause for optimism. There needs to be a rapid change to current practices. Fortunes in "aid" pledged by wealthy donor countries never reached the people of Haiti in the years following the 2010 earthquake when some 200,000 people are estimated to have died.

As some progressive commentators have noted, Haiti's suffering is not as noteworthy for the corporate media as that of France, the UK or the US. There isn't a rush to add a Haitian flag to millions of Facebook profile pics. The hashtag #prayforflorida is "trending". There is no such wave of support for prayers for Haiti.

Haiti has been the object of meddling by successive US administrations that have supported blood-curdling dictators and then deposed a progressive, popularly-elected president. There appears to be little support for the nation that liberated itself from oppression in a slave uprising that lasted from 1791 to 1804, when the country was a French colonial possession called Saint Dominique.

Unlike their North American counterparts, Cuba and Venezuela respect the history of Haiti and have expressed their solidarity with its people in impressive practical ways. They have already sent medical teams to assist with the treatment of the sick and injured. This is a major sacrifice of resources, especially for the Cubans. Hurricane Matthew pounded several municipalities in Cuba, including Baracoa, leaving a heartbreaking trail of destruction.

This isn't the first time Cuba has provided such assistance to Haiti or other struggling communities in the region and beyond. It even offered assistance to the US after it showed itself to be poorly prepared for the effects of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The generous offer of medical aid was contemptuously declined. Nevertheless, the world started to notice the impressive contribution of Cuban medical teams around the world.

Hurricane Matthew has been a curse on the people of the Caribbean but it has revealed another strength of Cuban society and its socialist system. It appears that, in contrast to the tragic situation in neighbouring Haiti, there were no casualties in Cuba arising from the storms. The preparations in place for this and other natural disasters are impressive. So is the Cuban government's assistance to the people of the affected areas to help them rebuild.

Cuba's ability to provide social infrastructure and aid to a much higher standard than its developing country status would seemingly determine is noteworthy. It would be even more impressive if the US's crippling blockade were lifted, other sorts of sabotage against the island nation were stopped and its territory around Guantanamo Bay was returned. The Communist Party of Australia will continue to work in solidarity to these ends. It also demands of the Australian government the most generous assistance possible to the people of Haiti and a break from the niggardly, self-interested "boomerang aid" practices of the past.

PRESS FUND

Last week Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* praised the heroic "escape" of nine Australian "lads" arrested for stripping down to underwear bearing the Malaysian flag, during that country's Grand Prix. What hypocrisy! If our national flag was deliberately displayed on the bums of raucous, prancing, beer-swilling foreign tourists in front of TV cameras during a major Australian sporting event, the *Telegraph* would undoubtedly rage and call for the offenders' punishment and expulsion. The young men made no apology on their return, but they may have learnt a valuable lesson – which is more than can be said for the *Telegraph*. But enough! We really need your support so please send in a Press Fund contribution for the next issue if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

PEA \$25, Mark Mannion \$5, "Rough Red" \$5, "Round Figure" \$10, E Seymour \$5

This week's total: \$50

Progressive total: \$6,180

Tragic farce on Manus

A 28 year-old Iranian asylum seeker in Mike Compound in the Manus Island detention centre attempted to set himself alight on September 30. The man, who was one of those seriously wounded in the 2014 attack by locals and police on Mike Compound, sprayed himself with flammable liquid before using a lighter to try and set himself alight. Fortunately, other asylum seekers at the scene quickly intervened, preventing the fluid catching fire, and he was uninjured.

After security firm Wilson's Emergency Response Team arrived, the asylum seeker was placed on high watch. The incident is one of the growing numbers of self-harm incidents on Manus Island, as the six month political crisis surrounding the centre drags on. The PNG Supreme Court order in April to close the centre have been ignored.

Bizarrely, a so-called "Communication Guide" issued by Manus prisoners by PNG Immigration on September 27 says that the closure of the centre "... will not be rushed."

The asylum seeker is one of the group of around 30 who have consistently refused to cooperate with the refugee determination process. Despite the fact that this group of asylum seekers have never been interviewed, some of this group have recently been given a negative refugee assessment.

Australian Border Force has also cut the weekly allowance of 25 points that can be used in the detention canteen to buy phone credit, in an attempt to force this group of asylum seekers to attend an interview.

Tensions have been rising since the PNG and Australian immigration moved to tighten rules over the Manus detention centre despite a PNG Supreme Court ruling in April that it must be closed.

Refugees and asylum seekers from the detention centre

are no longer allowed to visit or stay in the East Lorengau Transit Accommodation.

Immigration and [management contractors] Broadspectrum are again causing social upheaval, this time to force all double negative asylum seekers into Mike Compound. They have set a deadline of October 4 for the move. People with a positive assessment are expected to move from Mike to Foxtrot.

PNG immigration has warned that PNG police may be used to enforce the transfer between compounds. PNG police were involved in the 2014 attack on Mike Compound that resulted in the death of Reza Barati.

The restrictions are further steps to try and coerce asylum seekers to return to their home countries. But the restrictions also make a mockery of Australian and PNG Immigration claims that the centre is "open".

Both Australia and PNG governments are panicking to try and pre-empt the PNG Supreme Court hearing on October 27 where an application for "Summary Judgment" will seek orders for the immediate closure of Manus and the return to Australia of all those refugees and asylum seekers who wish to do so.

"Rather than face its legal responsibilities, the Australian government is determined to try to keep Manus detention open and maintain the fiction that resettlement is possible in PNG," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

The PNG immigration letter to asylum seekers warns that non-refugees will face deportation but further legal action is possible in all of those cases and PNG Supreme Court injunctions prevent the removal of any asylum seeker who is attached to the Ben Lomai case*.

"The Australian government is trying to save face, and is doing everything it can to maintain offshore detention policies and bully the PNG

government to prevent families being united, and prevent refugees finding a secure future," said Rintoul, "The Turnbull government should stop the delaying tactics, stop obstructing the courts and bring all the refugees and asylum seekers to Australia."

(* The Papua New Guinea Supreme Court is considering who has legal responsibility for hundreds of detained men after it ruled Australia's processing centre on the island was unconstitutional and should close.)

Lawyer Ben Lomai – who represents a number of the detainees – says there has been no action by Australia or Papua New Guinea since the Supreme Court declared the processing centre on Manus Island unconstitutional in April.

The PNG government had said it would close the facility and ask Australia to find alternative arrangements for the hundreds of asylum seekers and refugees held there.

Mr Lomai says at the least, the Supreme Court is expected to say both countries are equally responsible.

He says Australia needs to do the right thing for the people it has been sending to Manus Island under a regional resettlement program signed with Papua New Guinea.

"We can't enforce the order of the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court against the Australian government, but we are of the view that, morally, the Australian government should accept that position in law as interpreted by the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court and they should be able to abide by that, especially where they have relations with the PNG government and to which such an offshore program has been established on Manus Island. So, in a way, they should take some more responsibility. Morally, they are obligated, in our view." ☺

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“

”

This machine kills fascists

Inscribed on Pete Seeger's guitar

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Something to say? Write to the Editor!

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au



Sydney

**Vigil demanding that the USA
stop the blockade on Cuba**

Monday October 17 at 5:30 pm Martin Place, Sydney

Also to stop the subversion of funds against Cuba and return Guantánamo to the Cuban people

Baryulgil man takes action over asbestos

Keira Jenkins

As a child growing up in Baryulgil, northern NSW, Ffloyd Laurie remembers playing with the white dust that came from the nearby asbestos mine.

Now aged in his 50s, Laurie, who has never worked with asbestos, has the fatal cancer mesothelioma, which is usually found in people who worked directly with the deadly fire-retardant mineral.

Now he's started what is likely to be complicated legal action in a bid for compensation.

"As a kid at Baryulgil I didn't know what it was," Laurie said of the white dust.

"My father worked on the mine and we used to go up and see him where he was working. Dust would float around us and we'd ride on the equipment.

"We used to eat the fruit near the mine; we never used to wash it off."

Major building products company James Hardie, which operated the Baryulgil mine until 1976, established a huge compensation fund after widespread media coverage and legal action from former workers and unions.

But because of a clause in a settlement agreement the company struck with the NSW government in 2005, Laurie is unlikely to see any compensation from the mining company.

That clause dictates that James Hardie can be sued in relation to the mine at Baryulgil only as a "last resort". Consequently, Laurie's lawyer, Tanya Segelov, said she has started a legal case against the NSW Department of Education because Laurie and his classmates were exposed to the dust at Baryulgil Primary School.

"Normally we'd sue James

Because of a clause in a settlement agreement the company struck with the NSW government in 2005, Laurie is unlikely to see any compensation from the mining company.

Hardie, but because it was dust around the playground we have to sue the Department of Education," she said. "They used it (asbestos dust) to cover the surface of the playground. There's a special section of the deal James Hardie made with the government that only covers the mine in Baryulgil.

"It means that we're required to sue the government or anyone else who can be sued before we can sue the company. So we're suing the NSW government because it had a duty of care to keep those kids safe.

"There's no doubt the school had a duty of care, but we would have normally sued James Hardie. It's a very unusual provision that was agreed on as part of those negotiations."

Laurie says he can no longer work with the Aboriginal Medical Service, where he has been employed for the past nine years. "I used to be a health worker," he said. "I used to walk a lot and do lots of driving, and now I can't do that any more.

"I would have been coming up to long service if I could stay.

"The chemotherapy treatment for my cancer is draining and sometimes my eyes blur. I get blurry vision. I started chemo in June."

