



# A government in disarray

Peter Mac

The Liberal/National Coalition is staggering after losing state government elections in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland and a coup in the NT which was trumped by the Chief Minister who then made the coup leader his deputy. This week a seething battle for power within the federal government came to a climax resulted in Prime Minister Tony Abbott narrowly avoiding a leadership spill. A motion to spill the Liberal Party Leadership was defeated on Monday February 9, by 61 to 39 votes.

Abbott's ruthless economic agenda items have included (among other things) imposition of a GP co-payment, deregulation of university fees, abolition of social security entitlements for young people, the downgrading of pensioner indexation and the raising of the pension eligibility age and an attack on organised labour.

The combination of that agenda with Abbott's slapstick diplomatic blunders (including the reintroduction of knighthoods and the proposal to knight Prince Phillip) left the Coalition with virtually no hope of winning next year's federal election under his leadership.

The jostling for power between Abbott and the Minister for Communications Malcolm Turnbull has been conducted with a bitter determination that exceeded personal rivalry and reflects a massive struggle between opposing blocs of capital.

Abbott is absolutely committed to preserving the dominance of the fossil fuel industries, particularly those involving coal and gas extraction, and his policies have inhibited the development of renewable energy production.

The coal industry wants coal production to increase and, if that proves impossible, to slow the rate of transition to renewable energy production.

And Abbott is in lock step with their interests. Despite the global threat posed to the environment and human life by the mining, export and combustion of coal and gas, he has claimed publicly that these industries must grow without restraint by government.

On the other hand Turnbull, who has never been offered a ministerial portfolio involving energy policy by the Abbott regime, has lent a sympathetic ear to the renewable energy industries and their backers, which include some of the banks and insurance corporations.

His statements indicate he accepts that human industry is a major contributor to climate change, that sooner or later the demand for fossil fuels will lessen, and that Australia has a great opportunity to benefit from development of renewable energy technology.

But would he be willing or able to act on those convictions as Liberal leader?

## Trouble, state and federal

In NSW, the Baird regime is in difficulty because of a series of disclosures about secret police investigations which appear to have been aimed at cutting off the flow of information about police corruption and inappropriate behaviour by top police officials.

The government is also facing growing concern over (among other things) the piecemeal privatisation of public transport and the massive, grossly invasive WestConnex motorway. Also the plan to sell off government assets, including half the state's "poles and wires" electricity infrastructure, (the proceeds of which would be used to build a new harbour tunnel for a privately-run railway), and most recently the proposal to issue compulsory purchase orders to people who refuse to sell their homes to big property developers.

The federal government's popularity fell two percentage points after the Prince Phillip knighthood fiasco, and if Queensland's two-party swing of 13.5 percent was repeated in NSW at the next elections Labor would be only one seat short of taking office.

Baird refused to answer questions about his willingness to have Abbott appear at his side during the Coalition's campaign for next month's NSW elections, and last week Jeff Kennett, former Liberal premier of Victoria, declared bluntly that Abbott should be dumped immediately, to minimise electoral damage to the Coalition in NSW.

In Queensland the Coalition's reputation has taken another battering after Tony Fitzgerald, (who conducted the inquiry that helped shatter Bjelke-Petersen's vice-like grip on power), issued a scathing report on the conduct of the recently-deceased Newman government.

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## Unstable system, unstable government

The bourgeois democratic system is always vulnerable because it is inherently unstable, a reflection of the system from which it comes. Even in the context of the relative short period from the global financial crisis in 2008, it has become evident that capitalism's characteristic cycle of periods of economic boom followed by a disastrous (for working people) bust has itself been severely curtailed – where is the boom?

This in turn is reflected in the crisis in the political system itself, in Australia and in governments globally that are attempting unsuccessfully to manage the crisis on behalf of the capitalist ruling powers. Also in the ongoing and escalating conflicts being inflamed around the world.

The whole point of the supposed superiority of capitalism is that it claims to provide a system for the natural and unencumbered functioning of private property ownership. Since that system has been "discovered" – a truth found, like gravity – the less government, the better. Indeed, with such a system, government itself is but a necessary evil.

Last week in the SMH writing on the leadership challenge, former Howard government minister Amanda Vanstone revealed the nature of the parliamentary

process based on individualism and personal ambition. She said she approached the then Senate leader Fred Chaney about the behaviour of some backbenchers. Chaney told her that every MP is an important person.

Not because they had been democratically elected to represent the interests of the people, but, "Because it is only through them that you will ever get the chance to be a minister".

The fact is, as Rob Gowland noted in his *Culture and Life* column last week, this federal government is carrying out the greatest attack on living and working conditions in the country's history, an attack occasioned by the crisis confronting capitalism across the developed world.

Working conditions and wages won over 200 years of often bloody struggle are being stripped away at the whim of capitalist governments facing economic "difficulties" for which they have no solutions.

These current ructions will continue: this was fundamentally not about leadership but was a small eruption in the increasingly dysfunctional process that is held up as a beacon of democracy.

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## Guardian

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## Tax – a one-sided “conversation”

Federal government and big business figures are telling the Australian public that it must be ready for a “mature, national conversation” about taxation. “Reform” is the word being bandied around again to describe a very reactionary agenda. Reviews, inquiries and columns in the corporate media are full of the tax issue and they hold to the monopoly line – expand the GST (or lift its rate) and reduce company tax. This Robin Hood in reverse approach is going to take some selling. Embattled PM Tony Abbott says it won’t happen before the next election but that’s less than 18 months away and the softening up has started.

Some, like the Australia Institute, see potential for good in the “debate”. It suggests putting the GST on private education fees and private health insurance. Federal Trade Minister Andrew Robb says it could be whacked on banking fees and financial commissions. Backbench Liberal MP Dean Tehan and Liberal National Senator Ian Macdonald want all the exemptions lifted, including the one for fresh food. After all, the Howard government went to the polls in 1998 with a “tax-it-all” GST policy and won. And who would notice the small increase in food and other prices? That is how the argument goes.

Tehan, Macdonald and other GST maximalists pretend Australian workers and other less privileged sections of the community have embraced the tax. They haven’t. Howard was returned in 1998 despite the policy; memories of Labor’s own privatising, deregulating onslaught were too fresh with voters at the time. The policy was introduced in 2000 after the Democrats agreed to pass it in the Senate. The condition was that fresh food would be exempt. The sell-out was the beginning of the end for the Democrats and, even today, the question of altering the GST is raised with extreme caution by more senior supporters of indirect taxation.

Taxes like the GST used to be unthinkable. The suggestion that the extremely wealthy and the poor should pay the same rate of tax would have been scoffed at in the early stages of the establishment of the “welfare state”. Of course the wealthy should contribute more to maintain the government’s commitments! Of course the higher a person’s income, the higher the marginal rates of tax should go. And of course big business should pay higher rates of tax than the workers they employ! Workers were never persuaded to ditch those commonly expressed ideas but they were effectively silenced in subsequent “conversations” leading up to the current campaign.

The assumptions for the “debate” are being set by big business leaders and the likes of Joe Hockey. Some of the Treasurer’s contributions have backfired. Suggestions that middle income Australians currently work six months of the year to pay their taxes and that, in the relatively near future, the elderly will have to be supported until they are 150 years old got the reception they deserved. But the consensus being cooked is that too much money is being spent by governments and too little is coming in and that it is the workers who need to get ready for a “hair cut”.

The idea that big business should pay more tax is intolerable to those pushing the agenda. The carbon and mining taxes – token levies by design – have gone after long, dishonest and hysterical campaigns. The Tax Justice Network has been attacked for mentioning that, of Australia’s largest 200 publicly-listed companies, 29 percent had an effective tax rate of 10 percent or less and 14 percent had an effective tax rate of 0 percent. At the same time, the Australian Taxation Office is trialling a scheme whereby Australia’s largest companies will hire their own auditors to oversee tax compliance. The “Big Four” firms – PwC, Deloitte, Ernst & Young and KPMG – who advise on how to avoid tax, will be charged with keeping other big companies honest.

Workers and other exploited Australians are being taken for idiots in the current “debate”. They know the score but they will have to press home their point of view or suffer another blow to their living standards.

## PRESS FUND

Concerning the new Victorian Labor government’s commitment to scrap Melbourne’s East-West Link motorway, Tony Abbott observed: “It’s ... what happens when, in a fit of absent-mindedness, people elect a Labor government”. So the millions of voters in Victoria, and by implication Queensland as well, dumped the Liberal regimes because of a mass mental failure! Abbott’s blunders just keep on keeping on. In contrast, the *Guardian* keeps going because of the devotion of its staff and the enthusiasm of its readers for our coverage of news and events. However, we really need your help by way of Press Fund contributions, which help us meet our production costs, so if you like our stories please send us something for the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week’s supporters, as follows:

KM \$20, Mark Mannion \$5, “Round Figure” \$15, Eddie Seymour \$50.

This week’s total: \$90 Progressive total: \$1,045

## IOM prey on Manus asylum seekers

Officers from the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) visited jailed asylum seekers on Manus on February 4 looking for asylum seekers to agree to voluntarily return to their home countries.

IOM was the manager of the Manus Island detention centre under the Howard government. IOM have no protection mandate but are a mercenary outfit paid by the Australian government to arrange returns of asylum seekers. IOM contracts have sometimes included bounties paid for each asylum seeker returned.

The asylum seekers have been held in appalling conditions in the Lorengau jail since being shanghaied by Wilson security guards during the Manus mass hunger strike.

“To take advantage of asylum seekers who have been cruelly abused and are now unlawfully held in jail, is just despicable,” said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

“Many of those in jail have also been denied urgently needed medical assistance. Lorengau hospital is refusing to provide treatment saying that asylum seekers should be looked

after by IHMS (International Health and Medical Services). Some of those in jail are also refugees entitled to international protection.

“It says everything about the priorities of the Immigration Department and the PNG government, that IOM gets access to the jail, but there are no lawyers, nor medical assistance.

“There is an urgent need for the asylum seekers to get medical attention. There is an urgent need for human rights observers on Manus Island – at the detention centre and in the jail. IOM and the Immigration Department are systematically violating the rights of asylum seekers.”

Meanwhile, a meeting between the 15 Darwin hunger strikers and the Northern Regional Manager, Robin Gray on February 5 ended in dismay.

A meeting with the regional manager has been one of the demands since the hunger strike began 20 days ago.

But according to reports, Gray dismissed the hunger strikers’ concerns in minutes, refusing to take questions or to have any discussion. “You asked to meet me. We won’t listen to you while you are protesting.

If you have complaints or requests they can be sent to the Ombudsman,” said Gray before leaving.

After Gray left, another manager at the centre told the 15 hunger strikers, “We won’t do anything for you while you are on hunger strike. We don’t care if you die.”

Asylum seekers at the meeting said they wanted to ask Gray about possible appeals and why some people in the community were able to have their cases reviewed. But, they said, “We got nothing. One minute; no questions.”

One of the asylum seekers remains on 24-hour suicide watch after slashing his wrists two days ago.

“The contemptuous attitude of the Immigration Department is making a difficult situation worse,” said Ian Rintoul.

“Those who have been indefinitely detained are being mistreated in the hope that the Immigration Department can force other asylum seekers to voluntarily return. It is a form of torture that has already put the life of another hunger striker at immediate risk.” ☘

## Abbott gov’t must fully fund students with disability

Reports last week revealing huge differences in government funding for students with disability at different schools show the need for the implementation of full Gonski funding to meet the urgent need in disability education.

AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe said students with disability were hugely under-funded in Australia and the inequities in funding revealed today with some wealthy schools receiving over \$40,000 for every student with disability were further evidence of a failing system.

“These figures clearly show that if the Abbott government does not commit to the full six year funding of the Gonski education reforms, with their goal of bringing all schools to a minimum resource standard, we will be left with an even more inequitable system than we have now,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“It is not acceptable that schools are given different amounts for educating students with disabilities;

funding should be on the basis of need, as recommended by the Gonski Review.

“It adds to the concern we already have that at least 100,000 students with disability are not receiving funding support because the Abbott government failed to implement its promise to fully fund disability through a needs based loading in 2015.

“The current system vastly under-funds the real needs of students with disability, leaving them with a school system that does not let them reach their potential. We do not know the full number of students with disability who are not getting funding, or those who are getting less than required to meet their needs.”

These students have the right to an education that lets them reach their potential. “Failing to invest in educating students with disability will lead to massive social costs in the future.

“We have had enough of

excuses and inaction from the Abbott government and their inability to fix this crucial issue.” The Abbott government made an election promise in 2013 to increase the “disability loading” paid to schools from 2015. However no money was put aside in last year’s budget and a meeting of State and Territory Education Ministers in November last year confirmed this will not happen until 2016 at the earliest.

“We will know on budget night this year whether the Abbott government is serious about supporting students with disability or whether it will disappoint them again.

“States and Territories also need to take responsibility and put pressure on the Abbott government to honour the full six years of Gonski reforms, including a disability loading that reflects the actual cost of educating students with disability.” ☘

## A government in disarray

Continued from page 1

The report analysed the Liberal National Party’s now icy relationship with the legal profession, which resulted in part from the Newman government’s nomination of two of its cronies who were legal novices for the key positions of Chief Magistrate and adviser to the Attorney-General, as well as its attempt to overrule judicial decisions.

The party also refused to endorse a statement which supports the provision of prompt and accurate information about government actions, and which opposes party influence in public appointments or the provision

of special access to governments, or influence on governments by individuals or corporations. All this accompanied by widespread cuts to the public service and the privatisation of public assets.

At the federal level, when in opposition five years ago the Liberals split over Turnbull’s proposal to introduce a carbon trading scheme, and at that stage Abbott only beat Turnbull by one vote in a battle for the party leadership.

Moreover, the party’s pro-coal faction (“the fossils”) is still very strong. According to a Fairfax report former Liberal frontbencher Arthur

Sinodinos suggested he would only support Turnbull if he promised not to reintroduce a carbon tax after gaining the top job.

And in any case, although carbon trading is better than Abbott’s totally ineffective “direct action” plan, it has generally proved to be appallingly unreliable as a means of mitigating climate change.

To achieve a just and productive national life the Australian people will have to look not just beyond the Coalition but indeed beyond the two-party system. ☘



# The capital city for big developers

Peter Mac

The insatiable greed of big developers is nowhere more blatantly evident now than in Sydney, and the Baird government backs them all the way. In conjunction with its support for private vehicles as the primary means of transport, and its plan for piecemeal replacement and privatisation of Sydney's rail network, the government plans to dictate land use zoning and override objections from local councils.

Last year the government announced that hundreds of homes in Haberfield, Petersham and St Peters, three historic inner Sydney suburbs, were to be compulsorily acquired and demolished to facilitate construction of the portals (entry and exit points) for the massive, highly controversial WestConnex motorway.

The construction would require the complete demolition of beautiful streets of 19th and early 20th-century houses. It would also necessitate the partial or entire destruction of two 19th-century parks at Ashfield and Petersham (where Don Bradman made his first century in first class cricket), and an inroad into Sydney Park, created over the last 40 years at huge public expense.

The proposal was accompanied by a state government announcement that in other streets adjacent to the Petersham portal it would change the current zoning to allow for demolition of the old dwellings and construction of 10 to 25 storey apartment blocks. Similar proposals were made for other areas.

The government has also announced that under the advice of its redevelopment agency Urban Growth (predominantly staffed by former employees of development corporations) it would permit construction of an extra 60,000 apartments on Parramatta Road in the inner city, replacing the old hotels, shops and dwellings that currently line this section of the historic highway.

The proposed takeover of local government decision-making would mean that all heritage protection would vanish and home owners

could find themselves living in an area zoned for heavy industry, or surrounded and overshadowed by apartment monoliths.

## The tip of the iceberg

Following the electoral defeat of the Victorian Liberal government which had supported construction of a new motorway, the Baird government suddenly decided to alter the route and construction of the WestConnex Motorway so it would no longer pass through Petersham.

That relieved the immediate pressure on north Petersham as far as the motorway portal was concerned, but the government could change its mind again, and rezoning inner city suburbs to permit construction of high rise apartments is still government policy.

Meanwhile, Haberfield and St Peters residents still face the loss of their homes, and Ashfield Park and Sydney Park would still suffer massive encroachment.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg because the government's interlocked relationship with the developers threatens the entire city.

The government is evicting historic family groups from Millers Point in order to hasten the sale of their homes to the highest bidders, with no exemptions for the elderly.

It plans to sell off the historic Eveleigh railway workshops, which contain the last still-functioning



Protest against WestConnex motorway in Sydney earlier this year. (Photo: John Appleya)

industrial areas west of the Harbour Bridge.

## A nightmare vision

The government is arguing that half a million people will want to move to Sydney in the next 20 years, that inner city residents must make way for them and that resistance is both selfish and futile.

But there will always be a

redeveloped not just for 20 years but beyond.

In this scenario the existing buildings would be pulled down and replaced with ever-taller structures, until, presumably, the limits of human engineering were reached, most of the inner city was covered with massive Dubai-style skyscrapers, and the city's wonderful character was destroyed.

of Sydney's last undeveloped headland, between Malabar and Maroubra beaches.

The report said that selling the site would generate "a significant return for the government" and private investments of "up to \$1 billion" during the construction phase.

It noted disdainfully that converting the land into a National Park would do "little to improve the economic capital of the site" and provide "little opportunity for the private sector to contribute".

But Federal Minister for the Environment, Greg Hunt, frightened by plummeting opinion polls, global criticism of its environment policies, and the results of the Victorian elections, dumped the proposal. He gushed "I am passionate about ensuring this magnificent headland is retained in public hands forever".

The Baird government's intentions are also being challenged by local councils and dozens of community organisations.

In Newcastle the government's hell-for-leather plan to discard the city's rail line and open up the shoreline for development has been challenged in court by local residents.

Sydney City Council has announced it will oppose proposals for major extensions or alterations to the historic Miller Point houses by their new owners.

And Sydneysiders have watched with great interest the opposition of Melbourne residents to construction of another mammoth motorway, in a campaign which made a major contribution to defeat of the Liberal government.

The clear lesson from that struggle is that if you want to beat the greedy developers you have to dump the governments that serve their interests. ☺

## The construction would require the complete demolition of beautiful streets of 19th and early 20th-century houses.

major blacksmithing workshop in Australia.

Road construction and residential redevelopment is threatening thousands of beautiful heritage properties in Sydney's North Shore suburbs and many other areas, and the government is planning vast redevelopment of the picturesque old maritime

demand for accommodation in Sydney, and developer greed knows no time limits. Carrying the government's argument to its logical conclusion, Sydney suburbs, particularly the inner city which has ready access to services, transport, work, recreation and of course the beautiful harbour and beaches, should be

It's an absurd, nightmare vision that should have no place in Australian town planning.

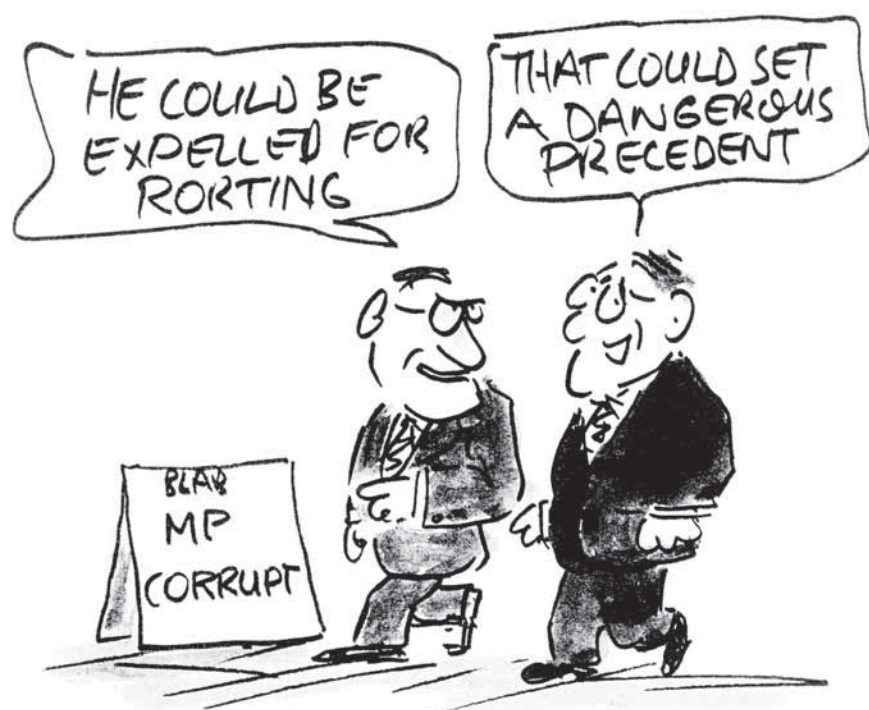
Other cities do the opposite. London, for example, places severe limits on redevelopment, takes vigorous and determined action to preserve its historic buildings, and severely restricts the number of private vehicles that can enter or even approach the inner city.

Its transport needs are largely met by trains and buses rather than private vehicles, and its growth is largely accommodated by redevelopment in former industrial sites and outlying low-density suburbs, and by the construction of new suburbs and towns.

## Challenges and backdowns

Last week the federal government distanced itself from an outrageous report it had commissioned concerning sale and development

## Pete's Corner



Something to say?  
Write to the Editor.

email: [tpearson@cpa.org.au](mailto:tpearson@cpa.org.au)



# "Stop trying to control our people"

Rudi Maxwell

**Northern Territorian of the Year Rosie Kunoth-Monks, an Arrernte-Alyawarra woman, told the *Koori Mail* that governments must stop attempting to control First Nations people.**

"We are to take our place within a modern-day Australian context, whilst remaining intact with our culture and our language," she said. "We want to see early childhood learning in First Nations culture."

"We are not about to let our culture die. We have survived this long against brutal and psychological assaults like the NT intervention and we are up and running and we are going to fight."

"On Invasion Day I would like to say that any intelligent government would have thought for a certain section of the community of Australia, the First People, January 26 and Captain Cook's arrival is not a day we can celebrate together, a day we can all celebrate this great nation of ours."

Ms Kunoth-Monks is also a spokesperson for the Freedom Summit, which last week gathered in Canberra for three days of networking and peaceful talks about issues of concern for First Nations people.

"I believe there is a momentum building," she said. "I feel it, not only with First Nations

people, but also amongst our brothers and sister of different colours. It is not colour that counts, it is the policies of this government that are repressive and the fact they feel they are in control of a section of humanity in this land.

"This land belongs to us, we more than share it."

"And we have also gained awareness of some of the anti-human rights policies of this government and bureaucracies – that is to cease."

The finalist of the 2015 Australian of the Year award said she would like to see a move towards eliminating poverty and disparagement of First Nations people by all governments.

