



Intergenerational Report

Plan for a failed system

Anna Pha

The Coalition government's 2015 Intergenerational Report is yet another attempt by Treasurer Hockey to sell their 2014 budget cuts and privatisation. It uses an ageing population as a political pawn to try to get across policies that are strongly opposed by the Australian people. The media ran with warnings of budget deficits for 40 years to come and no future for today's youth.

The report, produced by Treasury, is unashamedly pro-big business and political. In part it is yet another regurgitation of the all-too-familiar "we are living beyond our means".

A closer study reveals that the real agenda behind the budget cuts is the reduction of business costs and making investment in Australia more internationally competitive.

It is an attempt to coax a boom out of the profound bust the system is in.

The government's intent is clear. Its projections of major budget items over the coming 40 years reveal that military spending will rise to almost double the total of that for education which will not increase in real terms.

Aged and service pensions, family tax benefit, New Start Allowance (unemployed), Youth Allowance and Austudy will all be cut in real terms. (page 100) The amount on schools will be halved and tertiary education subjected to a 40 percent cut (schools and tertiary, training, etc).

It takes a swipe at Labor, forecasting huge budget deficits and mounting debt if the government had not got some of its cuts through Parliament. It argues the remainder of the budget cuts need to be implemented if the budget is to be balanced and surpluses produced.

The report signals an overhaul of superannuation – the subject of an inquiry. There are strong divisions within Coalition ranks over whether workers should be able to draw on their superannuation savings to purchase a home, education or fund other big items.

Eyes on Asia

"It is projected that by 2030, there could be around 3.2 billion middle class people in the Asia Pacific region. Asia's continued rise will bring great economic opportunities closer to Australia's doorstep. Australia needs to be in position to take full advantage of these opportunities," the report says.



Treasurer Joe Hockey.

It aims for businesses to be "flexible, competitive and robust in the face of dynamic global conditions." Towards these ends it advocates further deregulation and reforms to competition policy and further trade and investment liberalisation such as through free trade agreements. It is looking at life after the resources boom and has latched onto the IT sector at the same time as proposing cuts to science, research and innovation funding!

The report devotes considerable space to increasing productivity such as higher output per worker and cutting wages and conditions. It also trots out the old capitalist myth that private sector is more efficient and privatisation can result in increased productivity.

It refers to a forthcoming White Paper on Federalism in which the government is seeking to "enhance governments' autonomy, flexibility and political accountability". This is a reference to states and territories assuming many of the functions of the federal government, including setting their own labour laws and competing

with each other for domestic and foreign investment in a race to the bottom for workers.

Tax cuts

The report reviews the past 40 years and attempts to make economic forecasts for the next 40 years during which time it estimates that the population is set to almost double.

The tax base will shrink as a larger percentage of the population (the older generation) pays less or no tax creating a budget deficit. So, how does it solve that "problem"? It adopts a two-prong approach:

The first prong is to cut the taxation of companies and the rich! That of course, only exacerbates the situation.

So the second prong is to cut spending in selective areas to fund the initial deficit and the tax cuts. In addition, it has set a cap on government revenue at 23.9 percent, limiting the potential to make surpluses, pay off government debt or put away some savings during a boom for bad times. This implies regular tax

cuts in line with inflation – for corporations.

When it comes to the budget deficit, the government fails to look beyond cuts to working people and the most vulnerable. There are other options for balancing the books or paying off debt. These include:

- Increasing company taxation – not just the rate but ending the rorts
- Abolishing negative gearing
- Phasing out the government rebate on private health insurance
- Slashing military spending by at least 10 percent
- Abolishing the fossil fuel rebate for mining companies
- Higher wages for workers, resulting in higher tax income.

The government's focus on cuts and its victims reveal its class position. As far as it is concerned retirees can fend for themselves as their labour can no longer be exploited by the capitalist class: Hockey's "the age of entitlement is over". ✖

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The science is undeniable

The environmental crisis has been largely created by the rapacious exploitation of the Earth's resources. The response of governments in the developed capitalist countries such as Australia is all about safeguarding profits over the needs of the environment. In Australia, the effects of climate change are real and happening now. Soil salination, desertification and deforestation, pollution of the air and freshwater systems, destruction of waterways and a major loss of biodiversity began after the country's occupation by Britain in 1788.

Conversion to a sustainable economy will bring healthier economic outcomes and a healthier environment. In addition, sustainable production requires more workers, not less. And we are now dealing with a federal government which is unabashed in its climate change denial.

Scientists the world over are calling on urgent action on climate change. Here in Australia last week a group of top scientist published an open letter over the name of Dr Andrew Glikson, earth and paleoclimate science, Australian National University and 74 distinguished scientists and academics.

It states: "We are concerned the 2015 Intergenerational Report underestimates the serious threat of global warming. Based on the basic laws of physics, direct measurements and empirical observations in nature, the current rise in atmospheric greenhouse gases by about 40 percent since the 19th century is inducing a shift in the state of the atmosphere-ocean-land-ice sheets system, seriously endangering future generations, and nature's life-support systems."

They continue, "Our concern is based on the scientific peer-reviewed literature as summarised by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and on observations by the world's national science academies and geophysical research societies of leading nations, including Australia."

They warn, "At the current emission rate, carbon dioxide concentration would rise to about 480 parts per million by 2055, threatening the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets and approaching conditions that existed on the planet about 2.6 million years ago, before the appearance of the genus *Homo*."