Laurie's wife Noelene said the cancer has also had a significant impact on her and the couple's children.

"It's frustrating, and it's tiring, and it's something you'd never think

would happen to someone you love, so it's had a big impact," she said. "We lost a daughter a few years ago, then last year we lost another daughter, which had a big impact.

"We're handling this as well as we can. All we can do is put our faith in God."

Laurie is the first of his family who went to the school in Baryulgil to develop mesothelioma.

He said he hopes the upcoming court case will help his family get the treatment they need if they find they have the fatal cancer. "Dad didn't get any compensation so I want to do this for my family," he said.

"I hope it benefits my family. We just didn't know what asbestos was.

"I never smoked and I never drank, so the cancer can't be from that."

The Baryulgil community has now rallied around Laurie and his family, raising money through an online funding website for the couple to have the honeymoon they never had. In less than a week more than \$1,000 was raised.

"It just makes me feel like there's people out there who care," Laurie told the *Koori Mail*. "I'm well known in the local community. I've got lots of connections. I was raised in Tabulam and I've been all around."

To donate to Ffloyd and Noelene Laurie's honeymoon fund, visit www.gofundme.com/2nzpfbkn *Koori Mail* ✪



Ffloyd Laurie with wife Noelene.

Joint Communiqué

Establishment of Diplomatic Relations - Venezuela and Vanuatu

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, guided by mutual desire to initiate and develop ties of friendship and cooperation between the two States in political, economic, cultural, technical and in any other fields on the common agreement have decided to establish diplomatic relations as of the date of the signing of this joint communiqué on the basis of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations April 18, 1961.

The relation between the two States will be based on the principles and rules of the Charter of the United Nations and International law, particularly, equality among the States, respect for their independence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of the States.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu are convinced that the establishment of diplomatic relations between them corresponds to the interest of the two States and contribute to the consolidation and cooperation among them and peace in the world.

As a testimony of this act, the undersigned Representatives, duly authorisation by their respective Governments have signed this joint communiqué in Spanish and English.

Signed in Margarita Island, Venezuela, 2016.

For the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela:
Dely Rodríguez Gómez
Minister of People's Power for Foreign Affairs

For the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu
Bruno Leingkone
Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation & Foreign Trade

From the archives

The Guardian, November 1989



Don't dump on SA NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION against nuclear waste dumps in SA

Saturday October 15, 2016 marks 63 years since the first atomic bomb test at Emu Junction. South Australia is a proud state rich in possibilities, clever people, ancient and continuing Aboriginal culture, creativity and breathtaking nature.

Right now, we're facing two nuclear waste dumps; a national dump in the beautiful Flinders Ranges and an international dump to take the world's nuclear waste.

The decision to import high level nuclear waste is a forever decision. Once we make it, there's no going back. This is a decision that we cannot make for thousands of generations of future South Australians.

In the case of Australia's national waste, the government has failed for over 20 years to find a management solution – we must stop our iconic Flinders Ranges becoming a sacrifice zone for nuclear waste.

STAND UP FOR SA

Rally at Parliament House, North Terrace, 11 am, October 15

Nurses exhausted

In view of ongoing concerns in respect of staffing and workload, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) ACT branch recently wrote to the major parties and asked if they would commit to legislation for safe staffing levels if elected.

"The ANMF is extremely concerned that the Canberra Hospital is not effectively managing a shortage of Nurses and Midwives," ANMF ACT branch secretary, Jenny Miragaya, said.

"This is resulting in them becoming exhausted because of the need to do extra shifts and overtime," Miragaya added.

The ANMF disagrees with the Canberra Hospital's claims that it has sufficient numbers of Nurses and Midwives, saying that this is inconsistent with reports from Nursing and Midwifery staff who report regularly being asked to do extra shifts and told to work short-staffed because there aren't enough Nurses and Midwives.

"Those responsible for actually providing care, our Nurses and Midwives, do not agree with the mantra from Canberra Hospital administrators that the public is not at risk, and the ANMF points to almost 20 unsafe staffing incident reports, including 11 from just two areas, over the past two months," Miragaya said.

"The only way the hospital can manage, is to have Nurses and Midwives

work overtime and extra shifts," Miragaya added.

The ANMF believes this is not sustainable, with Nurses and Midwives reporting high levels of fatigue, and are at risk of "burning out", and that there is a clear solution.

"The only way we are going to fix these problems and ensure the safety of the public is by introducing mandatory safe staffing levels," Miragaya said.

It is clear that this election, Health has taken centre stage. All major parties have made health a priority. But the ANMF believes that the number one priority in health is the guarantee that when someone comes to Hospital that there is a Nurse or Midwife to care for them; a Nurse or Midwife who is not tired from working overtime, extra shifts or staying back late.

"When recently polled by the ANMF, Nurses and Midwives overwhelmingly confirmed that they want mandatory safe staffing levels to provide the care the ACT community expects and deserves", Miragaya said

"We expect that the ACT Community is as keen as our Nurses and Midwives to know if the next ACT government will act to ensure their promises of more nurses and midwives will be met through mandatory safe staffing levels," Miragaya added. ✪



Eliminate nuclear weapons

T Southern

September 26 marked the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. In the words of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, "The consequences of any further use of nuclear weapons, whether intentional or by mistake, would be horrific. When it comes to our common objective of nuclear disarmament, we must not delay – we must act now."

Achieving global nuclear disarmament is one of the oldest goals of the United Nations. It was the subject of the General Assembly's first resolution 70 years ago, in 1946. It has been on the General Assembly's agenda along with general and complete disarmament ever since 1959. It has been a prominent theme

of review conferences held at the UN since 1975 of states which are parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It was identified as a priority goal of the General Assembly's first Special Session on disarmament in 1978, which attached a special priority to nuclear disarmament. And it has been supported by every United Nations Secretary-General.

Yet today, some 16,000 nuclear weapons remain, stored at sites in 14 countries. Countries possessing such weapons, including the United States, have well funded, long-range plans to modernise their nuclear arsenals. More than half of the world's population still lives in countries that either have such weapons or are members of nuclear alliances. As of 2015, not one nuclear weapon has been physically

destroyed pursuant to a treaty, bilateral or multilateral, and no nuclear disarmament negotiations are currently underway.

Nuclear weapons have been forbidden by agreements between countries. Many nations have been declared Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, areas where nuclear weapons production and deployment are prohibited, through the use of treaties. The Treaty of Tlatelolco (1967) prohibited any production or deployment of nuclear weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Treaty of Pelindaba (1964) prohibits nuclear weapons in many African countries.

As recently as 2006 a Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone was established among the former Soviet republics of Central Asia prohibiting nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence persists as an element in the security policies of all possessor states and their nuclear allies. This is so despite growing concerns worldwide over the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of even a single nuclear weapon, let alone a regional or global nuclear war.

In the US presidential campaign now underway, the Republican candidate has casually expressed interest in deploying nuclear weapons against offending nations and peoples, and encouraged other nations to acquire them, to the dismay of every thoughtful person in the world.

These facts provide the foundation for the General Assembly's designation of September 26 as the International Day for the Total

Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. This occasion provides an opportunity for the world community to reaffirm its commitment to global nuclear disarmament as a high priority.

It intends to educate the public and their leaders about the real benefits of eliminating such weapons, and the social and economic costs of perpetuating them. Commemorating this Day at the United Nations is especially important, given its universal membership and its long experience in grappling with nuclear disarmament issues.

High on the list of global concerns is the urgency of addressing one of humanity's greatest challenges, achieving the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. ✪

Aged and disability services: systemic problems

To coincide with the International Day of the Older Persons, the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) last month released a report that contains widespread recommendations for both the staffing and regulation of aged care and disability services.

"Solutions from the frontline: Practical approaches to reduce the risk of abuse in aged and disability services" is based on findings from an NSWNMA member survey and follows on from recent state and federal inquiries into elder abuse and the aged care workforce.

Of the 323 registered nurses, assistants in nursing, enrolled nurses, managers and clinical educators surveyed, one in five said they had witnessed elder abuse by people acting as appointed decision-makers.

Almost 70 percent thought there should be legislation to protect people who can no longer make their own decisions and 75 percent believed audits should focus more heavily on

identifying 'hidden' areas of abuse, such as neglect, poor wound care and staffing shortfalls.

Feedback

"I've seen cases of families helping themselves to the bank books and accusing staff of interfering." – Assistant in Nursing, Residential Aged Care Facility (RACF)

"I work in an emergency department and looked after a man physically and emotionally abused by his brother who is also a power of attorney." – Registered Nurse, Public Hospital

"Spot checks are known about well in advance. So many more staff are on the floor on the day." – Assistant in Nursing, RACF.

The report offers 14 recommendations from protective legislation and strengthening of regulation to licensing and safe staffing ratios.

NSWNMA general secretary, Brett Holmes, said the report highlighted the daily challenges faced

by staff working in residential aged care facilities and the types of elder abuse encountered and experienced by those they care for.

"The results confirmed what we already knew from our close relationship with our aged care members: that they face daily challenges managing aggressive behaviours and are often at risk of assault themselves," Holmes said.

"Members told us that not only were they dealing with elder abuse on a daily basis but that they also struggle to know how to advocate for people when their relatives, or the aged care providers caring for them are not making decisions that are in their best interests.