"Last year was not a good one for First Nations people," Ms Kunoth-Monks said. "It's no good mincing words, the truth is that through propaganda our people have been made to look sub-human, when the most noble people who show absolute control over themselves are First Nations people."

Ms Kunoth-Monks also paid tribute to the Australian of the Year winner Rosie Batty, saying she was a strong woman who deserves the award.

As well as the gathering in Canberra, protests were staged around the nation on January 26, including marches in Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart.

*Koori Mail* ✪



Northern Territorian of the Year Rosie Kunoth-Monks (Photo: Steve Pearce: IAD Press)

## Coal mine site plan concerns

Keira Jenkins

**Two significant grinding groove sites\* will be "cut up like a jigsaw puzzle" if Chinese mining company Shenhua's Watermark coal project, near Breeza State Forest, in Western NSW is approved, it has been claimed.**

A group of 21 Gomeri Elders and community members met with the NSW Planning and Assessment Commission (PAC) on January 12 to visit the sites.

"There are over 100 grinding grooves up there," Steve Talbot, a member of the Gomeri community, said. "They're important to us. We want something that we can take our kids to see so they can learn about their culture 'in situ'."

Although Shenhua have insisted its operations will not effect the environment and the company intends to put the grinding grooves back after they are finished with the site in 17 years, Mr Talbot said this is not enough.

"Once Shenhua move it, it'll pretty much be destroyed anyway," he said. "Shenhua say they won't impact the land, but how can they know when they haven't assessed it properly?"

Elders fear Shenhua are using "obstructive tactics" to stop the community's concerns from being brought to the PAC. "This is a project and they've only assessed about 1.3 percent of the area, which it hasn't properly been assessed," Mr Talbot said.

"Their most recent Environmental Impact Report wasn't endorsed by us. In fact, we haven't even seen it to sign off on it. We haven't had a meeting with Shenhua since 2012. I feel like they're

just trying to stall the time they have to deal with the community."

The Elders claim Shenhua is interfering in the lore and customs of the Gomeri traditional owners by restricting the numbers and representation of the Gomeri people allowed to discuss concerns and cultural values with the PAC.

### Disappointed

Mr Talbot said he is also disappointed in the way the PAC has handled the process of approving the mine.

"When we gave them the tour of the grinding groove site the PAC didn't meet with the community like they were supposed to, and they didn't tell us beforehand that they couldn't make it," he said.

The Elders have promised to challenge Shenhua and its proposed mine as they believe its approval would mean the destruction of their traditional homelands.

"The community hasn't been given the chance to give the PAC all the information they need," he said. "I don't think the PAC are making an informed decision."

\* **Aboriginal grinding groove sites are rock depressions of various sizes that were formed by the repeated movement of hard stone artefacts against a softer stone surface. This was done to either sharpen stone hatchet heads, stone wedges, hand held "axes" and wooden artefacts with fire hardened points (such as digging sticks) or to grind secondary material (such as grass seeds). Grinding grooves were almost always located close to a source of water which was used to assist the grinding process [Ed].**

*Koori Mail* ✪

## BHP's slap in the face for Queensland workers

**Queensland workers will be banned from a Central Queensland coal mine BHP shut three years ago as the mining giant seeks to import cheaper workers from interstate, the miners union says.**

The Mining Division of the CFMEU has obtained an internal briefing paper prepared by a mining industry contractor outlining the terms under which the BHP Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) is seeking to operate the Norwich Park mine near Dysart.

It states: "BMA has strongly indicated that success of the project will be dependent on being able to operate the mine efficiently while using labour that is paid significantly less than is currently the case at surrounding existing operations. A strong desire has been expressed that labour should be sourced from lower paying areas outside of Queensland (Adelaide, Melbourne for example). They are likely to try and leverage off the labour model used at Norwich Park to generate lower cost labour models at their other operations."

The paper suggests BHP intends to restart production in the mine in

July, three years after it shut in May 2012, and use the lower wages at Norwich Park to drive wage-cutting at other operations.

CFMEU Mining and Energy general secretary Andrew Vickers said it was clear BHP had closed Norwich Park as part of an industrial strategy to slash wages and deny jobs to local Queensland workers.

"Four hundred skilled Queensland mineworkers were put out of work when BHP closed Norwich Park in 2012," said Mr Vickers.

"Now it appears that Queenslanders from Dysart or Moranbah or Mackay will have to relocate to Melbourne or Adelaide if they want to work at a local coal mine."

"It's no coincidence that BHP is now planning to reopen the mine exactly three years after closing it, to avoid legal requirements to hire back the local workers it ruthlessly dumped."

"This was always their plan. BHP is playing Queenslanders for fools – denying them the jobs and royalties they deserve from Queensland resources."

"Labor and the LNP must condemn this ruthless behaviour from

BHP and demand the company stop discriminating against locals being employed in coal mines on their doorsteps."

BHP's Queensland coal mines are profitable and efficient operations and can afford to provide good, permanent jobs to local workers, said Mr Vickers.

### Background:

- There were 340 workers employed at Norwich Park when the mine closed in May 2012
- The workers were given just days to decide their futures
- The mine had been operating for 32 years
- There was a strong market and good coal reserves at Norwich Park
- The mine was operating when coal was \$70/tonne and when it closed coal was \$200/tonne
- A five-year plan for Norwich Park was leaked in May 2012 which indicated BHP would reopen with a new workforce
- The closure of Norwich Park mine was a major blow to the nearby town of Dysart. ✪

Philippines

### Workers and Peoples Unite: Fight Neoliberal Attacks on Wages & Trade-union Rights International Solidarity Affair (ISA)

April 27 - May 6

An annual gathering of workers, trade-union activists, labor rights advocates, friends and supporters of the working class from all global regions.

The 31st ISA will hold the two main activities: exposure program and forum to educate participants regarding neoliberal attacks on wages and trade-union rights.

The objective of the exposure program is to enable international delegates to witness the situation and struggles of Filipino workers and exchange experiences.

Contact: Kilusang Mayo Uno (host): [kmu.intl@gmail.com](mailto:kmu.intl@gmail.com)



# Excluding unions

## Anti-union wave coming Part 3

Anna Pha

The Productivity Commission has been commissioned by the Coalition government to carry out an assessment of Australia's workplace relations framework. Productivity Commission chairman Peter Harris described the inquiry as a "once-in-a-generation opportunity". On January 23, the Commission handed down five issues papers seeking submissions as part of the process towards presenting the government with its final recommendations by November 30, 2015.

The issues papers make dense reading, mostly raising proposals that have come from employer bodies in earlier consultations. Every so often there is a token reference to workers or their representative bodies and the need for fairness, etc. The Commission avoids making direct recommendations, but its spin and questions send strong signals as to what is on the agenda.

Part 1 and Part 2 of this series covered penalty rates, the minimum wage, the National Employment Standards, modern awards, unfair dismissal, anti-bullying provisions – all of which are up for grabs. Part 2 also raised the question of individual flexibility arrangements (IFAs) (fancy language for individual contracts) along with the application of the "better off overall test" (BOOT), raising the need for greater flexibility.

### Bypassing the system

The Commission also raises IFAs from a different angle. It notes that it is possible to make common law agreements outside of the Fair Work Act (FWA) system, although they would still have to meet certain legislated requirements such as the National Employment Standards.

"To the extent that [employers and individual employees] are able to negotiate their own employment terms and conditions, employment contracts have some potentially desirable features. They provide flexibility for the employer and employee to craft arrangements that suit them specifically, and *without third party involvement*," the Commission says. (Emphasis added)

"While the FWA prohibits various terms from inclusion in enterprise

agreements, some terms may instead be established via employment contracts. Such contracts are less constrained than IFAs made under enterprise agreements, and are not beholden to the ... flexibility clause of an enterprise agreement."

The reference to "without third party involvement" is spin for "non-union". The Commission points out that if statutory employment law narrows its reach the common law gains significance and vice versa. It asks, "*whether there should be greater (or lesser) reliance on individual arrangements, and why should this be so.*"

Reading between the lines the Commission seems to be raising a new model whereby the government shrinks the safety net and workers can try to expand it through individual, non-union individual agreements under common law.

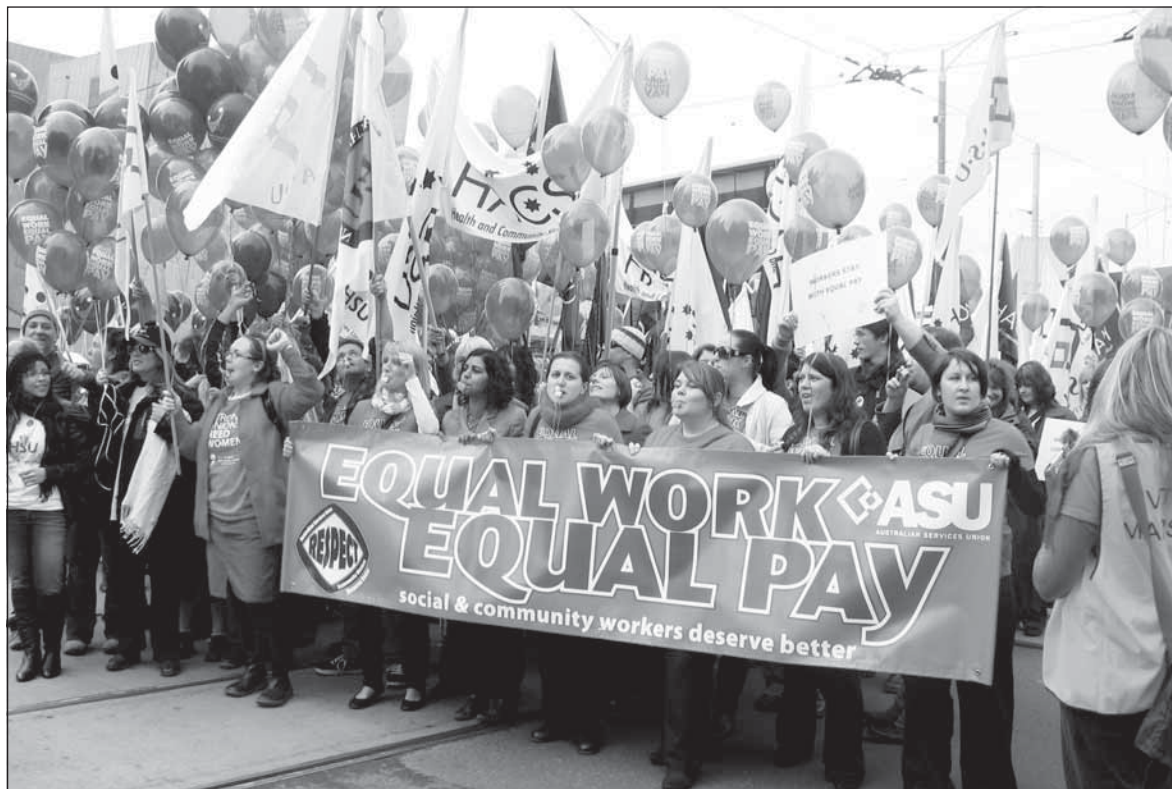
### Industrial action

One of the most important issues raised by the Commission is industrial action. Without the ability to organise and take united industrial action, workers are powerless in the face of employers' demands. Already the legal right to take industrial action has been seriously restricted in Australia. Breaches of the law can incur tens of thousands of dollars for individual unionists and hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars in fines and damages for trade unions.