The CPA proposes some of basic steps that need to be taken to confront the looming disaster:

- Develop a national energy plan, with legislated timetables and targets, for transition to an ecologically sustainable energy system;
- Nationalisation of Australia's electricity generation, distribution and supply infrastructure;
- Massively invest in research and development of alternative renewable energy resources under public ownership. Transfer of government subsidies from the fossil and nuclear sectors to energy efficiency and renewable energy and conversion programs;
- Make energy efficiency and conservation key determinants of urban planning and central to government economic and industry policy.

The need to act is urgent. The crisis is already causing immense human suffering and death, while diminishing resources threaten global peace and security.

Torture charges

A UN Special Rapporteur on Torture report has confirmed the Abbott government's mistreatment of asylum seekers. The report showed the government has been breaching global anti-torture conventions. PM Abbott, in response, said that the country was "sick of being lectured to by the United Nations". The first thing to be noted about that is now Australia is no longer on the UN Security Council the government has returned to its UN bashing.

As for his claim in the same response that "we have stopped the boats, and by stopping the boats we have ended the deaths at sea": what he doesn't say is that the boat arrivals simply go or are taken elsewhere. Rather than stopping deaths at sea he is placing deaths elsewhere. Abbott doesn't say where the boats have gone, just that for all appearances they have stopped coming to Australia.

As human rights lawyer Julian Burnside put it last week: "It is a matter of profound regret to see where the country is being taken by a man whose defining characteristics are bullying and dishonesty."

PRESS FUND

Two weeks ago the Abbott government hosted a function in a men's only club to commemorate International Women's Day! Not content with that, last week the PM claimed that people lived in remote Aboriginal communities as a "lifestyle choice", rather than because of their deep ancestral connection to the land. Forcing Aboriginal people off their country through the cessation of funding would certainly be good news for the mining industry. This week will doubtless bring us another crass insult – or another blundering revelation of the government's real political agenda. But in the meantime the Press Fund needs all the help it can get, so please send us something for the next issue if you possibly can. Many thanks to the following contributors for their support this week:

Mark Mannion \$5, KM \$10, John Hodgson \$10, Robert \$10, Iranian Comrades \$10

This week's total \$45 Progressive total: \$1,735

Increased US aggression against Venezuela

Statement Communist Party of Australia

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) condemns in the strongest possible terms the increased aggression being shown by the US administration towards the democratically elected government of Venezuela. US President Obama's statement that Venezuela presents a "threat to US interests and foreign policy" deserves, and has received, the unequivocal rejection of those who are familiar with the domestic achievements and the regional role of the government of Venezuela since 1998. The CPA calls on the Australian government to use its relationship with the US to dissuade it from its current belligerent course.

In spite of US interference,

including an economic blockade, the coordination of opposition groups to cause havoc and hardship to the point of plotting coups against the legitimate government of the country, Venezuela has made impressive progress during its Bolivarian Revolution. The lives of previously excluded people have improved markedly. The health and education indicators for the population don't lie. Present difficulties have not shaken support for the revolution and "no volverán!" – they (the former ruling elites) shall not return – is a popular slogan among the people.

Venezuela's role in Latin America, its pursuit of integration and economic relations on the basis of mutual benefit, stands in stark contrast to that of the US. Successive

US administrations have manipulated the political processes of countries in Latin America and sought to chain their economies to exploitative "free trade" agreements. Venezuela has joined a long list of governments targeted for "regime change" for defending its sovereignty and the well-being of its people. The CPA adds its voice to the millions across the globe saying "hands off Venezuela!"

Long live the Bolivarian Revolution!

Chávez lives on!!

Bob Briton
General Secretary
Communist Party of Australia

NSW Elections 2015

Throw out the privatisers!

The Communist Party of Australia calls on NSW voters to reject the Baird government's privatisation plans on March 28. The Liberal/National government is trying to lure NSW citizens with false promises of \$20 billion to fix infrastructure to be paid for by privatising the poles and wires of the state-owned electricity industry.

The CPA is implacably opposed to privatisation. The utilities and services privatised by previous ALP and Coalition governments ultimately benefit the wealthy (the top one percent) and are paid for through higher charges and poorer services for the great majority of NSW residents, especially the working class and marginalised groups like pensioners. Revenue from the poles and wires brings \$1.7 billion per year for public health, education and other services. Privatisation will mean this annual income is lost for 90 years.

The ALP's change of heart over privatisation is welcome but caution is needed. Trade union pressure was clearly influential here but this was not a decision on principle. Significantly ALP leader Luke Foley stated that he was "not an ideologue on privatisation" – a position that

was enough for South Coast Labour Council Secretary Arthur Rorris to decide to run as an independent in the election.

The fact that this Labour Council head has broken from the ALP is a welcome development. Australia needs a grassroots welling up for real change and the development of an electoral alliance with the working class as its primary focus and culled from a community and union coalition. We wish Arthur Rorris good luck and urge voters in the Wollongong area to give him their number 1 vote on March 28.

The NSW electoral system is still riddled with opportunities for rich vested interests to influence how this state is run. Both major parties still have the smell of corruption hanging over them. It is important that people insist that Parliament be run for the benefit of all and that the MPs we elect ensure there is a fair distribution of the wealth of this rich state. The ALP is claiming that it has "changed" from the bad old days of Obeid and others.