"By highlighting the issues facing frontline workers and the people they care for, we hope to inform the community and encourage the government to rethink the way some of these services are delivered." ✪



Taking issue – Rob Gowland

Case study in Corporate Welfare

When capitalism was young, merchants and cashed-up landowners used their surplus capital to outfit ships to sail to the New World to share in plundering its gold. Later, they sent their ships to the spice islands of the Orient to bring back cargoes as valuable as gold.

This influx of gold and expensive trade goods saw capital itself begin to replace land as the measure of wealth. The transition from feudalism to capitalism had begun. As the industrial revolution developed, the possessors of this new wealth sought to increase their holdings by exploiting the money-making potential of the new inventions and scientific discoveries that distinguished the age. The products of the new mines and mills needed to reach their markets so canny investors put up the money to build, initially canals, then railways.

They soon realised, however, that manufacturing the goods to be transported was potentially much more profitable. And so it remained for the next hundred years or so while capitalism exhausted the possibilities for investing its profits at home and had to seek foreign outlets for them instead. The age of economic imperialism had arrived.

There followed a century of unprecedented wars for colonies and markets, followed by national liberation struggles plus revolutionary and counter-revolutionary struggles and the flight of manufacturing from developed capitalist countries to low-wage economies concentrating on assembly.

As manufacturing shut down in developed countries, jobs disappeared by the thousand. Manufacturing in low-wage countries, by definition, cannot generate adequate income to replace that which has been lost. Low-paid workers cannot hope to buy everything they produce. The result is a crisis of overproduction and such crises have become endemic and constant.

Capitalism is in deep trouble. The richest capitalist country, the USA, is beset by poverty, homelessness (even among people with jobs) and despair. So universal is this feeling of crisis that Presidential hopeful



– and fascist demagogue – Donald Trump has campaigned successfully on a promise to “make America great again”, an admission that the country has well and truly fallen off its pedestal, as if such an admission of national failure was actually needed.

So how do the USA’s capitalists hope to revive their country’s economic fortunes (both figuratively and literally)? The more predatory elements of the US corporate state wage war against the global environment and against any government that does not accept their *diktat*. In the face of overwhelming scientific evidence, they persist in promoting the use of fossil fuels and, in the quest for short term profits, happily drill for oil and gas in such sensitive areas as the Gulf of Mexico and the Arctic.

They foment wars to disrupt the supply of oil and gas to their competitors in Europe and they especially seek to disrupt the economies of their main social and economic rivals, Russia and China. Russia is supplying China with massive quantities of oil and both countries are economic allies of another US target, oil-rich Iran.

The network of pipelines that delivers Russian oil and gas to Europe goes through Ukraine. A massive intelligence operation was launched to destabilise Ukraine, using street fighters brought in from as far afield as Chechnya and Israel, accompanied by intense US diplomatic pressure,

all staged for the benefit of the international capitalist media.

The coup in Ukraine was successful, ousting the elected government and installing an openly fascist stooge of the US. The other major source of oil and gas for Europe is Iran but the planned pipeline to bring it would pass through Syria. US efforts to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria are in part intended to frustrate attempts to build this oil pipeline or at least to bring it under US control.

The USA developed its manufacturing capacity in the 19th century and expanded it greatly in the 20th century, especially during WW1 and WW2, when – unlike its European rivals – it was spared the disaster of invasion while supplying vast amounts of arms and materiel to the Allies. Today, however, the larger US companies engaged in manufacturing are desperately trying to cut their costs, seeking to transfer their operations to a low-wage country so they can boost their profits at the expense of their laid off American workers.

US politicians at national, state and municipal levels are painfully aware that the country cannot continue to shed jobs at the rate it has been if they want to sustain their economy and avoid turning the USA into a massive rusting ghost town. They need to attract enterprises to their locality that will generate new jobs

if they are to prevent their populations from revolting.

So desperate are they to attract these businesses that they are offering what amount to huge bribes to any corporation that will only come and set up in their town. In 2008, to get German auto giant Volkswagen (VW) to set up in Chattanooga, Tennessee, the city and state administrations arranged to provide VW with a trifling US\$577 million subsidy package, “the largest taxpayer hand-out ever given to a foreign-headquartered automaker in US history” (– Chris Brooks, *Dollars & Sense*).

As Brooks points out, “According to the Subsidy Tracker at the website of watchdog group Good Jobs First, the package provided to VW included ‘\$229 million from the state for training costs and infrastructure; \$86 million in land and site improvements from the city and the county; state tax credits worth \$106 million over 30 years; and local tax abatements worth \$133 million over the same period.’”

That’s a hell of a subsidy, I hear you say? Wait, it gets worse – much worse. As Brooks explains: “In exchange for this massive infusion of public wealth onto Volkswagen’s corporate balance sheets, the company promised to create 2,000 jobs in Chattanooga, bringing the price tag for each promised job to \$288,500.” WHAT!?! Keep the job, just gimme the money!

Was Tennessee’s willingness to cough up a ginormous subsidy the only reason VW decided to set up shop in the state? Not entirely, no. A referendum in 2014 decided to forbid the state from ever establishing a payroll tax and Brooks notes that “earlier this year the state legislature passed a bill to phase out the state’s tax on dividends and income from bonds by 2022”. This largesse on the part of Tennessee towards corporations coming into the region resulted in millions of dollars in tax revenue being stripped from city budgets. The inevitable consequences are cuts in services and higher charges, both impacting hardest on the working class.

Almost the sole source of revenue for the Tennessee state government is sales tax. The primary form of wealth for the working and middle classes – a family home – is taxed to provide revenue for local government while major forms of wealth for the

ruling class – corporate stocks and bonds – are not. Similarly, essentials like groceries are subject to sales tax while luxury goods such as “attorneys’ fees, services such as haircuts and massages, and goods for horses and airplanes” are exempt!

As Brooks notes, “this regressive system is compounded with every tax abatement given to a large multinational corporation, such as Volkswagen. When the state increases its reliance on sales taxes to offset the holes punched into the budget by corporate tax breaks, this increases the overall tax burden on the poor and working class. The only other option to raising revenue through regressive taxes is for the state to cut services. Cuts to services, such as healthcare, public education, infrastructure, and transportation, are just another way to shift the burden onto the working class.”

The policy of in effect bribing large corporations to set up shop in Chattanooga may have given state and city politicians something to brag about when seeking re-election, but in fact it has done nothing to help the working people of Tennessee. “Currently, 27% of Chattanoogaans overall live in poverty, almost double the national average, and that number jumps to 36% in the city’s Black community. ... According to the 2015 report *State of Black Chattanooga*, by the Ochs Centre for Metropolitan Studies, the median wealth of white households in Tennessee ... increased by 2.4% between 2010 and 2013, to \$141,900. Contrast that with the median wealth of Black households in the state, which continued to spiral down in the same time period, falling more than 33% to \$11,000.”

With tax breaks, subsidies and other generous handouts of public money, it is no wonder that, in Brooks’s words, “the arrival of Volkswagen, [and other large companies like] Wacker and Amazon has failed to fundamentally alter the overall low-wage economy in Chattanooga ... In the 11 lowest-income neighbourhoods in the city, in which about three-quarters of residents identify as Black, the poverty rate is 64%.”

Corporate welfare is no solution to their problems. By diverting money away from the poor where it is needed, it in fact makes the situation worse. But that’s capitalism for you! ✪

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Q&A on a heating planet

A guide for people engaged in the exchanges on a daily basis of climate change.

1) "It's not really happening. We're just noticing extreme weather events more because of modern media coverage."

Global warming is certainly happening. Any cursory glance at mean annual temperature graphs since the 1880s (when records began) shows a steady increase in the world's annual temperatures, but there was a noticeable spike in the 1980's which meant two thirds of the 0.8C degrees increase over the past 100 years has happened in the last three decades.

On this trend, 21st century global surface temperature will increase to 2.9C degrees on the lowest carbon emissions scenario and 6.4C degrees on the highest. In other words, we are facing an increase in global warming of at least 3C degrees (because we are not holding to minimal emissions) over the next 90 years, an extraordinary change.

Worst affected are the polar ice caps, especially, at present, the Arctic. Melting of ice into the oceans slows their warming down, but land temperatures continue to grow and impact upon surrounding seas. Oceans rise, currents are being altered, which affects weather patterns.

To use an old metaphor, we are living in a sealed greenhouse within which more and more people are breathing out CO₂. The effect is to create denser humidity and more extreme storms, floods, cyclones, winds, heat and cold – yes cold, because increased humidity and cloud cover *can* produce extreme hail and snow falls as well ...

Insurance premiums against weather events like flood and bushfire have increased by 50-100 percent over the past decade – way beyond the rate of inflation. This is because the number of "classifiable weather or bushfire disasters" in Australia grew from 25 in the 1980s to 54 in the '90s and 60 in the 2000s. Hard-nosed capitalists do not raise prices for nothing: increasing extreme weather events are a reality.

2) "Global warming is a conspiracy of scientists, seeking to extract more money from government sources."

Of all "sceptic" claims, this is the most pernicious, illogical, and implausibly, dishonest. We already know that fame and fortune are most likely to accrue to "scientists" – often deniers are not scientists but writers, shock jocks and industry commentators having no relevant qualifications whatsoever – who have "discovered" evidence to contradict global warming.

This is because the general public has an understandable resistance to the idea of human-induced climate change. It confronts comfortable habits of consumption and capitalist precepts of maximal exploitation, and thus job security. The media have a history of inflaming prejudice to inspire rabid reaction and accrue profit. It is they who are most likely to lie or distort, not the 95 percent of scientists worldwide who have devoted their lives to expanding human knowledge.