"As typically measured (days lost per 1,000 workers), industrial action is now very uncommon ... In part, this is likely to reflect changes in WR arrangements, such as the emergence of enterprise bargaining processes where industrial action is only protected once the negotiation of a new agreement has commenced. Changes in industry structure, increased competitive pressures on businesses and lower rates of union membership may also have contributed to lower rates of industrial action."

Add to that the fear of hefty penalties and a trade union movement which has not only been weakened in the level of organisation but also ideologically, this situation is not surprising.

The Commission (add employers and government) are clearly not satisfied with this. It seeks suggestions



on how to expand the definition of what constitutes industrial action, what arrangements "might practically avoid industrial disputes", the "adequacy of enforcement arrangements for disputes", the role of the Fair Work Commission (arbitration powers?), and so on.

It also looks at the secondary boycotts legislation under the Competition and Consumer Act, and raises questions about the "misuse of power" and unions behaving as cartels as if unions were competing corporations.

Strangely, for a body seeking to change the framework, the Commission constantly refers to changes to the Fair Work Act and its main institutions, not their replacement with a different structure. This suggests that the government's intention is to retain the names of bodies and the Act that Labor brought in, while completely removing what few protections workers and unions have left.

Submissions are due by March 13. For more details see [www.pc.gov.au](http://www.pc.gov.au) ★



Domestic violence is a huge issue in our community. It is the most common factor contributing to homelessness among women and children. It is also the leading cause of death or injury in women under 45, with more than one woman murdered by her current or former partner every week. Women are not the only victims of domestic violence. It is believed that more than one million children are affected by domestic violence. Nowadays the police are more involved in the domestic violence issues and 40 percent of police time accounts for dealing with this issue. In money terms, the cost to the economy is \$13.6 billion per year. You would think that the government would do everything it could to deal with the situation. While mouthing support for women, it has drastically cut funding to the vital services that women so desperately need when they are in a crisis situation. More than 50 services across Australia are cutting staff, slashing programs or closing down. Homelessness services and financial counselling have been cut. Indigenous funding has been slashed. Some community organisations are still to find out whether they'll be getting any funding. The government has told providers that there will be alternative resources for women but so far nothing has been provided. The Minister for Women has a lot to answer for. And who is that person? None other than Mr Tony Abbott, the captain of the sinking ship.

Australian journalist Peter Greste was enthusiastically welcomed home. Four hundred days in an Egyptian prison is certainly not a picnic and Mr Greste's determination to fight for the release of his colleagues who are still in jail is admirable. Journalists around the world often turn into the main stories themselves. One of the stories in a daily paper after Mr Greste's homecoming spoke about how much Peter had missed during his imprisonment. One of the things that was not mentioned was the introduction of draconian counterterrorism laws introduced by the Abbott government last year. Human Rights Watch's World Report 2015 called these laws "vague" and "over-broad". The report says the laws infringe on basic rights and according to HRW Australia director Elaine Pearson "These [laws] are excessive restrictions of freedom of speech, so a whole range of peaceful conduct can be prosecuted under these laws -- something that affects the civil liberties of all Australians". It is ironic that Australia was mentioned together with Syria, Nigeria and Egypt as having a poor human rights record. While it may not be as bad as those in Egypt, the laws are already in place to jail journalists for reporting on police and spy agencies activities in the name of "national security".

# Allseas Group's

## Nazi-honouring vessel

### "must be banned"

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is demanding that Allseas Group SA, the owner of a ship that honours convicted Nazi war criminal Pieter Schelte, immediately change the vessel's name.

The *Pieter Schelte* is a Panamanian flag of convenience vessel, contracted by Shell to service its Brent platforms situated on the UK continental shelf. It was named in honour of the Allseas Group's owner's father, who was a Nazi Waffen-SS officer.

ITF president Paddy Crumlin said the vessel's name was a

disgrace and it should not be permitted to operate in UK or European waters.

"For Allseas to name its vessel after a convicted Nazi war criminal is utterly shameful," he said.

"To even countenance honouring a Waffen-SS officer just shows how twisted, arrogant and out-of-touch Allseas management is.

"It is worth noting that Allseas has a long history of seeking to drive down safety standards and working conditions for seafarers the world over. It is this group that the Australian government is taking its lead from when it comes to

driving changes to its offshore visa arrangements.

"The decision from Allseas management to honour a Nazi war criminal should serve as a potent reminder to the world of just what sort of outfit Allseas Group really is."

ITF general secretary Steve Cotton commented: "It is almost unthinkable that Allseas would have a vessel honouring a senior Nazi war criminal operating in European waters. It is nothing short of a grave insult. The *Pieter Schelte* should not be permitted to operate until it changes its name." ★



# The vanishing African lion

Steven Katsineris

As a child growing up in Australia, other than iconic Australian wildlife like Koalas, Kangaroos and Wombats, a constant presence in films, books, magazines and on TV shows were large African animals, such as elephants, rhinos and lions. Lions especially had a great impression on me and many of my generation due to the efforts of naturalist, artist and author, Joy Adamson and her husband George to save and return Elisa and other orphaned lions to the wild. This interest in African Lions grew particularly after the publication of Joy's bestselling book, *Born Free* in 1960, then the later books *Living Free* and *Forever Free*.

These were followed by two films *Born Free* and *Living Free* in 1966 and 1969 and a later documentary, *The Lions Are Free*. Lions were an exciting reality we saw, read and talked about often and their existence on the African savannah intensely stirred our youthful imaginations. These striking African wild cats had an unforgettable aura about them, which has stayed with me from childhood to adult life. Now for my own children's generation African lions are also a primary part of many nature documentaries and other wildlife shows they watch, as well as the books and publications they read.

## Endangered

For many years I've been very aware of the sad situation of the rhinos, elephants and other endangered species, through reading and what I've seen on TV documentaries. And I have signed many petitions, written letters and donated money to various wildlife organisations that are trying to halt the threats to these rare animals. I guess, like many people I'm repeatedly hearing and reading the distressing news regarding the reduction in numbers of these precious species of wildlife. And rhinos and elephants and other African animals are fixed in our collective consciousness due to the publicity about poaching, hunting and other things that threaten their survival.

Unfortunately, these well-known large animals aren't the only species at risk in the world today, many others, some less known and some very familiar wildlife are now also in danger of extinction. It came as a great shock to me recently to read for instance that African lions, the largest of the big cats are drastically declining across Africa. Not many people are aware that there are now fewer wild African lions remaining in the world than, rhinos, elephants, polar bears and orang-utans. The magnificent lion has joined other famed African species on the list of threatened animals, with a series of reports raising very grave concerns about the fate of these large cats. They are now listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), with the lions of West and Central Africa classified as endangered.

The African lion population has been rapidly shrinking throughout the continent. In 1950 there were over 400,000 lions living across Africa. By the early 1980s the population had fallen quite dramatically to approximately 200,000 lions. Even in the early 1990s it was estimated there were still about 100,000 lions in Africa.

Now it is estimated there are, unfortunately, only around 30,000 left on the whole continent. The African lion population has declined at an

alarming rate, plummeting in just the past few decades alone, with their population decreasing by more than 50% and they have also disappeared from over 80% of their historical range. I was born in 1952, so this means that in my lifetime the African lion population has fallen by more than 90%.

While there is some dispute as to the numbers of lions left in the wild, all the wildlife conservation groups agree that the African lion is now seriously threatened. The most recent surveys (2012) estimated that the number of African lions is fewer than 30,000 today. One report said there were about 25,000 remaining. While some other optimistic surveys have estimated that around 32,000 Lions could remain in the wild.

But a recent report by the conservation organisation LionAid says the figure could be considerably lower, with only about 15,000 to 16,000 left roaming the wilds of Africa. And of these approximately 15,000 to 30,000 lions are spread over a very wide geographic area of the African continent. So that many of these Lion populations are existing in precariously restricted ranges, in small, scattered and fragmented pockets of bushland.

## Extinct

The most substantial and viable lion populations now survive in eastern and southern Africa. Of their former range, they are already extinct in some 26 countries and virtually extinct in 10 other countries. Lions are still found in 28 countries, but only seven of these countries are believed to have populations of more than 1,000. These seven countries are Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Even in these countries the situation of lions is not secure. In Kenya for instance, there are estimated to be about 2,000 lions left, but each year Kenya loses over 100 lions due to killings by poachers, farmers and herders.

The situation is most serious in western Africa where lions are already on the verge of extinction due to the drastic decline in numbers. Some surveys have estimated the number of Lions that survive in West Africa is about 850-1,160. But according to LionAid estimates only some 645 to 795 lions remain in the region, in isolated pockets of remnant habitat.

These remaining lion populations are mostly geographically cut off from each other and have a high likelihood of inbreeding. But, even if the higher estimate of numbers were correct, with such few lions remaining, their small population makes their continued existence unsustainable. Similarly, lion numbers throughout central Africa are also small and these populations are likely to be extinct in a few years.

The most significant threats to the survival of the species are considered to be, habitat loss and fragmentation of habitat, conflicts with humans, such as retaliatory attacks by farmers, trophy hunting and the scarcity of prey. With human growth relentlessly expanding and engulfing lion habitat for agriculture, livestock and urban development, the African lion is fast running out of room. Added to this, while lions eat a variety of prey, from large animals such as antelope and giraffes to smaller animals like, hares and birds, numbers of several of their main prey, antelope and zebra have also fallen dramatically due to over-hunting by humans. This creates further conflict as lions then feed on livestock.



With the loss of habitat and prey, the lion-human conflicts have increased and the result is that more lions are then being shot or speared and killed as pests to protect livestock. In parts of east Africa some farmers and herders poison dead livestock to kill lions. A pesticide known as Furadan (which is banned in the EU, Canada and US) is sprinkled over lion-killed livestock. When the lion pride or other predators return to feed, they ingest the poison and die an agonising death.

## Threats

And despite the considerable decline in numbers lions face other threats from humans: they are still being hunted as sport for trophies and for taxidermy. The USA is the world's largest importer of lion parts for both commercial and recreational business, selling skulls, hides, claws and even living lions as pets. Big game hunters who pay to shoot lions claim that in doing so they are aiding conservation efforts.

But this is not a valid argument in relation to lions. African lion experts say that by killing the mature males, hunting radically upsets the balance within the pride and often results in fights that end in the deaths of many other lions. Because when a principal male lion dies, new challengers struggle to dominate the pride. When a new male lion takes over he will kill any resisting females and all the cubs. So, the shooting of one male can result in the deaths of dozens of other lions.

As well, the Humane Society International says that despite claims that big game hunting

injects cash into the local communities' economy and that some of it is being used for wildlife conservation efforts, this is not really proven to be the case. According to their research, only very meagre amounts of money actually get to the impoverished communities. In reality local African communities can gain more financial benefit through tourism by preserving lions and other wildlife.

Finally, there's another threat emerging, the lion bone trade, with lions being killed for their bones for traditional Chinese medicine. As happens with tigers, some bone traders are now starting to target lions.

If serious conservation measures are not taken soon, in a couple decades the African lion population will be down to just a few thousand animals in small areas, struggling to survive. Much more must be done and soon to ensure the continued existence of African lions. They are now in grave risk of extinction unless proper conservation measures are quickly implemented. So what can be done to save the African lion?

## Conserve

In order to conserve the African lion, firstly the killings of lions by humans, whether due to hunting for sport or livestock conflicts, must be halted. More needs to be done in working with local communities to lessen lion/human conflict, compensate for livestock killed and better protect both livestock and people. There is also an urgent need to protect lion habitat, to stop it being converted into farmland. And also to conserve the lions sources of food, in particular their main prey species such as gazelle, other antelopes and zebra.