The Greens have shown that their form of politics is clean and in stark contrast to the scandals of the major parties.

Labor and Liberals both have their hands on their hearts, promising relief from the housing stress suffered by so many people in NSW. The crisis reaches from the homeless to the well paid.

However, both the Coalition and the ALP rely on the market and the private sector to solve the problem. This neo-liberal approach to economic and social issues is typical of both Liberal and Labor policies. They reject the effective positive solution of concentrating on providing a massive increase in public housing.

There are many challenges in NSW but they will not be dealt with by any pro business party, whether Liberal or Labor. The Communist Party calls on its members and supporters to work and vote for your local Green, Socialist Alliance or progressive independent in both the lower and upper houses. Do not be fooled by any of the right-wing minor parties like the Shooters and Fishers or the Christian Democrats.

On March 28, vote for Green, progressive independent or Socialist Alliance candidates, followed by a vote for the ALP and put the Liberals last. ☘



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"Lifestyle choices" - the "gaff" that says it all

Bob Briton

Prime Minister Abbott's contemptuous statement that Aboriginal Australians were exercising a taxpayer-funded "lifestyle choice" by living in remote communities has outraged and disappointed many. Even hand-picked Indigenous affairs advisers, Warren Mundine and Noel Pearson, have weighed into the condemnation of the PM's glib aside, made during an ABC Radio interview in Kalgoorlie last week.

"That is a complete misconception of what it is and he's wrong in that regard," Mr Mundine said. "It's not about a lifestyle, it's not like retiring and moving for a sea change. It is about thousands of connection, their religious beliefs and the essence of who they are."

Mr Pearson didn't spare Abbott's feelings, either. "For this debate to be conducted in such an off-the-cuff manner through policy thought bubbles is, I think, a disgraceful turn of events," he said. The "debate" referred to is around the Barnett

government's closure of up to 150 remote Aboriginal communities in WA as a result of the removal of Commonwealth funding.

The WA experience is set to be replicated across the country because the PM's comments weren't a "thought bubble" or a "gaff" in the sense of being an error. They reveal a plan that has been a long time in development.

Abbott, the self-proclaimed Prime Minister for Indigenous Australians, has defended his comments saying that he is proud to have "run the country" from North-East Arnhem Land last year. Symbolism can't hide the underlying agenda. Last July, he made another "gaff" saying that, prior to European occupation in 1788, Sydney and its surrounds were "bush" - empty land crying out for "settlement" and "development".

Abbott's latest comments reveal an impatience on the part of those wanting unfettered access to resources in remote areas of the country. Warren Mundine noted that removal to under-serviced townships already

suffering high unemployment would exacerbate social problems and create new ones for displaced Aboriginal communities.

It would also make it hard to maintain their connection to the land; to defend their scant land rights. Mundine insists there are ways to preserve remote communities but the government is not interested. It wants a new *terra nullius* - a land without people so as to allow free rein for exploitation by transnational resource sector corporations.

A related initiative the federal government would like to progress is the development of northern Australia - a belt across the top of the country where "The focus is on building priority roads, developing water resources, attracting more investment and reducing red tape," according to the PM. He was talking about a federal government blueprint for what is being described as the "next frontier" for economic development. The relevant document is due to be released by mid-year.

The Twiggy Forrests and Gina Rineharts of this world can hardly



Warren Mundine with the Prime Minister.

wait. It will be a land thrown open for plunder. Workers from all over the world will be flown in and flown out of this union-free territory. Land rights would be the first item of "red tape" to be torn up along with regulation and oversight of safety and environmental standards. "Awards", stripped bare or otherwise, would be dim memory.

Abbott's parliamentary colleagues rushed to his defence on this

occasion. According to them, the media were being "unfair" to the PM for simply raising issues that should be discussed. They probably realise that, as plans for the future exploitation of the country reach their implementation phase, somebody will have to announce the next major phase of the total dispossession of the Aboriginal people. The duty falling to the rest of us is to stop these reactionary plans. ✪

Concern for trapped workers

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) was concerned for the welfare of workers trapped on Barrow Island as they prepared for the arrival of Tropical Cyclone Olwyn.

More than 1,000 workers were stranded on Barrow Island, off the north-west coast of Australia, after the Chevron stuffed up plans to evacuate its workforce ahead of the arrival of the Category Three Cyclone.

ITF President Paddy Crumlin said many of these workers are now expected to sleep on blow-up mattresses on floors and in corridors in what appear to be sub-standard conditions.

"Chevron missed its window in evacuating workers who are now unnecessarily stranded on Barrow Island in the midst of a severe tropical cyclone," Mr Crumlin said.

"You've got to wonder why Chevron kept people working until

it was unsafe to evacuate them.

There needs to be a proper investigation into why this has happened because it is Chevron's fault that the workers are still there."

A support vessel for the Gorgon Project, the *Europa*, has done its best to avoid the cyclone but the union is being told the vessel has been battling eight metre swells.

An email from a Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) member says many onboard are sea sick and unable to leave their rooms.

"Half the staff are sick to their stomachs due to the outrageous weather conditions, the glass window shattered on the galley near the dining room, and the waves are nearly as big as half the boat," the email says.

"People are just getting weaker/sicker by the day and don't know how to react!"