To suggest that tens of thousands of people from such differing academic communities as China, India, Europe, the USA and Australia, from as widely varied sources as geographers, atmospheric scientists, marine biologists, biogeochemists, physicists, meteorologists and applied mathematicians to name a few, have all joined together in some kind of plot to extract money from their respective governments, beggars belief.

The supposed "proof" of a conspiracy, some hacked e-mails from the University of East Anglia, and jumped upon as "evidence of a cover up" by such noted News Ltd luminaries as Andrew Bolt, have simply been misinterpreted and beat up to try and undermine the overwhelming weight of real evidence.

A 2008 Gallup Poll found that 58 percent of Australians believed that human-induced climate change was real. A survey of 3,146 earth scientists conducted by Doran, found that 82 percent of them held human-induced climate change was real. Of these, furthermore, the specialist "climatologists", that is, those scientists who had specifically published, undergone peer review, and established their detailed knowledge of the science, 97 percent said that human-induced climate change was real. In



Insurance premiums against weather events like flood and bushfire have increased by 50-100 percent over the past decade.

other words, the more people know, the more detailed their appreciation of the facts, the more certain they are of global warming.

3) "Climate change is not new. It has happened many times before in the Earth's history. It is natural."

While there have been fluctuations in Earth temperature over the past 2,000 years (the so-called "mini-Ice Age" of the late mediaeval period), none of them have been so abrupt or severe as those being experienced in the 20th century and now – we are currently living through the hottest decades in world history.

"Pre-history" is another matter. Over the past 2 billion years the Earth has undergone its own process of development. It began as a molten mass but its distance from the Sun allowed cooling, which in turn formed an "atmosphere" of various liquids and gases. Once it had established its climate, four major factors continued to naturally influence the future of the planet:

Variations in the Earth's orbit: This "tilt of the axis" ranges from 22.5C degrees to 24.5C degrees. Currently the Earth's tilt is 23.5C degrees, exactly midway, but heading for the further lean. When the world's tilt is smaller, the temperatures of the seasons are milder, when it is higher, they become more extreme. The cycle takes 26,000 years overall. That is, in 13,000 years time, our summers will become hotter and our winters colder. The problem is everything is becoming much hotter, NOW.

Volcanic eruptions: At one stage in Earth's pre-history, its crust was thinner and volcanic activity was rife. The effect was to produce a greater land mass and to cool the atmosphere for, despite the heat of exploding magma and gas, the sulphur dioxide of volcanoes mixed with the stratosphere to cloud the Earth's surface and limit the impact of the Sun's rays. In turn, when volcanic activity decreased and the clouds cleared, the Earth warmed up. This process took millions of years to happen.

Variations in solar output: Periodically sunspots and storms alter the amount of energy coming from the Sun. Climate change deniers have sometimes argued that such events provide a "natural" explanation of global warming. The problem is, that the overall direction of the Sun's energy is in decline and that the basic impact of more frequent sunspots on the Sun is to reflect cooler temperatures, while the Earth

is getting hotter. Generally, the hypothesis of the Sun "naturally" causing global warming has been scientifically debunked.

Atmospheric carbon dioxide variation: The volume of carbon dioxide has indeed varied throughout the Earth's prehistory, although evidence suggests that in the distant past, this has been more of a symptom than a cause. When the Earth's temperature has varied due to factors previously mentioned, the oceans stored more CO₂ when colder, and released more as temperatures rose. Again, this "natural" process occurred over hundreds of thousands of years ... the situation is different now.

Now, human-produced carbon dioxide is driving the heating of the Earth, not the reverse. And it is happening at an ever faster rate, faster than anything in history or pre-history. By warming the oceans and clearing forests, humanity is making the "natural" task of absorbing CO₂ difficult, if not impossible.

Climate scientists are not stupid. The natural variations mentioned here, and many others, as many as might rationally be considered to have an effect on the Earth's climate, are factored in to computerised models of present and future climatic projections, such as those produced by NASA. The one constant, irrefutable factor that dominates these projections is the growing presence of human-caused carbon dioxide, accumulating in the Earth's atmosphere. There is no escaping it: it is causing the heating of our globe.

4) "Carbon dioxide is a weightless gas. It is pointless to try and arrest it."

Apparently both Tony Abbott and commercial radio commentator Alan Jones have been caught out on this point. Of course it is utterly false. Carbon dioxide is a gas, and relatively light. But it has a weight, and that weight is caught in increasing amounts in the Earth's atmosphere.

CO₂, compared to other major gases such as nitrogen and oxygen, is a relatively small component of the total atmosphere. However, its role in moderating the world's temperature is crucial. It is one of the few gases that captures heat, and without it, the Earth would have frozen over eons ago. But over the past 100 years, since industrialisation, the relative volume of CO₂ has increased from .028% to .039%, an overall increase in CO₂'s share of 70%.

The "natural" ecosystem deals with 255 billion tonnes of CO₂ per year, but industrialisation has added a further 5.5 billion tonnes (and growing) from burning fossil fuels every year, and this has tipped the balance above the capacity of the environment to absorb. Thus extra carbon dioxide is accumulating around us every day.

According to the Garnaut Climate Change Review the average Australian emits 28.1 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, which is twice the OECD average and four times the global average. This is largely because of our dependence on coal-fired energy sources and a need to consume copious amounts of fossil-fuel power for mining, manufacture, heating, cooling, cooking, lighting, entertainment and transportation.

5) "Why should Australia stick its neck out? The rest of the world is doing nothing."

It's true that, today, China is the world's biggest manufacturer, and its biggest polluter, producing some 17 percent of the world's carbon dioxide. On the other hand, the Chinese response to issues around climate change has been swift and meaningful.

At Copenhagen they tabled plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40-50 percent and increase forest cover an extra 40 million hectares by 2020. Also, renewable power sources would take up 15 percent of energy generation by the same year (Australia's now is 9 percent).

China once used 37 million barrels of crude oil to manufacture plastic bags – they are now universally banned. They have also committed to the elimination of incandescent light bulbs, and being the producer of 70 percent of the world's light bulbs, this process is virtually guaranteed.

China is also no slouch when it comes to manufacturing green technologies and now produces more solar panels and wind turbines than any other country. China leads the world in voltaic cell research and production. The Chinese government recently committed US\$216 billion in subsidies to further develop the nation's green technology sector. In 2009 China spent twice as much as the US to fund so-called "green markets", which was close to 50 percent of world expenditures overall. China's per capita CO₂ emissions, incidentally, are currently 6 tonnes.

Myanmar

Hidden strengths, hidden struggles

Women continue to suffer due to land grabs and militarisation, writes Nyein Nyein.

Despite the peace process and ceasefire agreements, women in the ethnic minority south-eastern regions of Myanmar still continue to suffer human rights abuses stemming from militarisation and land confiscation.

Land confiscation and rights abuses linked to the continued militarisation of ethnic minority regions in southeastern Burma have had particularly adverse impacts on women, ethnic Karen human rights advocates said at a recent press conference in Rangoon.

While the launching of the peace process in 2011 and a series of bilateral ceasefires with ethnic armed groups have lessened certain abuses, including forced labour and extrajudicial killings, new business opportunities have led to an increase in land seizures, they said.

The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) has documented the experiences of women in rural areas of Karen and Mon states and Tenasserim and eastern Pegu divisions, and has compiled four years' worth of findings on the effects of landmines, land confiscation, forced labour, torture and violence against women in a report released on August 3.

The report, "Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women's Testimonies from South-east Myanmar", was based on the analysis of 1,048 documents, including 98 interviews with separate women, said KHRG advocacy officer Jasmin, who pointed out a change in the type of abuses suffered by local women since 2012.

2012 was the year the previous government reached a bilateral ceasefire with the Karen National Union, the largest ethnic Karen armed group whose operations span the area of study, and which also signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in October last year.

Jasmin said, "In our report 10 years ago [*Dignity in the Shadow of Oppression*, published in November 2006], cases of rape and forced portage [for the Burma Army] were extensively documented. In our report this year, accounts of such abuses have lessened, with a change in the form of rights abuses.

"Because of the peace process, we now have more business operations, and land confiscation has become the main problem," Jasmin added. "They are losing their livelihoods and still being displaced due to that."

Despite the signing of both bilateral and "nationwide" ceasefire agreements, the presence of Burma Army troops across rural areas continues to threaten the safety of local people, especially women, said the rights advocates.

They added that a lessening in hostilities has had the side-effect of diminishing the authority of women at the village level. Over 60 years of civil conflict, with the enrolment of men in rebel armies, women have had to step forward and become village leaders. With the return of men over the last few years to their traditional positions of authority in the community, women have lost these roles.

Jasmin said the report aimed to heighten the public's awareness of "the experiences of women and their changing roles in the southern part of the country".

However, the KHRG advocates noted that locals in the area of study still fear talking

openly about instances of abuse, making it hard to verify and adequately document them.

Justice mechanisms

The KHRG also urged the government, legislators and the Karen National Union to "improve justice mechanisms" and create secure avenues for women facing gender-based violence and abuses linked to land confiscation to file cases with local authorities, and "bring perpetrators before independent and impartial civilian courts".

The KHRG framed these demands with reference to Burma's obligations under the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Burma signed in 1997.

Win Mra, chairman of Burma's National Human Rights Commission, attended the press conference and commended the KHRG's report, which he said "fairly documents human rights violations, the situation since the ceasefires and the [2015] election, and abuses against women".