As well, the conservation group LionAid has put forward several positive measures to help save the lion, including appealing for more accurate lion counts to be conducted, called on other African countries to join Botswana, Kenya and Zambia in halting lion trophy hunting, asked importing countries to ban lion trophies and pleaded for lion range states to declare lions a national protected species and to urgently enact proper conservation programs.

For various reasons African lions are very difficult to count. But from the best attainable survey's we do know that 30 or so years ago there were approximately 200,000 lions in Africa and the population is now at most around

**With human growth relentlessly expanding and engulfing lion habitat for agriculture, livestock and urban development, the African lion is fast running out of room.**



# Save the Irrawaddy River Dolphins

Steven Katsineris

The Mekong River is the mother of all Southeast Asian rivers, providing life-sustaining resources to millions of people. The future of the Mekong, her people and wildlife are in jeopardy, however. The government of Laos plans to build the Don Sahong Dam – the second dam proposed for construction on the Lower Mekong mainstream – on the main pathway in the Mekong that allows for year-round fish migration. If built, the Don Sahong Dam will entirely block the Hou Sahong Channel, endangering the rare Irrawaddy River Dolphins and fish migration throughout the region, with far-reaching consequences for people's food and livelihood security in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Lives in this area and throughout the Mekong are intricately entwined with the river that provides an identity and rich history, as well as a source of income and food security. The planned site of the Don Sahong Dam is also a unique section of the Mekong River, home to one of the last remaining populations of critically endangered Irrawaddy Dolphins as well as the iconic Khone Phapheng waterfalls, and near an internationally protected Ramsar wetland site in downstream Cambodia.

The Irrawaddy River Dolphins of the Mekong River are therefore in grave danger: a commission of four Southeast Asian states will be meeting soon to decide whether to go ahead with building the Don Sahong Dam on the Mekong River in Laos. Irrawaddy Dolphins live in both saltwater and freshwater in South and Southeast Asia. They are widespread in coastal areas, but they now only survive in three rivers – the Mekong in Cambodia and Lao PDR, the Mahakam in Indonesia, and the Ayeyarwaddy in Myanmar. The population in each of these rivers is thought to be less than 100 dolphins and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species describes these three river populations as Critically Endangered.



The population in the Mekong is estimated to be 75 adults. Research shows that the population is slowly declining and the mortality rate is unsustainably high. In the last 10 years at least 115 dolphins have died, which is an average of nearly one per month. Fishermen along the Mekong use gillnets to fish and unfortunately dolphins are occasionally caught in them as bycatch.

In 2006 the Cambodian government with support of conservation group, Save Our Species created the Dolphin Commission to Protect Irrawaddy Dolphins in the Mekong River. The Dolphin Commission now has 17 ranger posts along the river and more than 70 rangers patrolling the river to prevent the use of gillnets in dolphin protection zones. A grant from SOS - Save Our Species - enabled the

project team to provide training, equipment, and fuel to allow more frequent and effective ranger patrols. The purpose of this project was to reduce the number of dolphins that die in gillnets each year.

So, the situation of these threatened river dolphins was already dire and if the building of this dam goes ahead it would probably be the last straw in their difficult struggle for survival. Please act to protect the Mekong's Irrawaddy River Dolphins from extinction. Now is the time for us to make our voices heard and call on these leaders to stop playing with the lives of the Irrawaddy River Dolphins, the livelihoods of their people and future of the vital resources the river supports. ✪



30,000. And that this is a very low number of lions and they are sparsely spread throughout their current range.

So, the situation for the African lion is already dire. If the present situation is not remedied, then African lions will continue to be reduced to ever smaller patches of scattered habitat, with their prey base depleting, their numbers dwindling and genetic diversity diminishing further. And if this drastic decline continues, within 20 years over half the present population will be lost and African lions will be teetering on the brink of extinction in the wild.

Lions are a vital part of the natural environment and a key species in the biodiversity of African ecosystems, but they are also an important piece of the history, culture and heritage of Africa and its people. Their loss would have a devastating impact on the fragile ecology of the African savannah. It would be a deplorable tragedy if in the near future this potent symbol of the African bush was wiped out, surviving only in nature parks and zoos. It is also distressing that the condition of the African lion has become so precarious almost without being noticed.

Now steps must be taken to properly protect them from disappearing in their natural habitat, so that lions will continue to exist in Africa. It would be utterly unforgivable if humanity were to let the African lion perish from their native environment. We still have a very good chance to reverse this situation; we need more concerned people to stand up for the preservation of lions and stop the alarming trend towards extinction.

People who are distressed about this dismal state of affairs can express their feelings best by taking action while there is time to help. To make a difference we have to urgently support the worthy efforts promoted by the lion conservation groups striving to save these threatened big cats from vanishing. Let's make sure this doesn't happen to this truly magnificent creature. It's ultimately up to us to make certain to it that the unique African lion will be able to go on living, forever free and wild on the grassy plains of Africa.

For more information and to assist lions please contact:

lionaid.org  
panthera.org/species/lion  
lionconservationfund.org ✪

## Land-grab investors in Nigeria

Chris Walker

**Farmers of the remote Gassol community in Nigeria's Taraba State are facing a battle for their livelihoods in the face of a land grab backed by UK aid. A new report shows that the farmers are being forced off the land they have farmed for generations to make way for US company Dominion Farms to establish a 30,000 hectare rice plantation. Land containing plots held by thousands of farmers and a publicly funded irrigation system was handed over to Dominion by the local government. Yet local farmers were not consulted about the deal and are still to hear of any compensation or resettlement plan.**

Africa holds almost half of the 31 million hectares of land acquired by overseas investors around the world since 2000. Countless deals between transnationals and governments have left small-scale farmers displaced and vulnerable. Yet it's the involvement of millions of pounds of UK aid that means British government ministers are facing embarrassing questions about the plight of Gassol's farmers.

Dominion Farm's investments in Nigeria are just some of those pledged as part of the

G8's New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition. Launched in 2012, the program draws on billions of pounds in G8 aid to push for pro-corporate policy reforms across 10 African states to attract the world's biggest agribusinesses. Like other African states, Nigeria is now changing its laws on land, seed and fertiliser markets and trade rules that effectively hand control of local food systems to corporate giants, including Unilever, Syngenta and Dominion. It's why nearly 100 African campaign groups have branded the initiative "a new wave of colonialism". Britain alone has pledged US\$210 million in aid to Nigeria's New Alliance projects.

With the New Alliance and its corporate investors under fire for failing to provide evidence of its impact on food security and poverty reduction nearly three years after its launch, British campaigners and MPs are demanding that UK aids protects communities' food sovereignty instead of backing corporate profit. Last week, Labour MP Diane Abbott called on Secretary for International Development Justine Greening to take heed of Gassol's farmers. "It is alarming that farmers in Taraba State, Nigeria, without having been consulted or compensated, are being forced from their land to make way for large-scale land investment by a

multinational company," said Abbott. "Allowing local populations to keep control over their land and seeds is a means towards sustainable development and avoids profit being syphoned off by large multinationals."

G8 leaders would no doubt like their "corporate partners" to be seen as a beacon of responsible investment across Africa. Yet, like other New Alliance investors, Dominion is no stranger to controversy. Farmers in Siava District of southwest Kenya have complained that Dominion have not delivered promised jobs for local people after leasing farming land that CEO Calvin Burgess claims was a "malaria-infested swamp before we got here".

With Gassol's farmers already losing access to irrigation and fishponds they rely on for income and food, the community has pledged to fight back. "We were ready for peaceful demonstrations, dialogue and even to cry out to the whole world just to hear our voices," says local farmer Mallam Ismaila Gebi. "But if this does not work out then we can mobilise against Dominion Farms for our land, the land of our forefathers, with our families and remain there until they answer us."

*New Internationalist* ✪



# PEGIDA: Horrors and contradictions

Victor Grossman

**BERLIN:** I cringe and shudder when I hear of bloodthirsty, barely-hidden “concerts” by German “Neo-Nazis,” which too often lead to violence against subjects of their hatred: leftist youngsters called “ticks” (their vocabulary), but above all people with other accents, clothes or skin colours.

Such groups, present all over the map, seem strongest in south-eastern Saxony, north-eastern Mecklenburg and the western Ruhr region, all areas plagued by unemployment, especially among young people.

## Ultra-right parties and groupings

Semi-secret ties connect them with the almost openly pro-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), legal despite various attempts to outlaw it. It is good that it has failed the requisite five percent hurdle for all but one state parliament; only in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania did six percent of the voters give it five seats (out of 71). Last May, for the European Parliament, with the hurdle at only 1 percent, its 1.03 percent all-German result let it squeeze into one seat in Strasbourg. Despite low votes, however, it has bases in all too many towns and villages thanks to its activity in voluntary fire departments, PTA groups, soccer clubs and outdoor festivities. Local fear often plays a role.

The next ring in widening rightist circles has been the PEGIDA movement with its marches, mostly Monday evenings, denouncing a fantasy “Islamisation of the West.” In late 2014 it grew alarmingly in the city of Dresden, where on one occasion more than 20,000 took part. Aside from its anti-foreigner bias (in a city with an immigrant population of only two percent, far below the average), it appealed to many who were worried about their livelihoods, resentful of traditional parties – and ready to load blame on scapegoats.

Happily, its shady yet somehow charismatic leader had to step down after his Facebook self-photo imitating Hitler and his viciously brutal epithets against immigrants went too far. His successors soon split up, and PEGIDA in Dresden has called off further “walks” for now and may collapse. In other cities it was always countered or blocked by immigrant-friendly opponents in far superior



Alternative for Germany rejects the euro, opposes immigration and same-sex marriage but rejects being called the “German Tea Party”.

numbers. But people of colour in Dresden still live in fear!

Nine-tenths of those PEGIDA walkers look to a party called the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Founded in 2013, it won seven percent in the European Parliament vote and then nine percent to 12 percent in three state elections. It rejects the euro, opposes immigration and same-sex marriage but rejects being called the “German Tea Party”. Some fine-sounding economic demands steal voters from the LINKE (Left) but it lacks any clear shape.

At a recent congress in Bremen its ever-grinning leader Berndt Lucke, once a World Bank economist, narrowly forced through a change in its current triumvirate rule, granting himself sole top leadership. The AfD, despite populist phrases and a stack of professors among its delegates, reminds me of a one-cell organism called the “brain-eating amoeba.” Like it, the AfD may become a dangerous rightist menace. And it has far more than a single cell.

Angela Merkel’s party, not to be outdone, also shows skill at talking out of two sides of its mouth. While she boldly denounces racists and proclaims that “Islam belongs to Germany,” Stanislaw Tillich of the same party, the minister-president of Saxony, contradicts her in a very transparent code: “Muslims are welcome and can practise their religion. But that does not mean that Islam

belongs to Saxony.” In that state, whose capital is Dresden, the votes of PEGIDA walkers and other bigots can always be useful politically. Why lose them?

Indeed, Volker Kauder, the head of Merkel’s CDU fraction in the Bundestag, also wants to burn down no xenophobic bridges and lose voters. Referring to the PEGIDA sing-out on December 22, he found it “really good that the people in Dresden sang Christmas carols!” Perhaps they thought of the child in the manger, this conspicuously Christian politician surmised.