Mr Crumlin said Chevron has mismanaged the Gorgon project

since its inception. "Gorgon is a multi-billion dollar project requiring thousands of workers on Barrow Island yet there is not enough accommodation to house the workers adequately in an emergency.

"Workers were left scared and confused and you really have to question Chevron's management of this entire episode.

"It's not the first time Chevron's management has been called into question - after all the Gorgon project is already 18 months late and more than \$17 billion over budget."

Mr Crumlin, who is also MUA national secretary, recently wrote a joint letter with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) to Chevron Chief Executive John Watson. An excerpt reads:

"We are writing to you directly because we are concerned about Chevron's Gorgon LNG Project in Western Australia. As you know,

this project is of high importance to our unions because it is a significant employer of our members who work in Western Australia.

"In your recent earnings conference call with analysts (January 30, 2015) Ed Westlake, an analyst from Credit Suisse, asked you: 'And then specifically Gorgon, you've kind of reiterated the timetable I mean can you give us any nuggets to give you confidence that we will get that first gas in Gorgon mid-year and the first LNG cargo this year?'"

"Mr Watson replied: 'We're monitoring very closely contractor performance and productivity on the Island we're working with the unions on contracts and industrial relations. We've been able to manage through those things fairly well and we're planning for a flawless start up commissioning and start-up process.'"

"As unions covering both the construction and maritime workers

on the project we don't believe that the response that you provided to Mr Westlake is correct.

In fact members were telling the unions that the ongoing industrial issues on the site were having an impact on the start-up process.

"We do not believe that Chevron's local managers and contractors are managing these issues effectively nor are they reporting them accurately to you.

"We understand that senior Chevron managers are expected to visit the project in the next month and we would like to make a formal offer to you for them to meet with us to discuss the outstanding industrial and project management issues on the project."

The letter was sent on February 6, 2015 and we are yet to receive a reply. ✪

Pete's Corner



Sydney

CPA Port Jackson Branch

invites comrades and friends to join us for our

Port Jackson Discussion Hour

Tuesday 7 April 5:30pm

World War I and the Russian Revolution

Introduced by Comrade Denis

Tuesday 21 April 5:30pm

What's wrong with the ANZAC commemoration?

Introduced by Comrade Denis

Tuesday 5 May 5:30pm

Where did Australian manufacturing go & why?

Introduced by Comrade Stratos

Tuesday 19 May 5:30pm

Why you should be afraid of the TPP

Introduced by Comrade Stratos

All classes are held at 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills

Enquiries: Hannah 0418 668 098

Taking Issue - Steven Katsineris

Political/business elite rule in Indonesia

My family and I have never been to Bali or the rest of Indonesia and don't intend to travel there until the country undergoes considerable real change. Despite the tentative moves towards a more democratic Indonesia, the same powerful, corrupt Javanese military and ex-military political/business elite controls and represses the country. The vast majority of people live in poverty and the small educated and privileged few exploit them and the nation. So essentially the mindset of the ruling elite is unchanged and the system that supports them remains intact.

Indonesia is supposed to have a new liberal leadership with the election of new president Joko Widodo, the first president to be elected from outside the Javanese military/political elite. But the Australian public in the furor over the fate of two the Australians and others facing execution are getting a glimpse of the stance of Widodo (and other influential Indonesian leaders) on human rights, justice and compassion.

Of all the areas of Indonesia, West Papua, the richest resource region is suffering the most, with the people there getting the least social and economic benefits and the West Papuans living under a brutal Indonesian army occupation. West Papua has the world's largest copper and gold mines, but with corruption and injustice rife the West Papuans endure poverty and inequality while the wealthy Javanese elite and foreign companies are further enriched.

The minerals, rainforests and other resources of West Papua are being exploited with negligible benefits to the local people and resulting in pollution, deforestation and destruction of wildlife and habitat. The main beneficiaries of the resources wealth are Indonesia, USA and Australia.

In 1961, West Papua was promised independence from their former Dutch

(Netherlands) colonial rulers, but Indonesia wanted to take over the country to get access to the vast mineral and timber resources of West Papua. The USA forcibly pressured the Netherlands to give West Papua to Indonesia. Indonesia was eventually given interim control of the territory until West Papua's future was decided.

West Papuans were not consulted about this. The United Nations did promise the West Papuans they would have a say in determining their own destiny. What actually happened in 1969 was not a free referendum, but a so-called Act of Free Choice which was a farce. Indonesia selected 1,025 people and forced them at gun-point to vote for incorporation with Indonesia.

Since the invasion and occupation of West Papua the Indonesian army and police have carried out a policy of slow systematic genocide against the Indigenous West Papuans. Before the Indonesian invasion the native West Papuans were 98% of the population, today they are only 48%. It is estimated that 500,000 West Papuans have been killed or have disappeared since the Indonesian invasion. Indonesian military and police carry out regular operations in the rural areas which result in houses being burnt and civilian villagers being terrorised, beaten, tortured and killed.

Many West Papuan leaders and activists have been killed or are being held as political prisoners for engaging in peaceful protests or other acts of resistance and even for raising their voices against Indonesian oppression. Some are serving 15 years in prison for merely hoisting their people's flag, The Morning Star. While others have been shot and killed or cruelly tortured for this action.