He stressed the importance of implementing the recommendations contained in the report, rather than merely continuing to document cases and hold seminars and workshops.

"Our [national human rights commission] is doing the same activities as the KHRG and as the Gender Equality Network. We will not stop with workshops. We will continue working to achieve results," Win Mra said, with reference to the commission's partnership with UN Women on empowering rural women. – The Irrawaddy (www.irrawaddy.com).

Third World Resurgence ✪



Countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Hungary, Belarus and Britain (among many others) have drastically reduced their per capita emissions over the past decade while Australian emissions have continued to increase.

6) "So what?"

Some deniers argue that climate change, whether natural or human-induced, will happen anyway. It is unstoppable, so why bother trying. We could all do with less polar ice (the Antarctic will be easier to mine!) and a few less glaciers. With the changing weather patterns, we might even be able to plant crops in the desert.

Again, a shallow and unscientific analysis. We most certainly will *not* be able to "cherry-pick" the plethora of changes that will occur with global warming. Many species will not survive the rapid acceleration of heat. It is not just a question of relocating several million people when the oceans rise. If the ocean becomes acidic, most current species dependent on it will die. It is entirely possible that we will end up with a dead planet in the not-very-distant future.

It is no longer, really, a question of whether global warming is happening, it is a question of how much Planet Earth can stand. Our future, the future of the globe, is too important to allow privateer corporate barons to exploit on a rampaging, cut-throat basis, without regard to the total ecology. Now, more than ever, the people of the world, the 99 percent if you will, must grasp the ownership of the Earth's major resources in order to save it!

"Self regulation", whether in the media, advertising or problem gambling, simply does not work. "Carbon trading schemes", taxes and regulation are only half-baked measures designed to make capitalism behave like a good citizen – it never does. The production, use and distribution of energy is too important to be left in the hands of profit-motivated cowboys. It is a "commanding heights" industry!

This is the very worst time for governments to be privatising electricity. Working people must assert and extend their management over such vital resources. The future of Spaceship Earth demands it.

These and other subjects of discussion on this urgent issue are available in the excellent CPA booklet *Hot Earth*, available from the Party Bookshop. ✪



Protesters' pipeline victory

Roberta Wood

In a victory the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is calling "a game changer," three federal agencies effectively blocked the construction of a pipeline at Lake Oahe in North Dakota. The agencies, which operate under the direction of the Obama administration – the Department of Justice, the Department of the Army and the Department of the Interior – issued a joint statement [reproduced below] calling for a pause in the pipeline construction around the Lake.

The Tribe's Facebook post also pointed positively to the statement's call for establishing consultation with Tribes for future construction projects.

This week, near Cannonball, ND, pipeline protestors – Tribe members and their allies – were attacked by dogs and thugs employed by Energy Transfer Partners, the company that owns the North Dakota pipeline project called Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). Perhaps in response, the three-agency statement used unusually eloquent language to laud "the thousands of peaceful demonstrators who exercised their First Amendment Rights to voice their heartfelt concerns about the environment and historic, sacred sites."

The Tribe reported in its Facebook post that it is looking into filing for an injunction to force DAPL to stop construction.

Joint Agency statement:

We appreciate the District Court's opinion on the US Army Corps of Engineers' compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. However, important issues raised by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and other tribal nations and their members regarding the Dakota Access pipeline specifically, and pipeline-related decision-making generally, remain. Therefore, the Department of the Army, the Department of Justice, and the Department of the Interior will take the following steps.

The Army will not authorise constructing the Dakota Access pipeline on Corps land bordering or under Lake Oahe until it can determine whether it will need to reconsider any



Thousands of demonstrators have come together peacefully, to exercise their rights and to voice heartfelt concerns about the environment and historic, sacred sites.

of its previous decisions regarding the Lake Oahe site under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other federal laws. Therefore, construction of the pipeline on Army Corps land bordering or under Lake Oahe will not go forward at this time. The Army will move expeditiously to make this determination, as everyone involved – including the pipeline company and its workers – deserves a clear and timely resolution. In the interim, we request that the pipeline company voluntarily pause all construction activity within 20 miles east or west of Lake Oahe.

Furthermore, this case has highlighted the need for a serious discussion on whether there should be nationwide reform with respect to considering tribes' views on these types of infrastructure projects. Therefore, this fall, we will invite tribes to formal,

government-to-government consultations on two questions (1) within the existing statutory framework, what should the federal government do to better ensure meaningful tribal input into infrastructure-related reviews and decisions and the protection of tribal lands, resources, and treaty rights; and (2) should new legislation be proposed to Congress to alter that statutory framework and promote those goals.

Finally, we fully support the rights of all Americans to assemble and speak freely. We urge everyone involved in protest or pipeline activities to adhere to the principles of non-violence. Of course, anyone who commits violent or destructive acts may face criminal sanctions from federal, tribal, state, or local authorities. The Departments of Justice and the Interior will continue to deploy resources to North Dakota to

help state, local, and tribal authorities, and the communities they serve, better communicate, defuse tensions, support peaceful protest, and maintain public safety.

In recent days, we have seen thousands of demonstrators come together peacefully, with support from scores of sovereign tribal governments, to exercise their First Amendment rights and to voice heartfelt concerns about the environment and historic, sacred sites. It is now incumbent on all of us to develop a path forward that serves the broadest public interest.

Standing Rock Sioux Facebook post:

The federal court ruled against the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe today but, in a stunning move, three federal agencies have blocked the pipeline

at Lake Oahe pending a thorough review and reconsideration of the process. In a joint press release, the Department of Justice, Department of the Army, and the Department of the Interior said that they will not allow the pipeline to be built on US Army Corps land bordering or under Lake Oahe.

The agencies requested that Dakota Access voluntarily pause all construction activity within 20 miles east or west of the lake. They also set the stage for a nationwide reform, establishing consultation with tribes regarding the need for meaningful tribal input for all pipeline projects in the future. This federal statement is a game changer for the Tribe and we are acting immediately on our legal options, including filing an appeal and a temporary injunction to force DAPL to stop construction.

People's World ✪

Tories say: Frack you Lancashire

Sofia Lotto Persio & Peter Lazenby

The Tory government rode roughshod over the wishes of tens of thousands of people in Lancashire after giving the go-ahead to fracking. A landmark ruling from Communities Secretary Sajid Javid paved the way for the first fracking site in Preston New Road.

But the government halted progress on the one in Roseacre Wood due to a "real and unacceptable risk to the safety of people using the public highway."

The ruling said the other social, environmental and economic effects of fracking – which involves smashing underground rocks with a high-pressure toxic sludge to release gas – could be reduced to an "acceptable level," but did not specify how.

Lancashire County Council had refused permission to fracking company Cuadrilla to extract shale gas at both sites, citing adverse

effects on traffic and noise, but the company appealed. The council's cabinet member for the environment Marcus Johnstone said: "A local council, made up of councillors democratically elected by local people, and charged with serving their interests, is exactly the right body to make decisions on local matters."

"It is clear that the government supports the development of a shale gas industry, but I would ask it to do more to address the concerns of local communities and the councillors who represent them by supporting the best environmental controls."

Shadow energy and climate change secretary Barry Gardiner accused Javid of overriding the wishes of local communities.

He said: "The government's decision bulldozes local democracy and risks locking Britain into an old-fashioned dirty energy

infrastructure when we should be seizing the opportunities for new long-term jobs and investment in a clean energy future.

"Cuadrilla's own figures on jobs show they would be very temporary, and their claims that fracking will lower British energy bills have been discredited."

Campaigners immediately vowed to continue their battle against the controversial process. But general union GMB welcomed the government decision, saying it meant new jobs and opened the door to an alternative supply of energy for Britain. GMB national officer Stuart Fegan called the government decision "pragmatic," as the gas industry provides for "highly skilled jobs."

He said: "The go-ahead will reduce the gas we will need to import from regimes fronted by henchmen, hangmen and head-choppers."

The union also welcomed the arrival of shale gas imported from the US to Scotland last week, again on the grounds of job creation.

However opponents say the process is environmentally damaging, threatens health, pollutes water sources and can even cause earthquakes.

The government's ruling is a bitter blow for anti-fracking campaigners who worked tirelessly to protect the land from the drill.

A Residents Action on Fylde Fracking spokeswoman told the *Morning Star*: "What was once a rural community will now become an industrialised zone."

"We will continue to fight this dirty, unwanted and unneeded industry. There were over 18,000 objections and only 200 in support."

"More and more communities are speaking out up and down the country, and there are now more than 500 community groups

opposed to fracking, with more being set up every week."

The group accused Javid of "overruling democracy."

The campaigners also said Prime Minister Theresa May had backtracked on a pledge in her maiden speech when she said: "We will do everything we can to give you more control over your lives. When we take the big calls, we'll think not of the powerful, but you."

Nanashire anti-fracking group's Tina Rothery said: "Today marks a day we made local democracy a myth, a mockery. They took away our ability to defend our families using democratic processes."

Anti-fracking groups will gather at Maple Farm near the Preston New Road site to discuss what to do next and show once again they will not give up the fight.

Morning Star ✪

Honduras

Pre-election violence spikes

Emile Schepers

National elections in Honduras are a year away, but the incumbent president, Juan Orlando Hernández of the right-wing National Party, is already in campaign mode, as are his opponents on the left and centre. Tensions are on the rise, with police carrying out a tear gas attack against opposition demonstrators this past week.