## Germany’s foreign policy

In other matters Kauder is rather less gently inclined. It was he who welcomed Vitali Klitschko to the Bundestag, conservative Germany’s favourite boxing champion and planned ruler of the Ukraine until stronger US managers re-classified him to be only the mayor of Kiev. Quite undeterred, and despite the frightening dangers boiling up in that terribly troubled region, Klitschko flexed his biceps, waved his big fist and declaimed: “With no fight there’s no victory!” And Kauder, even more vividly, promised aid so as “to bring into full radiance the flame of victory.”

Kauder’s enthusiasm is understandable if one knows that he is the

main parliamentary pillar of Heckler & Koch, one-time maker of Mauser weapons, whose main plant is in his district, which contributes handsomely to his campaigns, and which he supports just as enthusiastically in its export (for strictly peaceful purposes, of course) of handguns, rifles, sub-machine guns and grenade launchers to all and sundry, like the USA, Bosnia, Nepal, Indonesia, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, probably pre-NATO Libya.

Contradictions are common in the coalition of Merkel’s CDU and the Social Democrats, especially on relations with Ukraine. Sometimes it resembles a “good cop - bad cop” scenario, whereby the roles can change. Foreign Minister Steinmeier (SPD) often calls for a diplomatic solution, Merkel for tougher sanctions against Russia. Then she praises diplomacy, while her man Kauder and German President Gauck want to march on and delight at the roar of Phantom fighter jets in Estonia skimming along the Russian border. However, despite transatlantic pressure and that from Kauder and Co and such gun-lovers, the Berlin government has thus far kept to one position: “No weapons for Kiev.” And a majority of the public also rejects any hostilities.

The mass media, less troubled by complexities or power rivalry when backing Pentagon and State Department positions, has in its ruthless attacks on Putin virtually deleted any thoughts on German-Russian history or its consequences. This rule was briefly broken by a few journalists after the death on January 31, at 94, of Richard von Weizsäcker, West Berlin mayor (1981-1984) and German President (1984-1994), and they recalled some of his courageous words:

Surprising a hushed Parliament in Bonn in May 1985, Weizsäcker

broke with West German usage and spoke of May 8, 1945 as “a day of liberation ... It liberated all of us from the tyranny of the National-Socialist regime.” Referring to seeming forgetfulness about those Hitler years he continued:

“When the unspeakable truth of the Holocaust became known at the end of the war all too many of us claimed they had not known anything about it or even suspected anything ... Anyone who cared to inform himself could not escape the fact that the deportation trains were rolling ...” No, young Germans could not be blamed for crimes of their elders, he said, but they had been left “a hard legacy ... Those who close their eyes to the past will remain blind regarding the future ... Anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present.”

How relevant this seems today. After the elections in Greece and with ones to come in Spain, Merkel and Finance Minister Schäuble fear any progress which threatens their “austerity policy” – imposing that old hegemony of German power and finance in all Europe at the cost of living standards for working people, pensioners and young people, also those in Germany (meaning new recruits for PEGIDA or AfD). Indeed, if such “threats” gain real strength, two fearful responses are always possible. The racist, neo-fascist structures could strengthen – the vehicles are present – or the bugles of war could trumpet toward that path. Neither route excludes the other.

Are we again facing the horror of Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum,” destruction by the sharp, bloody pendulum of expanding war or another fatal fall into a dark, abysmal pit? Or can we fight our way clear of both these destinies? *People’s World* ☘

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# US plots escalate in Ukraine

Niles Williamson

**German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande met for approximately five hours with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow last Friday in an attempt to hash out what has been described as a last-ditch effort to resolve the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.**

The talks concluded on Friday evening without any agreement, and the two European leaders left Moscow late at night without making a press statement. There were pledges of further discussions over the weekend on a ceasefire between Ukrainian armed forces and pro-Russian separatists in the country's eastern Donbass region.

Dmitry Peskov, a Kremlin spokesman, told reporters after the meeting that the leaders had agreed to continue working towards an agreement on implementing the lapsed ceasefire plan signed in Minsk last September. "At the moment joint work is under way on preparing the text of a possible joint document on implementation of the Minsk agreements – a document which would include proposals made by the president of Ukraine and proposals formulated today and added by Russian President Putin," Peskov said.

Prior to Friday's meeting Merkel told reporters that the European leaders were, "convinced there will be no military solution to the conflict." She also sought to lower expectations for the meeting's possible outcome, saying, "We know, however, that it remains completely open whether we will be able to reach a cease-fire through these talks."

The meeting between the European leaders and Putin took place amidst threats by the US to directly arm the regime in Kiev that was installed in a right-wing coup one year ago. Ukraine has suffered a series of setbacks in the east and is facing a deepening economic crisis.

US Vice President Joe Biden and European Council President Donald Tusk, the former Prime Minister of Poland, made a joint appearance in Brussels ahead of the talks in Moscow, calling for unity between the US and EU in maintaining an aggressive stance towards Russia.

"Russia cannot be allowed to redraw the map of Europe," Biden told reporters. In fact, it is the United States and the European powers that

have utilised the coup in Ukraine as the basis for a vast militarisation of all of Eastern Europe, including the doubling of NATO combat forces announced last week. NATO will station six command and control units in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

Biden later cast aspersions on the trip by Merkel and Hollande to Moscow, "President Putin continues to call for new peace plans as his troops roll through the Ukrainian countryside, and he absolutely ignores every agreement his country has signed in the past."

Tusk told reporters, "The European Union and the United States need to continue standing shoulder to shoulder, coordinating our efforts and uphold the pressure on Russia for as long as necessary." He also warned against an agreement with Russia that would result in the partition of Ukraine, "We cannot compromise on Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Ukrainian President Poroshenko announced on Ukrainian television that his government would only accept an agreement in line with the cease-fire plan negotiated in Minsk in September of last year.

In addition to armoured Humvees, drones, and radar equipment, the Obama administration is also considering delivering small arms and anti-armour missiles to aid in the bloody suppression of pro-Russian separatists. Direct military aid to Ukraine could be seen as an act of war by the US against Russia, provoking a Russian response and a possible direct confrontation between the two nuclear-armed powers.

Underlining the danger of the plan, NATO Commander General Phillip Breedlove issued a warning that such a move must take into account a possible military reaction from Russia. It was reported earlier that Breedlove and other key figures had recently shifted their position in favour of providing Ukraine with weapons and other military equipment, opening the way for a final decision by US President Barack Obama this coming week.

There are indications of significant differences between Washington and European powers over the arming of Ukraine. German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen said in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that providing defensive weapons to the Kiev regime would



German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Russia's President Vladimir Putin and French President François Hollande.

"be a fire accelerant." She warned that weapons deliveries might "give the Kremlin the excuse to openly intervene in this conflict."

Rather than military aid, Germany and other European powers have indicated a preference for increasing economic sanctions against Russia as a means of forcing it to back down. The EU is set to consider such action next week.

These manoeuvres take place amidst ongoing fighting in eastern Ukraine. The Kiev regime has suffered a series of embarrassing setbacks after launching a renewed offensive in recent weeks, with the separatists making territorial gains and pushing Ukrainian forces out of the strategic Donetsk airport.

The separatists have made significant advances on the city of Debaltsevo, an important rail hub between Luhansk and Donetsk, where several thousand Ukrainian government troops are entrenched. The separatists have captured the village of Vuhlehirsk, which is approximately six miles to the west of the city.

Consistent artillery shelling from both sides has destroyed much of the town's infrastructure, knocking out heat, running water and power. A brief ceasefire was agreed to by both sides on Friday allowing for the evacuation of the approximately 3,000 out of 25,000 residents who had remained amidst the fighting.

[globalresearch.ca](http://globalresearch.ca)



## Region Briefs

The No.1 Central Document of the Communist Party of China for 2015 reveals the government's plan to deepen agricultural modernisation. The plan aims to consolidate the agricultural industry's reforms and increase farmers' income. It will put the industry on a new development path that focuses on product safety, high efficiency, resource saving and environmental protection. The document also calls for restructuring of the industry, building more infrastructure in rural areas, and increasing innovation in agricultural science and technology.

At the recent Communist Party of China's Politburo meeting, General Secretary Xi Jinping called on Party members to value ideological work and promote core socialist values. He said, "China will remain at socialism's primary stage for a long time", despite the country's successes in lifting people's living standards, increasing national strength and boosting productivity. He stressed that Marxist ideology would continually provide the correct method for the Party members to solve China's problem in reform and development.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has sped up the militarisation of Japan, using the excuse that it is necessary to protect the security of Japanese citizens following the execution by ISIS of two Japanese hostages. It showed Abe's eagerness to practise the recently passed Collective Self-defence Right that enabled Japanese military to fight on foreign soil if an ally was attacked. Japan had been providing logistics support to the US's bombing of ISIS. Meanwhile, according to a report from a meeting of the Japanese Communist Party's Central Committee, the Party had secured the target of 6.5 million votes (10 percent of total votes) in last December's general election. Party leader Shii Kazuo also issued a five-point guideline to the government regarding developing relationships with other Asian countries. The points included admitting and apologising for Japan's military invasion in the past, admitting the Japanese government organised sex slaves in World War 2, prohibiting politicians from visiting Yasukuni Shrine (a symbol of imperialist aggression), banning hatred and racist speeches and demonstrations, and abandoning the right-wing rewriting of history in text books justifying the country's aggressive history in the war.

The Vietnamese Communist Party's state and military leaders paid a visit to the mausoleum of former leader Ho Chi Min, marking the 85th anniversary of the establishment of the Communist Party of Vietnam. The Party's General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong said "the country's success has proved that the Party is the decisive factor behind every victory of the Vietnamese revolution", and "there is no other political force besides the Party that has enough support from the people, brainpower, experience and capacity to lead the country through all the difficulties and challenges to final success". He stressed that from a poor and backward country that suffered from many years of war and trade embargoes, Vietnam had become a modernised market-oriented socialist country.

### Cuba

## Call for the 10th International May Day Brigade

April 27 to May 10, 2015

The Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples and its travel Agency Amistur Cuba S.A, invites you to participate in the 10th edition of the international brigade, on the occasion of the international workers' day.

In addition to the voluntary work, participants will visit places of historical and social interest, receive lectures about our reality, and will have the possibility to exchange with representatives of different social and political organizations, they may exchange with Cuban workers and unionists and visit Playa Giron, where for the first time in Latin America imperialism received its first defeat in less than 72 hours.

The Brigade will take place in the provinces of Havana, Artemisa and Matanzas (Playa Giron). The same will lead the participants a better understanding of the current Cuban reality, in the midst of transformations that are carried out in Cuba, as part of the update of the economic model of our Socialist project.

For full program see [www.cpa.org.au/whats-on](http://www.cpa.org.au/whats-on)



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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

### Vale Tom Uren and thanks for designing your own ceremony

For two hours we shared in the values that Tom held dear in life and reminded us all of the beauty, dignity and struggle of "ordinary" folk.

From the opening Aboriginal smoking ceremony and the slow entry of the coffin accompanied by the hauntingly beautiful singing of East Timorese singers to the playing of the *Last Post* followed by *Rhapsody in Blue* as the coffin made its way out of the packed Sydney Town Hall, we felt we were farewelling a

man who to the end was proud to be identified with all workers of the world.

Centre stage through the whole ceremony were the combined Trade Union choirs from Sydney, Newcastle and the Illawarra with cast members from the 1979 New Theatre production of *Reedy River*.