Bali is the regional headquarters of the military operations for West Papua. While oppression, gross human rights abuses and atrocities continue in West Papua people of conscience should not holiday in Bali or the rest of Indonesia or buy products made there. This may



President Joko Widodo – behind the sham democracy the old Javanese fascist and feudal military regime is still the real power in Indonesia.

unfortunately affect some ordinary Balinese and other Indonesians, but it will mainly impact the privileged few of the Javanese political/military/business elite who (with the large foreign corporations) dominate business operations and who gain the most from exploiting the resources of West Papua. They also own most of the hotels, airlines, travel agencies, other tourism ventures and commerce in Bali and elsewhere in Indonesia.

The Indonesian army also operates legal enterprises and illegal businesses, either by itself or through criminal gangs with military connections from timber logging and tourism, to alcohol, gambling, drugs, protection rackets and prostitution.

Behind the sham democracy the old Javanese fascist and feudal military regime is still the real power in Indonesia. And as long as its reactionary policies dominate the country nothing will really change in Indonesia. As was the case in South Africa, East Timor, Burma, etc, pressure and actions from outside did play a role in supporting and encouraging fundamental change.

The West Papuan people continue to struggle against oppression and for freedom and independence and deserve support. Our actions in speaking up on this vital issue and exposing the oppressive situation that exists in West Papua can play a constructive part in helping to promote genuine change there. ✪

Legal services face funding cuts threat

Rudi Maxwell

If the federal government refuses to reinstate funding, Aboriginal legal services will be forced to wind back dramatically, including closing the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS).

Calls to reinstate funds to Aboriginal legal services have come from all seven state and territory attorneys-general, the Australian Bar Association, the Australian Council of Social Services, the federal opposition and the Greens.

NATSILS chief executive Eddie Cubillo told the *Koori Mail* that

without more funds the peak body would have to shut in June.

"There have been numerous independent reports – including from the Productivity Commission and the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report – that highlight the desperate need for more money in the sector, but they've been ignored," he said.

The Abbott government has cut more than \$13 million from the Aboriginal legal sector. NATSILS unsuccessfully applied for funding under the government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

"We've had to cease policy reform work and, while the

government claims the cuts wouldn't affect frontline services, they have," Mr Cubillo said.

The Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) NSW/ACT has launched a petition calling on the Prime Minister to reverse the funding cuts of nearly 20 percent.

ALS NSW/ACT chief executive Phil Naden said the cuts will have damaging effects on Aboriginal families, particularly children.

"Everything we do at the ALS is frontline, so a 20% cut to our annual budget is a 20% cut to our frontline services," he said. "We're a not-for-profit organisation running on a shoestring budget and, compared to other legal services, we are underfunded."

Mr Naden said cuts to services will have "terrible ramifications" for Aboriginal children, parents and carers. "Every day in Australia some 40 Aboriginal children are removed from their families, and now there's over 15,000 Aboriginal children sitting in out-of-home care," he said.

"Life after removal is not always a happy ending. Evidence shows a large cohort of those kids who were removed end up in the juvenile justice system, and then adult jail.

"Not only are we experiencing rates of child removal faster than at any time during the Stolen Generation, we're also determining a path for so many of these kids which is straight into the criminal justice system.

"ALS frontline services are there for those kids. We operate a care and protection practice that fights to keep children and families together.

"We run a family law practice that works with families and the best interests of the child. We run a criminal law practice that helps divert young people from the juvenile justice system and adults from entering prison. If the ALS is cut, more kids will be taken away and more of those kids will end up in detention and then prison."

All seven state and territory attorneys-general have reportedly written to their federal counterpart George Brandis about the government's cuts. Their letter is said to call on Senator Brandis to guarantee no further funding reductions would be made to the Legal Aid Commission, community legal centres, and the Aboriginal Legal Service.

The Prime Minister's Parliamentary Secretary, Alan Tudge, told Sky News the government had an

"absolute commitment" to providing funding for frontline legal aid services for vulnerable people. He said the government was reconfiguring how legal services organisations were funded.

"Instead of the Commonwealth funding them directly, we will fund them via the state governments," Mr Tudge said.

Greens spokesperson for legal affairs Penny Wright said NATSILS advocacy was crucial to addressing shocking levels of Indigenous incarceration.

"More than one in four prisoners are Aboriginal, despite making up only a fraction of our population," she said. "Too many are in jail because of inadequate legal understanding and representation.

"These cuts demonstrate an appalling lack of concern about shameful over-incarceration of Aboriginal people. Without the national coordination, advocacy and frontline assistance NATSILS provides, I believe we will see imprisonment rates rise even further."

Mr Cubillo said he would like to see politicians take heed of the independent reports into Aboriginal legal services and come and speak to the people working in the sector. *Koori Mail* ✪

Sydney

Millers Point: Community or Commodity?

A documentary screening and forum

State Parliament House – Theatre

Thursday March 19, from 11am to 1pm

It is almost a year since the State Government announced its plan to sell the public housing in Millers Point, Dawes Point and the Rocks. To mark this, there will be an event to engage politicians, the media and general public with the sale. Director Blue Lucine and producers Tom Zubrycki & Helen Barrow have been making a documentary about the sale since March last year. They will be screening a preview section of the documentary as a work in progress, to stimulate conversation.

Film reviews by Jim Lane

Birdman, Turner, McFarland USA

The Academy Award Best Picture-winning movie, *Birdman*, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, is a pretentious movie about pretentious people. In fact, the tension between the different characters develops from accusations of pretentiousness against one another. There is the pretentious former movie star who decides to produce and star in a Broadway play that explains all about love, playing off against the Broadway star who admits to being a phoney in all things except his stage performances. Suffering from all this pretentiousness are the producer's daughter, girlfriend, and ex-wife, plus the Broadway star's ambitious girlfriend.