Such events are leading the opposition to worry whether it will be possible to campaign for the November 2017 vote without being subjected to violence. Honduras remains one of the most violent countries in the world, a situation that has only worsened since the 2009 coup against former President Manuel Zelaya.

Indigenous, women's, labour, and LGBTQ activists have been particularly targeted over the ensuing years. In many cases, the victims have been people who got in the way of big moneymaking schemes involving transnational corporations, Honduran elite families, right-wing political leaders, or all three.

There is now also serious talk of the reappearance in Honduras of the death squads which slaughtered thousands in Central America during the dictatorships of the 1980s. The disappearance of the case files from the Berta Cáceres murder investigation are ramping up such fears.

Legacy of the coup

When former President Manuel Zelaya was overthrown by a military coup in June 2009, the pretext given was that he was somehow planning to run for re-election later that year. Second terms were forbidden by the Honduran constitution at the time. The more likely reason for his overthrow was ruling class resentment over the social and economic reforms he had introduced which were beginning to have an impact on Honduras'

historic poverty. Another was probably that under Zelaya, Honduras had allied itself with the left-wing governments in the region via the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, or ALBA.

Zelaya's foreign minister, Patricia Rodas, said at the time that the coup plan was hatched under the administration of US President George W Bush, who was angry because of Zelaya's alignment with Cuba and Venezuela.

The pretext that Zelaya had to be overthrown because he was thinking about running for re-election has now been blown out of the water by the current president, Juan Orlando Hernández.

A wealthy businessman, he was elected in 2013 under very dodgy conditions; it later was revealed that money had been illegally taken from the Honduran Social Security Institute, the agency that provides health care for the poor, to finance his campaign. This and other revelations have led to months of anti-corruption demonstrations against his government.

Undaunted, Hernández managed to pack the Supreme Court with his supporters and secured a ruling that the prohibition on re-election was unconstitutional. It is now assumed he will run again, though he has not yet formally announced his candidacy.

Under Hernández and his predecessor, Porfirio Lobo, also from the National Party, the economic situation in Honduras for the poor and working class has declined sharply. Of course, most countries around the world took a big economic hit due to the world financial crisis at that time, but Honduras did radically worse than other countries in the region.

A 2013 study by the Centre for Economic Policy and Research found the increase in inequality in the country particularly notable.



Under Hernández and his predecessor, Porfirio Lobo, the economic situation in Honduras for the poor and working class has declined sharply.

This, combined with the deteriorating security situation and the corruption scandals, should be a source of worry for Hernández.

Zelaya still has a strong following in Honduras, so the cynical decision of Hernández to give himself permission to run for re-election has set off a debate as to what the pro-Zelaya forces should do. The electoral left is mostly concentrated in the LIBRE (Libertad y Refundación) political party which grew out of the movement opposing the 2009 coup.

One possibility that has been mentioned is to run Xiomara Castro, Zelaya's wife, as LIBRE's presidential candidate. She was the party's nominee in the last election in 2013 and might well have won had the election been clean and fair. Another possibility is to run Zelaya himself once more, since Hernández has now made this possible. On October 30, LIBRE is holding a national consultation to determine what will be their course of action.

Return of the death squads?

The opposition's fear of election-related violence, however, has been stoked by the murder of several government opponents over the last couple of years. The best

known of them was environmentalist and Indigenous rights activist Berta Cáceres, who was shot to death on March 3 of this year. Her case has brought to light the probable collaboration of the military and the militarised police in some of these slayings. Eventually, five men were arrested for her murder and were supposed to be put on trial.

However, Cáceres' family and friends got very disconcerting news last week. For reasons that have not been adequately explained, a supervising magistrate in the case, María Luisa Ramos, decided to take the case files out of the office and to her home on September 29. On the way, she says, she was held up by two unidentified men and the files were stolen from her car.

There is now fear that not only will the disappearance of the Cáceres case files allow the killers off the hook, but that the lives of witnesses to the crime will now be endangered because they can be identified from the files.

Cáceres' daughter Olivia has demanded that an investigation be carried out of why Ramos took the files out of the office and called for witnesses in the case be fully protected. The Cáceres family and their friends are demanding that an impartial outside agency, the Inter-American

Commission on Human Rights, be brought in to investigate the murder, but President Hernández has so far ignored this demand.

The US connection

The United States government bears major responsibility for the current situation in Honduras. When Zelaya was overthrown in 2009, most of the countries of Latin America formed a united front to reverse the coup and return Zelaya, the legally elected president, to power. However, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton worked to undermine this strategy and moved toward new elections to replace Zelaya. These elections were carried out with troops in the street repressing Zelaya supporters and cannot be considered to have been fair.

Legislation currently in the US Congress calls for a cut-off of security aid to Honduras unless the human rights situation there is improved dramatically.

So far, however, the Honduran government expresses no worry that US aid to its military and police forces will be cut off. It announced that it is also negotiating with the government of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to get aid from that quarter.

People's World ✪

Women's Gaza-bound boat

A few hours before the Zaytouna boat reaches Gaza shores, a cry for help has been launched by onboard activists to guarantee their safe arrival to the coastal territory.

With Israeli threats materialising on the ground, the International Committee to Break the Siege on Gaza appealed for guaranteeing women onboard al-Zaytouna a safe arrival to Gaza shores without being hijacked by Israel.

A fleet of Israeli gunboats has, meanwhile, set sail from the Ashdod Harbour in an attempt to intercept the Zaytouna solidarity boat.

The American activists onboard the ship appealed to the US embassy in Tel Aviv to deter Israel from attacking the boat. However, they were told by the embassy that the occupation navy has received instructions to commandeer the boat right as it approaches Gaza shores and to tow it to the Ashdod Seaport. In case of any defiance, activists will be arrested.

Israeli gunboats docked in

Ashdod navigated to international waters so as to force Zaytouna to backtrack.

The international anti-siege committee dubbed Israel's projected takeover of the boat an infringement of international laws and parliamentary immunity and also a crime against peaceful activists that do not pose any threat to Israel.

The committee's chairman Zaher Birawi called on activists around the world to launch a solidarity campaign via social media in the event of an Israeli assault.

A similar Gaza-bound aid flotilla ended in tragedy in 2010 when the Turkish "Mavi Marmara" aid ship was raided by Israeli commandos, who killed 10 Turkish activists.

Since 2007, the Gaza Strip has groaned under a crippling Israeli/Egyptian blockade that has deprived its almost two million inhabitants of most basic commodities, including food, fuel, medicine and desperately-needed building materials.

The Palestinian Information Centre ✪

Sydney

A talk with Professor John Dugard on human rights in Palestine

Thursday October 27

6:30 pm for 7:00 pm start

Footbridge Theatre, University of Sydney, Parramatta Road

Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine is pleased to be hosting the esteemed South African professor of International Law and Human Rights, John Dugard who will be in conversation with Professor Ben Saul from the University of Sydney who is also highly regarded for his work on international law. Professor Dugard has served on the International Court of Justice and as a Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories from 2001-2008. As an outspoken critic of the policies of Israel in relation to Palestinians, John Dugard has stated that he thinks the apartheid policies of Israel are far worse than those he witnessed in South Africa.

Bookings are open now and even though the event is free, you'll need to reserve a spot.

cjpp@coalitionforpalestine.org

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
74 Buckingham Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

The march to where?

While it is evident that a rival imperialist power is attempting to create “a pivot to Asia” it is far from convincing as the editorial of September 21, 2016 (“Long March continues”) states, of it not being a reality that China is creating capitalism.

The “partnerships, liberalisations and other market-related initiatives” have created capitalism with Chinese characteristics rather than a type of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

China very much wants to preserve its culture and identity rather than let its brand of capitalism become enmeshed with the US economic prosperity sphere notwithstanding the large volume of bilateral trade between the two countries.

In China there is neither socialism nor democracy but an opaque form of government that attempts at times to govern in the interests of all the Chinese people.

Usually a good sign that socialism is operating and progressing in a country is if it has May Day rallies at which independent unions can hold May Day rallies.

This happens in Cuba and I had the good fortune to attend May Day in Havana in 2009 with over a million other people who marched or watched the rally that day of their own free will.

There are no May Day rallies held by independent unions in China as both are banned. Instead for May Day the government gives its people a four day public holiday which they use to leave the big cities and relax in

the country or else leave the country to visit family in the city.

I read the *China Daily* newspaper and I also see that there is very little about Marxist/Leninism happening there. I read China is trying to create its own luxury goods market so that Chinese people buy Chinese luxuries instead of foreign ones. This points to another characteristic of a capitalist society evident in China and that is rising inequalities, especially between rural and city Chinese people and within cities in China.

A further characteristic which comes with a capitalist society is rampant corruption.

A visiting academic from Beijing gave a talk to the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy (part of Curtin University of Western Australia) about corruption and anti-corruption in China.

He said there were three problems which caused corruption in China. One was that it was systemic (and cultural to some extent), two; there was a rule by man rather than a rule of law and three; there was no

separation of powers in China so the executive, administrative and judicial were all rolled into one – one government of the Communist Party of China.

Full marks to the professor, He Jiahong, as he took very critical and probing questions from the packed university audience – Chinese and non-Chinese alike. Ironically in Australia as our own government becomes increasingly subservient to capital, the government is also increasingly exposed to corruption, not acting democratically and acting against the interests of the people. A slow fascist creep is taking place.

As members of the Communist Party we are taught to think critically and dialectically and I see little evidence of synthesis and antithesis in this editorial and it does not behave respect nor to be taken seriously by other Australians and the Chinese government to print editorials which are basically flag waving for the Communist Party of another country.