With the great Town Hall organ, the combined choir sang fervently the National Anthem, especially with the words "For those who've come across the seas, We've boundless plains to share, With courage let all combine, To Advance Australia Fair." Fair, not as in beauty but for a fairer society.

Again, Tom's choice of music was unconventional but true to his spirit. He chose "The Ballad of 1891" telling of the great shearers' strike and sung by the Union Choirs divided in two parts representing the shearers and the squatters. It reminded us of the conflict between the "haves" and "have nots" of the world and perhaps a lesson to the many dignitaries and politicians in the front rows that this struggle is still in progress.

The beautiful recording of Paul Robeson singing "Joe Hill" was

another tribute to the class struggle and the union movement, with its "Where workers strike and organise, That's where you'll find Joe Hill", and in "Balled of 1891", "When they jail a man for striking, It's a rich man's country yet". In an indirect way it was another tribute to the work done by amateur groups in keeping these songs and ideals alive.

Family and friends told of Tom's life and political work, his passion for the environment and the peace movement but it was the music Tom chose for his final farewell including the beautiful "Romance" by Shostakovich, "Trees" sung by Paul Robeson and John Lennon's "Imagine" with its "imagine all the people, Sharing all the world" which really expressed the spirit of this noble and "ordinary" man.

We came to pay tribute to Tom Uren, but in reality, he paid a tribute to all that is wonderful in humankind and in this world.

Vale Tom and thanks for inspiring us to continue "the good fight".

Silvia Salisbury  
Sydney  
(Silvia is a member of the Sydney Trade Union Choir)

### Solidarity with the people of Jeju Island

At this moment it is the early hours of Saturday morning on Jeju Island, South Korea. Police buses are coming into the small fishing and farming village. The 500 year-old village of about 2,000 people have already been forced to surrender their sacred rocky coastline and the pristine environment offshore where endangered soft coral reefs are found.

The Navy base now under construction, will eventually host US aircraft carriers, nuclear subs, and destroyers outfitted with so-called "missile defence" interceptors, all to be aimed at China and Russia in that part of the world.

A call went out for help and people rushed in to join the barricades

against the threat to destroy the permanent protest tents that are a symbol of the villagers' refusal to give even more precious land for the base. But the South Korean government, under the forceful direction of the Pentagon, pushes ahead.

The people on Jeju need our solidarity and prayers. Their spirited and determined eight-year daily struggle at the Navy base gates has spread globally. Hearts from around the world are in Jeju right now.

You can send a letter to the South Korean military administration at the following email. Please let them know you support the people of Gangjeong village. Remind them that the whole world is watching and enraged. Send message to: cyber@mnd.go.kr

Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space

Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

## Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

# Pro-democracy thugs, political prisoners and the destruction of the NHS

The US has been pressuring Venezuela to release Leopoldo Lopez, a far-right political activist who was jailed for playing a leading part in organising a three-month wave of street violence supposedly in support of democracy. In reality, the US-backed campaign was openly aimed at forcing the removal of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his policy of continuing Hugo Chávez' Bolivarian Revolution.

Previously, when imperialist powers wanted to remove a progressive or left-wing government, they organised a military coup. But riding so blatantly over democracy while posing publicly as its champion simply won't wash any more. So the Western powers' political tacticians have fallen back on seemingly "spontaneous" violent demonstrations. Masked Fascist thugs armed with chains and clubs set about winning control of the streets.

In a pattern that has become familiar from Ukraine to Moldova, Chile to Venezuela, violent mobs strive to intimidate and cow everyone on the Left, create an atmosphere of chaos and violence, and ultimately destabilise and unseat the government and force "regime change" on the country. Not a coup, you see, but the expression of the popular will. But, as the Duke of Wellington once famously said, "If you believe that you'll believe anything!"

In the "protests" that Leopoldo Lopez organised in Venezuela for Washington, streets were blocked by the usual violent masked thugs and extreme right-wing terrorists. Dozens were killed at their hands. With a blithe disregard

for truth, the US resolutely describes him as a "pro-democracy campaigner".

In response to US demands for the release of this notorious terrorist, Venezuela's President Maduro has offered to exchange him for Puerto Rican independence activist Oscar Lopez Rivera, who has been in jail in the US for a staggering 33 years. Curiously, the democratic rights of the Puerto Rican people apparently count for a lot less than those of people in countries the US is seeking to control.

Uruguayan President Jose Mujica has also sent an open letter to Barack Obama calling for Rivera's release. Even Puerto Rican Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla has called on the White House to release him, and popular Puerto Rican singer Rene Perez has also been vocal in support of Rivera. In addition, the National Boricua Human Rights Network and *La Respuesta* magazine have organised a worldwide campaign calling for freedom for Rivera.

However, for all their talk about "freedom" and "liberty", the US authorities clearly intend to hang on to their Puerto Rican colony come hell or high water. And in typical US fashion, those who try to object will be silenced with horrendous jail sentences.

On the other side of the world, in the UK, people are waging a campaign in defence of the country's prized National Health Service, once the jewel in the British welfare state's crown but which the Tories are now doing their best to destroy. To Britain's capitalist politicians, just like ours, health care is not a person's right. In



With a blithe disregard for truth, the US resolutely describes Leopoldo Lopez as a "pro-democracy campaigner".

fact, as far as they are concerned it is not a right at all. Instead, it is a commodity that can – in fact, *should* – be marketed for private profit. So the reactionaries there, as here, are undermining the public health service, trying to make it unworkable, to create opportunities for private entrepreneurs to replace the public system with a private one run for profit.

Already, nine major British hospitals are operating on a crisis basis: routine operations are being postponed, staff from different departments are being transferred to the Accident and Emergency units while patients are being held waiting on trolleys in corridors and ambulances, unable to unload their patients, are being kept in queues outside the A&E departments.

One tactic the Tories use is to not employ enough nurses, forcing hospitals to make up the difference by employing nurses and other staff from private agencies, at much greater expense. Of course, the owners of the agencies are making a mint from this tactic, which is a form of privatisation by stealth.

The rationale for private health care is the usual one, that "all who get it should pay for it". But, as Daphne Little points out in the British Communist paper *The New Worker*, the people already do pay for it, through their taxes and other government charges. "But that cuts out big business and leaves no room for profit-making."

In all the developed capitalist countries, they are trying to force everyone to take out private health insurance, which creates a bonanza

for insurance companies while failing miserably to fund proper health care.

At the same time, the British authorities cut some ten thousand jobs from the NHS last year while the real value of NHS pay has fallen by 15 percent over the last five years. NHS staff are in the unenviable position of being representatives of "in-work poverty". If big government employers can get away with paying poverty wages, private employers are emboldened to do so too.

In October last year, members of the giant union Unite working in the NHS, along with colleagues from ten leading health unions, took strike action for the first time in more than 30 years over pay, followed by a second walkout in November. The government caved and offered a deal which the unions are considering. Said Gail Cartmail of Unite: "The offer moves the NHS towards becoming a living wage employer and begins to address issues around low pay."

Minimal pay offers notwithstanding, the British Tories are still intent on doing away with the NHS and replacing it with the same sort of US-style for-profit health care system favoured by Abbott and Hockey and Co. But the British people, like the Australian people, know when they are being robbed blind, and whether it's called the NHS or Medicare, the destruction of a system of public health funded out of government revenue with no charges for medical care and its replacement by a system of private health care provided only if you can pay hefty prices for it is clearly the theft of a valuable asset from the people. ✪





**Rob Gowland**  
**previews**  
**ABC & SBS**  
 Public Television

Sunday February 15 –  
 Saturday February 21

The second series of *Broadchurch*, the multi award-winning British drama series, starts this week (ABC TV Sundays from February 15 at 8.30 pm).

Set in Dorset, the first series followed David Tennant as DI Alec Hardy and Olivia Colman as DS Ellie Miller, investigating the murder of a schoolboy. The script became a little contrived, however, when DS Miller's husband confessed to the crime.

The first series was not a simple who-dunnit, but much more an examination of the impact of the crime on all involved: the family, the local community, the police. Personally, I prefer traditional who-dunnits, but that is just me.

The plot of series two was subjected to faintly ridiculous secrecy constraints: Email and other electronic communications between producers, cast, and crew could only make oblique reference to plot details, fake emails were circulated to mislead those who might leak them, and some emails were coded.

Cast members were required to sign legally binding non-disclosure agreements. Each actor's or crew member's script had the individual's name watermarked across the page, so that leaks could be traced back to the person responsible.

The first episode of *Broadchurch* series two met with a highly positive critical reception. *The Independent* awarded the premiere episode four stars out of five and labelled it "a brilliant demonstration of the risks a writer can get away with when there's a proven cast to fall back on". *The Times* labelled the first episode "expansively told and imaginatively filmed". Episode two, however, did not fare as well. *The Independent* criticised the writing, concluding, "Sadly, all the electric tension of episode one has evaporated, instead events are becoming improbable and additional drama seems to be shoe-horned in for the sake of it. ... There's so much going on that it's starting to feel unbelievable."

The *Daily Mail* reported that there was extensive viewer dissatisfaction with the episode's plot. The "Bafta-winning detective drama is a heap of old codswallop that makes no sense at all," said their critic. "The first episode was shaky. The second was riddled with errors. But the third

was beyond all forgiving." Another *Daily Mail* critic wrote: "this second series really is rubbish." Grace Dent, writing in *The Independent*, called series two "a plot as patchy and as shamelessly far-fetched as a sub-par *Midsomer Murders*." Karen Price of the *Western Mail* found the show had "descended into classic soap opera farce."

You have been warned.

The second episode of *David Attenborough's Conquest Of The Skies* (ABC Sundays at 7.40 pm) charts the rise of new, larger creatures that took to the air in pursuit of the insects that had dominated it – extinct reptiles that flew on wings of skin, dinosaurs that sprouted feathers to become the ancestors of birds, and gliding mammals that emerged from a life in the trees to dominate the night as bats.

This is another fascinating exercise in popularising science, complete with new fossils from China and the latest CGI to reveal the secrets of flight itself.

The British drama series *Fortitude* (ABC Sundays from February 15 at 9.20 pm) has more plot elements going on than would seem necessary or even desirable: an accidental killing, a brutal murder, an adulterous affair, a child whose mumps might actually be polio, a major property development threatened by the discovery of rare frozen animal remains that will need to be protected, and all of this taking place within the isolation of the Arctic Circle. And that's just episode one.

And I haven't even mentioned Polar Bear cannibalism, inter-police rivalry or attempted extortion. It's very atmospheric, but to say that the first episode is confusing would be an understatement.

So-called "reality TV" gets sweeter by the week. *Slum Survivors* (SBS 2 Mondays from February 16 at 8.30 pm) takes a group of young people from the UK and plonks them into some of the biggest and most colourful slums in India, Africa and Asia.

The reasoning behind the series is that "far from being a sob story, the slums, and the people that call them home are thriving places and have much to teach us in the west". The main lesson human beings coping with privation and poverty have to teach "us in the west" is that they would much rather not have to do it.

Under the title *Movie Mayhem with Marc Fennell*, SBS is running what it calls "the best in cult cinema". The addition of the word "cult" in this context usually means films so silly they insult the intelligence. Normal critical responses have to be suspended.

This week's "cult movie" is *The Medallion* (SBS 2 Wednesday February 18 at 8.30 pm) in which a Hong Kong detective suffers a fatal accident involving a mysterious medallion and is transformed into an immortal warrior with superhuman powers. A comic strip movie pitched



David Attenborough's *Conquest Of The Skies* (ABC Sundays at 7.40pm).

at the very unsophisticated. If you think that's you, enjoy!