Michael Keaton, usually one of the most dynamic of screen characters, plays a delusional and melancholy has-been who once was famous for playing in a series about a comic-book character named Birdman. The inside joke is that Keaton was effective, years ago, in one of the better Batman movies. He even uses his Batman voice. Edward Norton, who usually exploits his excellent ability to play many-layered characters, plays the shallow Broadway star.

The film interrupts the talky scene-by-scene narrative with animated comic book movie scenes, to show how delusional Keaton's character has become.

My movie buddy and I didn't really mind seeing a movie about pretentious people, but we felt that the entire movie was pretentious. Why were we supposed to care about the broken-down movie star, either about his artistic success or about his love life?

One of his main decisions has to do with mortgaging his house in Malibu. Should we care what he does with his house in Malibu? If the movie has a message or a point, it is something about how difficult it is for artsy people, and how far they will go, to find some foundation for their continuing pretentiousness.

Also features Emma Stone, Naomi Watts, and Zach Galifianakis.

Mr Turner, written and directed by Mike Leigh, isn't about Mr JMW Turner. It's a 150-minute period piece, but it's not directly about the period in which Turner lived and painted his famous seascapes.

It isn't that Turner wasn't pretty interesting. His dalliances with his housekeeper and his probably bigamous married life were interesting enough. It was quite nice to see actor Timothy Spall interpret the painter's interest in his contemporaries and his devotion to his craft. At one point, he has himself tied in the crow's nest of a sailing ship so he can experience a storm firsthand. His work was sometimes controversial, too. One of his paintings depicted a storm in which seamen on a slave ship are throwing their living cargo overboard!

JMW Turner painted when painting was at its apex. It was the best possible, almost the only, way to reproduce what people saw. During the movie, Turner himself goes to see an early camera – he calls it “the contraption” – and likes it well enough to have a couple of daguerreotypes made. The movie thus puts us on notice that, as far as simple visual reproductions go, painting was starting to slip behind.

I don't think I've ever seen such interesting period settings or costuming. The mid-19th century outfits really stand out. And that brings me to what *Mr Turner* is really about: It's in the cinematography, artfully presented by Dick Pope. Pope brings us some of the same sea scenes that Turner painted, landscapes that are breathtaking and, on the big screen, visual impressions that are far beyond what a 19th-century painter, or any painter, might have hoped for.

My movie buddy and I didn't go to see *Mr Turner* because we are interested in painting, although those interested in art history would like it. We went because we are interested in movies, and director Mike Leigh has never let us down. He is the master of the best modern art methods today, just as Turner was the master of what was available in visual art in his own time. It's a movie for moviegoers and it's about art. Features

Dorothy Atkinson as Turner's faithful housekeeper.

McFarland USA, directed by Niki Caro, at 128 minutes, is more than sports and Kevin Costner. My movie buddy wanted to see it, frankly, because Kevin Costner is in it. She's never missed a Costner film. For my part, I can't remember being disappointed in one. We knew from the trailers that Costner plays yet another over-the-hill sports figure as he did in, for instance, *Tin Cup* and *Bull Durham*. We knew from the trailers that he was going to coach a winning cross-country running team. We were happy with those expectations and glad, when the movie was over, to see our expectations fulfilled.

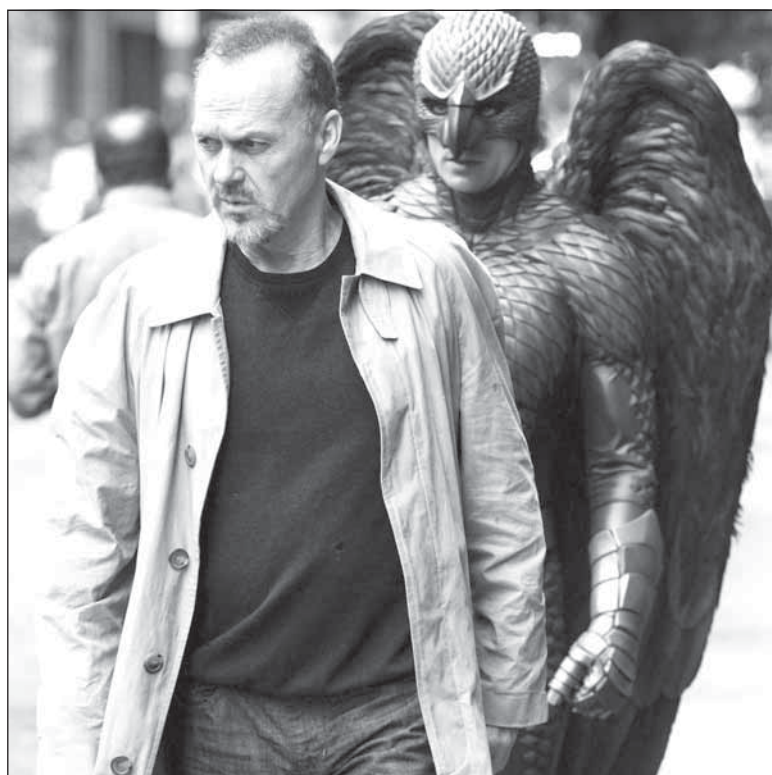
But *McFarland USA* has quite a bit more to offer. It isn't just an old high-school coach, near the end of his career, who takes on a near-impossible project. It's also a white guy, with no experience in culture clashes and no direct interest in overcoming them, thrown into a different world. McFarland, in central California's agricultural lands, is a town where pickers live. The pickers, including high schoolers, rise before dawn to work in the fields. At school time, they hurry into town. After school, they rush back to the fields.