Richard Titelius
WA

Don't hold your breath

I am so pleased that Theresa May is planning to shut down the body investigating claims that British troops committed atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan (UK *Guardian* September 25, 2016).

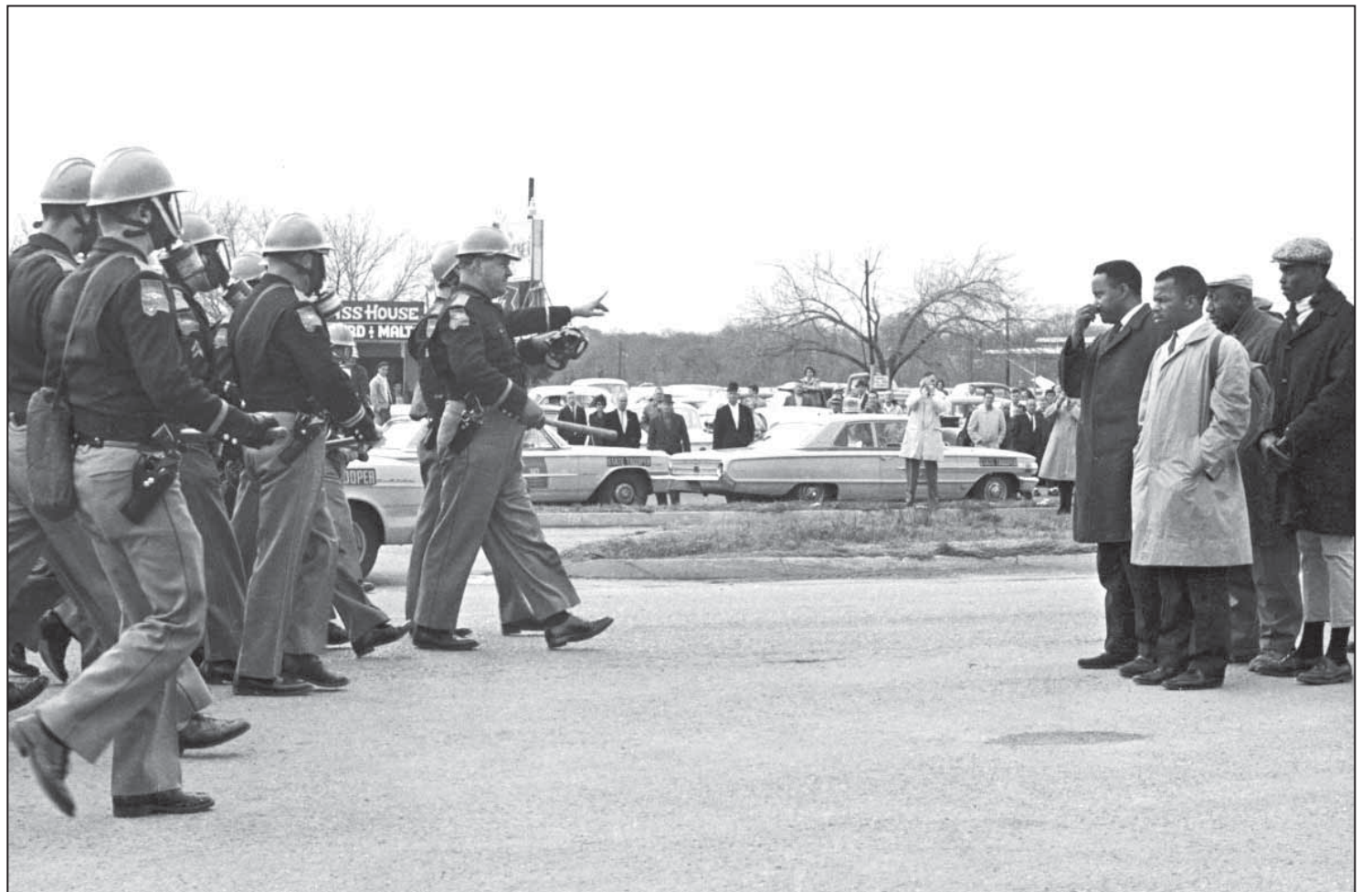
We may now get less rhetoric about Russia in Chechnya and the attempts of the Assad government in Syria to defend its secular socialist constitution but I will not be holding my breath on that one.

Also no surprises when Anthony Blair QC vociferously supports his fellow Tory; after all, politicians who are responsible for wars in which such atrocities occur are not as unaccountable as they once were.

John Berwick
Sydney

Culture & Life

by Bill Meyer



I Am Not Your Negro

TORONTO: One of the most artistic and daring political statements at this year's Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), was the world premiere of Haitian-born Raoul Peck's *I Am Not Your Negro* based on James Baldwin's unfinished book *Remember This House*. Not surprisingly, the film won the People's Choice Documentary Award for its “radical narration about race in America today.”

Peck has created one of the most progressive filmographies in cinema history. He actually received privileged access to the Baldwin archives because the family knew of his outstanding works on the Congo leader Patrice Lumumba, specifically the 1990 political thriller *Lumumba: Death of Prophet* and the 2000 award-winning drama on the same subject, *Lumumba*. They trusted in his ability to accurately represent Baldwin's life and writings.

The filmmaker took 10 years to bring this masterpiece to the screen, after being rejected by every American studio he approached. Public agencies said, “This is public money so you have to present both sides!” Thus his ability to produce this film through his own successful company and a supportive French TV station ARTE allowed him to make it exactly as

he wanted, with no censorship and no one telling him to rush the film or mellow the message.

Peck “didn't want to use the traditional civil rights archives.” He chose to avoid the talking-heads format and picked Samuel L Jackson to embody the spirit of Baldwin in the potent narration. The film's powerful structure utilising rare videos, photos and personal writings of Baldwin, at the same time aligning them with contemporary issues of police brutality and race relations, creates a mesmerising awareness of continuity in the struggle for civil rights.

Baldwin made a deep impact on the young impressionable Haitian filmmaker. Peck remembers back in the 1960s when mostly white Americans were honoured in pictures on walls, and that “it was Baldwin who first helped me see through this myth of American heroes.” He felt that Baldwin had been forgotten or overlooked, while James Meredith, Medgar Evers, the Black Panthers, Huey Newton, Malcolm X and other Black leaders were either killed off, imprisoned, exiled or bought out. There were rare exceptions on commercial TV – once when Baldwin talked on the *Dick Cavett Show* for an hour uncensored.

Baldwin, although a literary giant and a close friend of many leading activists, rarely

appeared at events and mass rallies, and declined membership in parties or groups such as the NAACP, Panthers, SNCC, etc. And although he was homosexual, he rarely focused on the issue of gay rights, which would have been even more isolating in those decades. Rightfully, this film brings to life Baldwin's poetry and passion for justice, and reasserts his importance in the field where art intersects activism.

Addressing the enthusiastic audience in the Q&A, director Peck said, “I hope this film will help rephrase what is called the race conversation, which deep down is a class conversation.” Although class wasn't developed as much as race in this film, not coincidentally, Peck is now in post-production on a drama about the young Karl Marx – a major historical figure who has likely never been a subject in America cinema. All of Peck's previous films are imbued with a deep awareness in the class struggle.

The director was a special guest at a TIFF Talk entitled “Race and History” where he covered many of the points mentioned here about taking control of your own artistic project. He defended the idea that an artist has a point of view and shouldn't be forced to compromise his political message, whether it's acceptable or

not. Near the end of the conversation I was able to ask him a question about how difficult it is to market films on race and class. He responded, “I come from a generation that was more political and where the film content was more important ... I tried to keep the content but provide a great movie ... All my films are political but I make sure I tell a story, that it's art and poetry and that the audience will enjoy it.”

Peck confessed that he's privileged having his own company and that his films don't always have to make money. “It's about financing your movie, not making a profit ... It's difficult to have those two sides in your head, because you know that having to make a profit means you often have to compromise ... Once I have people trust me with their money, I am obliged to give them a great film – I'm not obliged to give them profit.”

And he gave them a great film! *I Am Not Your Negro* was recently purchased for North American distribution by Magnolia Pictures, which praised Peck for crafting a “profound and indelible statement that couldn't be more timely or powerful.” We're eagerly awaiting his new biopic on Karl Marx!

People's World ✪

Film review by Bill Myer

The Birth of a Nation

TORONTO: This is not to be confused with the other film of the same title, a 1915 silent film by director DW Griffith, which portrays the Ku Klux Klan as saviours who defend the antebellum system of slavery in the South and post-war Jim Crow. This new cinematic masterpiece tells the story from the victims' point of view.

Never has a film captured the profound history of American slave rebellions as powerfully and artistically as Nate Parker's 2016 film *The Birth of a Nation*. The story of freedom fighter Nat Turner and his 1831 revolt in Virginia has taken on deeper meaning owing to the diligence and artistic skills of actor Nate Parker (*The Great Debaters*). Not only is this Parker's first directed film, but he also acted, produced and wrote the screenplay. Such an accomplishment ranks alongside pantheon directors like Orson Welles.

Parker and his cast were greeted by the audience at the Toronto International Film Festival with a deserved extended standing ovation after its premiere screening there in September. It was by a wide margin the most important and intense film at the Festival, coming at a time when America is dealing with its sordid history of slavery and current struggle against racism and police brutality.

You cannot watch this deeply moving film and not feel the humanity of the African American victims who were brutalised and held in bondage during the entire early development of the United States.