*The Paedophile Hunter* (ABC2 Wednesday, February 18 at 9.30pm) is an observational documentary from the UK that follows self-righteous online "vigilante" Stinson Hunter and his mates, who pose as underage children on social networking sites in order to identify and draw out men they assert have paedophilic predilections.

Some of the men he "exposes" might well be paedophiles, but there is a very strong element of entrapment in what he does. Would these men seek out under-age girls if Stinson didn't strenuously tempt them? Vigilantism is no substitute for well-resourced police. One thing that does emerge from director Dan Reed's documentary is the shocking scale of the problem of online grooming and the complex relationship between the vigilantes, the police and people who use social network sites to groom underage children.

The film features interviews with police and legal experts who highlight the dangers for vigilantes, the people they target and their families – and also the risk of affecting evidence and police investigations. But on one thing they all agree, the astonishing prevalence of paedophile grooming online and the very real danger for children online. \*

Sydney

## POLITICS IN THE PUB

February 12

### HOW SERIOUS IS THE CONTINUOUS GROWTH OF INEQUALITY DRIVEN BY NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY AND ECONOMICS, AND ITS SOCIAL AND PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES IN AUSTRALIA?

Chris Sheil, Dr, President Evatt Foundation and Visiting Fellow School of Humanities and Languages, UNSW;

Frank Stilwell, Emeritus Professor, Department of Political Economy, Sydney University;

February 19

### ISLAMOPHOBIA IN AUSTRALIA: THE POLITICS OF RACE HATE IN NEOLIBERAL AUSTRALIA

Jock Collins, Professor of Social Economics, UTS Business School;

Alana Lentin, Professor, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney;

February 26

### AUSTRALIA AT WAR AGAIN: THE REAL REASONS WHY WE ARE AT WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Jake Lynch, Professor, Director of Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies;

Richard Broinowski, President of Australian Institute International Affairs (NSW), former Ambassador Vietnam, Korea, Mexico; author 4 books, latest *Fallout from Fukushima*;

March 5

### THE RUSSELL TRIBUNAL ON PALESTINE: PREVENTING THE CRIME OF SILENCE

Peter Slezak, Professor, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UNSW;

Cathy Peters, Australians 4BDS and former Marrickville Councillor;

March 12

### DEREGULATION OF UNIVERSITIES: A RECIPE FOR PERPETUATING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA?

Nick Riemer, Dr, Department of English, Sydney University;

Richard Hil, Dr, Honorary Research Fellow, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Sydney University;

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 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
 Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833  
 Email: [guardian@cpa.org.au](mailto:guardian@cpa.org.au)

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# Vale Tom Uren

## Courageous champion for justice and human rights

Tom Uren was one of the greatest politicians Australia ever had. I first came across him at Vietnam rallies when I lived in Sydney in the early 1970s. He was a very powerful speaker - eloquent, articulate, persuasive, rational and warm.

Tom was very sincere, totally opposed to human rights abuses committed against all people and strongly on the side of those who suffered tyranny. This is why he supported the Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians, the East Timorese and the West Papuans.

Yes, he was a supporter of left and progressive politics. To him, this meant following the politics of social justice, human rights, equality for all, fairness between nations and caring for the environment.

At a time when most of the ALP had sold out the East Timorese, he was one of a few who supported the liberation struggle of our former, valiant WW2 allies. Others in that group, of course, included Richie Gun and Ken Fry.

Because of his strong support, CIET (SA) - now AETFA SA, asked Tom to officially open the East Timor, Australia and the Region Conference. This conference was an international one and it was organised by CIET SA and held at Adelaide University in 1979. Tom made a great contribution.

Frequently, he spoke out about what was happening in Timor and always gave support to activists working in solidarity with the East Timorese.

I see that Bill Shorten has described Tom as a giant in the ALP, which is true. But, I also remember being at an East Timor Activists Conference in the early 1980s as the right was becoming far more dominant in the ALP. At a party organised by Tom to which he invited conference delegates, I remarked to an ALP staffer that he must be very proud working with people like Tom Uren. His response was that Tom was a fool for supporting East Timor and that he was working with others in the ALP to get rid of old fools like him!

Is it any wonder that the East Timorese got very little support from the ALP leadership during their struggle? It was rather ironic that towards the end of their struggle, it was Laurie Brereton, a key figure in the NSW right of the ALP who turned around the Party's policy on

this issue. Sadly, this did not follow through and when the ALP took office in 2007, there was no support from ALP MPs to reverse the Liberal Party's policy to refuse to recognise the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in relation to Timor-Leste - although Australia recognises the UNCLOS principle with NZ and the Solomons. This has resulted in Australia taking a lot of the oil and gas from Timor-Leste's half of the Timor Sea.

Tom Uren always stood for human decency in relations between people and was totally opposed to racism.

Even though he was a victim of the Japanese military during WW2, he did not harbour anti-Japanese sentiments. Tom had been captured in West Timor and sent to work on the infamous Thai Burma railway as a POW and later he worked in a slave camp in Japan not far from Nagasaki, where he saw the atomic bombing of Nagasaki from a distance.

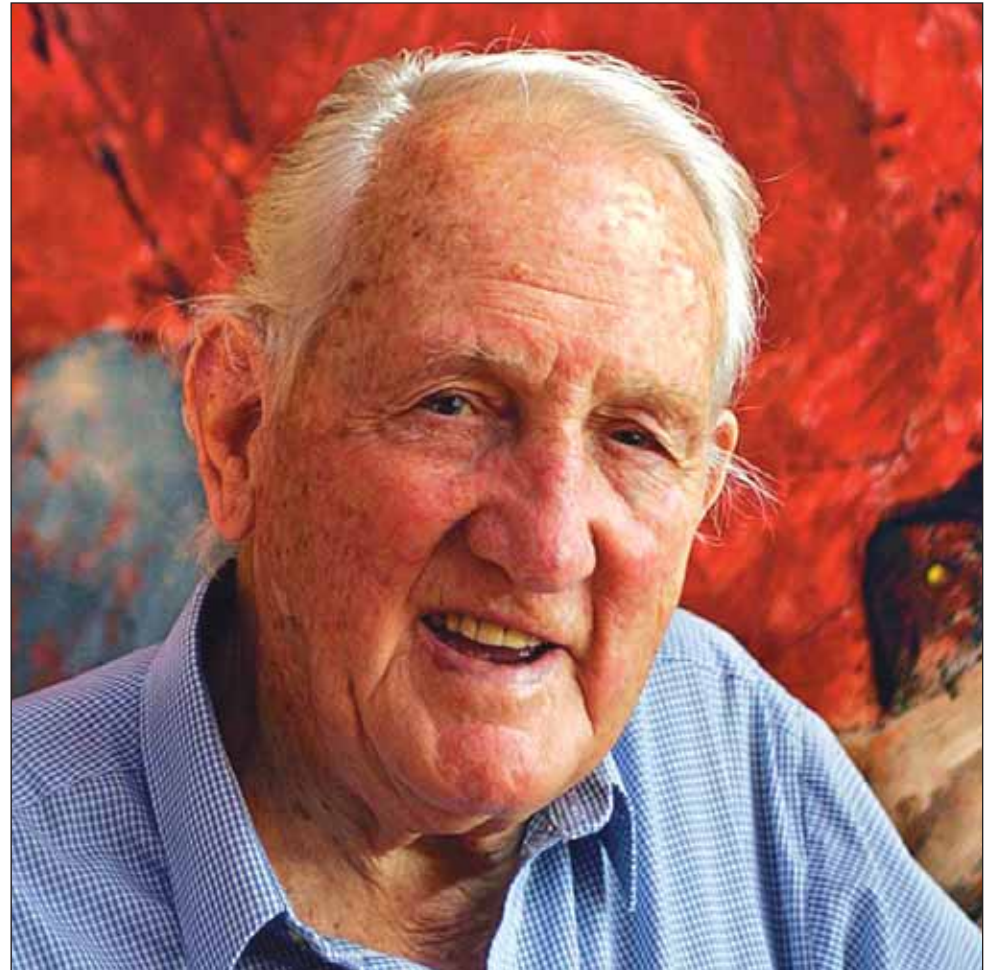
During the official recognition of the 60th anniversary of the end of WW2, I saw Tom being interviewed at Hellfire Pass, a part of the railway in Thailand. The interviewer asked him what the conditions were like. Tom's reply was that it was like hell on earth.

"We were expected to pick and shovel through solid rock to make this cutting. We worked long hours on extremely meagre rations. Many of the men were extremely sick. A huge number had dysentery and they were literally shitting their lives away. There was virtually no medication for the sick. I saw men on many occasions drop dead while they were on the job."

The interviewer then asked Tom what he thought about Japanese people because of his experiences. His answer was: "I hated every last one of them and I would not have cared if they had been all wiped out!"

He was then asked if he still had the same attitude. His answer was a definite "No!" Tom then went on to say that "I did not keep that opinion for long."

Later, I was transferred to a slave camp in Japan. There I met Japanese political prisoners. These people had the courage to oppose Japanese fascism on its own grounds. They were very courageous people. They were my brothers. They were my comrades. Many people who



harbour ill-will to all Japanese people because of WW2 do not understand one important fact. And that is that during WW2, we were not fighting the Japanese people, we were fighting Japanese fascism and there is a great difference."

His analysis of the conflict between Australia and Japan avoided the racism against all Japanese that Bruce Ruxton's analysis embraced.

Because of his experiences during WW2, Tom became a devoted peace activist and was opposed to nuclear weapons and the nuclear industry.

His quest for social justice led him to be a strong advocate for socialism. Tom Uren was a giant physically, but a gentle one. He was also a boxer, but more importantly, he used his strength and energy to fight for a fairer and safer world.

Farewell, Comrade Tom. You will never be forgotten.

Andrew (Andy) Alcock  
Information Officer  
Australia East Timor Association SA Inc

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**Central Committee:**  
General Secretary: Bob Briton  
Party President: Vinnie Molina  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
P: 02 9699 8844 F: 02 9699 9833

Website: [www.cpa.org.au](http://www.cpa.org.au)  
Email: [cpa@cpa.org.au](mailto:cpa@cpa.org.au)

**Sydney District Committee:**  
Wayne Sonter  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
P: 02 9699 8844 F: 02 9699 9833

**Newcastle Branch:**  
[newcastle@cpa.org.au](mailto:newcastle@cpa.org.au)

**Riverina Branch:**  
Allan Hamilton  
2/57 Cooper St Cootamundra 2590  
[riverina@cpa.org.au](mailto:riverina@cpa.org.au)

**Melbourne Branch:**  
Andrew Irving  
[viccpa@netspace.net.au](mailto:viccpa@netspace.net.au)  
Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall  
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053  
P: 03 9639 1550 F: 03 9639 4199

**SA State Committee:**  
Bob Briton,  
PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,  
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366  
[www.adelaidecommunists.org](http://www.adelaidecommunists.org)  
Email: [sa@cpa.org.au](mailto:sa@cpa.org.au)

**West Australian Branch:**  
Vinnie Molina [perth@cpa.org.au](mailto:perth@cpa.org.au)  
PO Box 98 North Perth WA 6906  
P: 0419 812 872

**Brisbane Branch:**  
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152  
P: 0449 202 189  
[cpabris@live.com.au](mailto:cpabris@live.com.au)

**Tasmania Branch:**  
Bob Briton [tas@cpa.org.au](mailto:tas@cpa.org.au)  
P: 0418 894 366