Hardly any of the boys know anyone who went beyond the ninth grade. Whatever academic ambitions they might have entertained are eroded away from them by hot, sweaty field work. Whatever regard or trust they might have had toward their teachers has long been replaced with deep, bitter cynicism. They call Costner's character, Coach Jim White, “White,” or “Blanco.” They barely, if at all, listen to his responses.

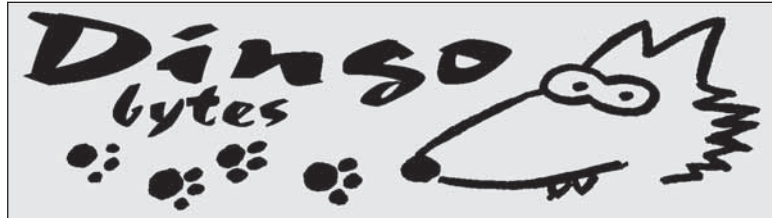
It's that distrust and cynicism that Coach White, a real guy who carries his own baggage, has to overcome. He also has to deal with his own fear of the strange new culture that he and his family are thrown into.

Of course he succeeds all around. We knew that from the trailers. But how he does it, that's what's especially good and worth a high recommendation, for *McFarland USA*.

People's World 🗳



Birdman, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu.



“It's a very strategic site with good opportunities for urban renewal,” said Mike Baird the NSW premier referring to the Powerhouse Museum. It's an extremely crude attempt for a land grab in the heart of Sydney. The Powerhouse Museum has been in Ultimo since 1893. Moving it to Parramatta as suggested by Mike Baird is to deprive the city of one of its visitors' attractions and an important educational centre for children. There is nothing wrong with building a facility in Parramatta to display the many exhibits that are now in storage. The proposed closure has not been widely and openly discussed. There is no mention of what is going to happen to the existing heritage-listed building either. It is “a very strategic” site and it should remain so for the enjoyment of the people of Sydney, not for the profiteering by developers.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has spent more than \$250 million on private military contractors to protect high risk diplomatic posts, such as embassies in Kabul and Baghdad. One of the main reasons why the Australian government employs mercenaries was “to outsource much of the risk associated with running a large team prepared to use lethal force against a local attack”, according to former Australian army officer and analyst at the Lowy Institute for International Affairs James Brown. “Security contractors are responsible for their own insurance, and if a contractor is injured it is the company and not DFAT that bears responsibility of providing medical aid, evacuation and ongoing rehabilitation,” Brown said.

Outsourcing government responsibilities seems to be the name of the game. Recently Fiji PM Frank Bainimarama sharply criticised Australia for resettling asylum seekers in the Pacific – “outsourcing its human rights responsibilities” was how Mr Bainimarama described it. Four hundred people were released from detention centre into the community. Trying to survive in a hostile environment without any support is a huge challenge for anybody, let alone asylum seekers who had been traumatised by their experience. Nauru authorities arrested 200 of them for organising a protest. The population of Nauru is about 10,000 people. The number of asylum seekers in the detention centre there was 996 in November 2014. Nauru is getting money from Australia to keep asylum seekers there. It's a poor nation which can hardly support its own population. Dumping displaced people fleeing war and persecution there who are not able to support themselves because Australia does not want to fulfil its international obligations is a crime.

Fracking in Oklahoma, USA, has led to a huge increase in earthquakes. The number of perceptible earthquakes increased from an average of two each year to 567 last year – an increase of 28,250 percent between 2009 when fracking began and last year. Something to think about.



McFarland USA, directed by Niki Caro.

State of the nation

An address given at the Melbourne Unitarian Church by **Marion Harper**, honorary Secretary Melbourne Unitarian Church, January 18, 2015

"Although we give lip service to the notion of freedom, we know that government is no longer the servant of the people but, at last, has become the people's master. We have stood by like timid sheep while the wolf killed – first the weak, then the strays, then those on the outer edges of the flock, until at last the entire flock belonged to the wolf."

Gerry Spence – lawyer and author
Source: *From Freedom*

So Slavery so what are our freedoms? What is the state of our nation? It is a state of extreme corruption, manipulation of information, lies, lack of compassion, excessive greed on a massive scale both in government and without, and all this from the big end of town. Those in power are happy to bomb nations out of existence but can't build a sustainable society. They can find money for destruction but not for construction. They prefer dirty, profitable coal to clean green energy. They worship at the altar of private and belittle anything public.

They admire the rich and famous and condemn the impoverished and the homeless. We are a fractured society, of minor wealthy and major poor. In Australia and around the world we have widespread austerity. Austerity is not the product of a deficient grasp of macroeconomics or a failure of "social dialogue": it is a conscious blueprint for expanding corporate power. The program has been practised and refined for decades in the developing world everywhere, with similarly disastrous results.