Nat Turner, until now a name usually associated with a fanatic religious preacher, has become a human being with a loving wife and family, a literate slave preacher who as a victim of violent oppression incomprehensibly gains an intense desire to risk his life to free his people from bondage.

Although his rebellion resulted in the deaths of around 60 whites, and hundreds more African Americans who were subject to hateful revenge, Parker offers that his



actions ultimately "forced the issue of slavery to the forefront of American politics which would result in the Civil War and eventual emancipation." Parker states, "For decades and probably still in many centres of the South, Turner's name shudders the soul. He's a terrorist to some, liberator to others."

Turner survived the revolt and fled, but was captured two months later, imprisoned and eventually hanged. During his time in jail, his confessions were recorded by a wealthy lawyer (and slave owner) Thomas Ruffin Gray, who represented the other slave defendants. Many challenge the accuracy and interpretation of these writings, which were also used as a basis for a 1967 fictional work by Pulitzer Prize winner William Styron.

Using the same title, *Confessions of Nat Turner*, Styron embellished the story with his writer's imagination; his approach was challenged by Turner advocates in the book *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*.

There has never been a feature film on Turner and slave rebellions of this scope, although in 2003 the revered African American director Charles Burnett produced the stylized documentary *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property*, which addresses the complex interpretations of Turner's life and actions. The high production values of *The Birth of a Nation* are the result of years of preparation by Parker and his crew. It contains the most profound use of Billie Holiday's rendition of the Lewis Allan song *Strange Fruit* in recent history,

along with a music score by Henry Jackman that enriches the story and its complex emotions.

Among the remarkably effective cast who all shared in Parker's dream of telling Turner's story, Roger Guenveur Smith should be noted. His life's work has included a road tour of a one-man play about Black Panther founder Huey Newton, another about Frederick Douglass, and he also appeared in many of Spike Lee's challenging films about race and racism.

The film has a telling scene involving a young slave who at first joined the rebellion but backed away when it looked hopeless. He went back and snitched to his master, who informed the military that eventually quelled Turner's rebellion. The young man is there to witness Turner's

hanging and a tear drops from his eye, which the director zooms into and then out to the face of a Black soldier 30 years later fighting to end slavery in the Civil War, implying the continuity of the struggle.

A constant determination in the African American community to address American injustice has resulted in one of the greatest films about race in American history. After watching this film that reached such dramatic heights, I felt like I would never have to see another film again. Nat Turner – terrorist religious fanatic or revolutionary liberator? *The Birth of a Nation* firmly sides with the latter definition and is sure to open much needed discussion on one of the most important topics in America.

People's World ✪

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POLITICS IN THE PUB

October 13

IMPROVING THE SHAMEFUL TREATMENT OF THE FIRST NATION'S PEOPLES IS VITAL TO AUSTRALIA'S WELL-BEING.

• Jason De Santolo & Paddy Gibson, Senior Researchers, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology Sydney.

October 20

SUPPRESSING FREE SPEECH, CRIMINALIZING PROTEST: PALESTINE (BDS) AND BEYOND.

• Emeritus Prof Stuart Rees, University of Sydney;
• Dr Peter Slezak, University of NSW.

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A dangerous proposal

Is the United States on the verge of enshrining "humanitarian intervention" as a bedrock principle of foreign policy? asks **Conn Hallinan**.

While the mainstream media focuses on losers and winners in the race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, a largely unreported debate is going on over the future course of US diplomacy. Its outcome will have a profound effect on how Washington projects power – both diplomatic and military – in the coming decade.

The issues at stake are hardly abstract. The United States is currently engaged in active wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia. It has deployed troops on the Russian border, played push-and-shove with China in Asia, and greatly extended its military footprint on the African continent. It would not be an exaggeration to say – as former US Secretary of Defence William Perry has recently done – that the world is a more dangerous place today than it was during darkest times of the Cold War.

Tracking the outlines of this argument is not easy, in part because the participants are not always forthcoming about what they are proposing, in part because the media oversimplifies the issues.

In its broadest framework, "realists" represented by former National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, Harvard's Steven Walt, and University of Chicago's John Mearsheimer have squared off against "humanitarian interventionists" like current UN Ambassador Samantha Power. Given that Power is a key advisor to the Obama administration on foreign policy and is likely to play a similar role if Clinton is elected, her views carry weight.

In a recent essay in the *New York Review of Books*, Power asks, "How is a statesman to advance his nation's interests?" She begins by hijacking the realist position that US diplomacy must reflect "national interests," arguing that they are indistinguishable from "moral values." What happens to people in other countries, she argues, is in our "national security."

Power – along with Clinton and former President Bill Clinton – has long been an advocate for "humanitarian intervention", behind which the United States intervened in the Yugoslav civil war. Humanitarian intervention has

since been formalised into "Responsibility to Protect," or R2P, and was the rationale for overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. Hillary Clinton has argued forcibly for applying R2P to Syria by setting up "no-fly zones" to block Syrian and Russian planes from bombing insurgents and the civilians under their control.

But Power is proposing something different than humanitarian intervention. She is suggesting that the United States elevate R2P to the level of national security, which sounds uncomfortably like an argument for US intervention in any place that doesn't emulate the American system.

Facing off the Kremlin

Most telling is her choice of examples: Russia, China, and Venezuela, all currently in Washington's crosshairs. Of these, she spends the most time on Moscow and the current crisis in Ukraine, where she accuses the Russians of weakening a "core independent norm" by supporting insurgents in Ukraine's east, "lopping off part of a neighbouring country" by seizing Crimea, and suppressing the news of Russian intervention from its own people. Were the Russian media to report on the situation in Ukraine, she writes, "many Russians might well oppose" the conflict.

Power presents no evidence for this statement because none exists. Regardless of what one thinks of Moscow's role in Ukraine, the vast majority of Russians are not only aware of it, but overwhelmingly support President Vladimir Putin on the issue. From the average Russian's point of view, NATO has been steadily marching eastwards since the end of the Yugoslav war. It is Americans who are deployed in the Baltic and Poland, not Russians gathering on the borders of Canada and Mexico. Russians are a tad sensitive about their borders given the tens of millions they lost in World War II, something of which Power seems oblivious.

What Power seems incapable of doing is seeing how countries like China and Russia view the United States. That point of view is an essential skill in international diplomacy, because it is how one determines whether or not an opponent poses a serious threat to one's national security.

Is Russia – as President Obama recently



told the UN – really "attempting to recover lost glory through force," or is Moscow reacting to what it perceives as a threat to its own national security? Russia did not intervene in Ukraine until the United States and its NATO allies supported the coup against the President Viktor Yanukovich government and ditched an agreement that had been hammered out among the European Union, Moscow, and the United States to peacefully resolve the crisis.

Power argues that there was no coup, but US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and the US Ambassador to the Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt were caught on tape talking about how to "mid-wife" the takeover and choose the person they wanted to put in place.

As for "lopping off" Crimea, Power had no problem with the United States and NATO "lopping off" Kosovo from Serbia in the Yugoslav War. In both cases local populations – in Crimea by 96 percent – supported the takeovers.

Understanding how other countries see the world does not mean one need agree with them, but there is nothing in Moscow's actions that suggests that it is trying to re-establish an "empire," as Obama characterised its behaviour in his recent speech to the UN. When Hillary Clinton compared Putin to Hitler, she equated Russia with Nazi Germany, which certainly posed an existential threat to our national security. But does anyone think that comparison is valid? In 1939, Germany was the most powerful country in Europe with a massive military. Russia has the 11th largest economy in the world, trailing even France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Brazil. Turkey has a larger army.

Power's view of what is good for the Russian people is a case in point. Although one can hardly admire the oligarchy that dominates Russia – and the last election would seem to indicate considerable voter apathy in the country's urban centres – the "liberals" Power is so enamoured with were the people who instituted the economic "shock therapy" in the 1990s that impoverished tens of millions of people and brought about a calamitous drop in life

expectancy. That track record is unlikely to get one elected. In any case, Americans are hardly in a position these days to lecture people about the role oligarchic wealth plays in manipulating elections.

The view from China

The Chinese are intolerant of internal dissent, but Washington's argument with Beijing is over sea lanes, not voter rolls.

China is acting the bully in the South China Sea, but it was President Bill Clinton who sparked the current tensions in the region when he deployed two aircraft carrier battle groups in the Taiwan Straits in 1995-96 during a tense standoff between Taipei and the mainland. China did not then – and does not now – have the capacity to invade Taiwan, so Beijing's threats were not real. But the aircraft carriers were very real, and they humiliated – and scared – China in its home waters. That incident directly led to China's current accelerated military spending and its heavy-handed actions in the South China Sea.

Again, there is a long history here. Starting with the Opium Wars of 1839 and 1860, followed by the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 and Tokyo's invasion of China in World War II, the Chinese have been invaded and humiliated time and again. Beijing believes that the Obama administration designed its "Asia pivot" as to surround China with US allies.

While that might be an over simplification – the Pacific has long been America's largest market – it is a perfectly rational conclusion to draw from the deployment of US Marines to Australia, the positioning of nuclear-capable forces in Guam and Wake, the siting of anti-ballistic missile systems in South Korea and Japan, and the attempt to tighten military ties with India, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

"If you are a strategic thinker in China, you don't have to be a paranoid conspiracy theorist to think that the US is trying to bandwagon Asia against China," says Simon Tay, chair of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs. *Information Clearing House* 🇺🇸

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