In Australia it has led to poverty, huge and growing unemployment and unacceptable levels of homelessness. Universities have become businesses instead of places of free and academic learning. Taxpayer-funded services, such as gas, electricity, telephone and water, essential to our wellbeing, built and owned by the people, have been privatised to benefit mainly foreign companies, thus priced out of the economic reach of many people. Our highly valued health care system, based on the principles of equal access regardless of income, is being slowly but deliberately eroded.

Leaners and lifters

Government spends our money recklessly on wars that we should not be involved in, denies global warming, destroys our environment, signs "free" trade agreements that are detrimental to our whole community and sells off our birthright, wastes huge amounts of our tax dollars on self-interest and lifestyle while accusing the majority – the creators of all wealth – of being leaners not lifters.

In 2011 the Prime Minister, this good

Christian man, a man who aspired to becoming a priest, made a public statement prior to his election:

"It is an absolute principle of democracy that governments should not and must not say one thing before an election and do the opposite afterwards. Nothing could be more calculated to bring our democracy into disrepute and alienate the citizenry of Australia from their government than if governments were to establish by precedent that they could say one thing before an election and do the opposite afterwards."

Tony Abbott, August 22, 2011

This is a government of liars, cheats and corrupt individuals who treat the electorate with contempt. You will remember that prior to the election of this discredited government, *Beacon* published a "wish list" that was compiled at a prestigious dinner organised by the very right-wing Institute of Public Affairs (IPA). Present at this expensive dinner were the moguls of big business and media. Indeed, guests of honour (or dis-honour) at the dinner, for those of you who don't read *Beacon*, were Rupert Murdoch, Gina Rinehart and, of course, Tony Abbott, prime minister in waiting. It was chaired by media hack Andrew Bolt. I don't recall any other organisation or the media exposing that wish list as fully as this church did, yet it is this wish list that provides the basis for the policies that the Abbott government are committed to.

This cabal of powerful business, media and corporates, like children running wild in a lolly shop, gleefully promoted their personal interests and demands into this wish list that was to be the Liberal Party charter. (Payment for their help in the election: why not? They were the very forces that funded Abbott's campaign, and the Murdoch media propaganda machine conned a large section of the community into voting for him.)

Wish list

There were some 75 "wishes", some of which have already been implemented, some temporarily or permanently thwarted in the Senate, and some still waiting to be introduced. This list should be mandatory reading for everyone as a clear demonstration of both the power of the corporates to control governments and their disdain for the needs of the majority of Australians.

Of course we have moved on since the publishing of that list, and as you will all know, the list was followed by the government's so-called "independent" Audit, again prepared by representatives of the corporates and again to con us into believing that if our country was not to sink financially their agenda must be implemented in full. They insisted on savage cuts to the social program, to a campaign to destroy the trade union movement by falsely claiming it was riddled with corruption and to implement the plunder of every service required for a

decent life for the people (services not provided by grateful governments, but fought for by past generations of workers through the trade union movement).

Money was always readily available, of course, to allow government to embark on another abortive costly war in Iraq and Syria and to continue to subsidise their conglomerate mates.

So, it would seem that in fact we are really governed by an extreme right-wing cabal, organised by the IPA.

So who is the IPA?

My investigation found that the IPA is indeed a right-wing, corporate-funded think tank based in Melbourne. It has close links to the Liberal Party of Australia, with its executive director John Roskam having run for Liberal Party preselection for a number of elections. Following the 2007 federal election defeat for the Liberal Party, *The Australian* journalist Christian Kerr noted that a new group of federal Liberal politicians were "receiving support from former Howard government staffer John Roskam" at the IPA.

The IPA key policy positions include: advocacy for privatisation and deregulation; attacks on the positions of unions and non-government organisations; support for assimilationist Indigenous policy (cf. the Bennelong Society), and refutation of the science involved with environmental issues such as climate change. It is a non-profit company. It has a restricted membership of 54 people. It was established in 1943 by GJ Coles and a group of businessmen based in Melbourne who appointed Charles Kemp as its first director. From the outset it had close ties to the Liberal Party under its leader Robert Menzies. Australian journalist Paul Kelly argues that the IPA's CD Kemp was "probably the principal architect of the original Menzies platform". Throughout the 1980s the IPA's primary focus was on issues such as economic policy, privatisation and industrial relations policy. It dabbled in a few broader issues, such as the role of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the role of churches in public policy debates. It wasn't until 1989 that the IPA began to pay any sustained interest to environmental issues. Since then it has campaigned against the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, promoted the use of genetically engineered crops and defended the logging of native forests.

Failing people

So what is the "state of our nation" resulting from the biased wish list and the Abbott government's compliance with what is the corporates personal constituency? It would be a foolhardy person who would disagree that this country nationally and internationally is failing its people and their needs in a way never seen before and removing or cutting essential programs and whittling away our democratic processes at a faster rate than has ever happened historically.



Public outrage over the budget has been long and sustained and we can be proud that we played no small role in this. However, the fight is not yet over and these campaigns must be maintained and strengthened because politicians believe they have time on their side.

It is no coincidence that the budget was preceded by a meticulously planned campaign to discredit the union movement – a fundamental ally of working people. Aided by the reactionary Murdoch media, the Abbott government has painted an extremely false picture of "corruption" in the union movement, suggesting the whole union movement is tainted when, like the Liberal Party, the Labor Party, big business and the banks, there are some varying degrees of corruption that need to be removed like a cancer.

However, there is no plan for a royal commission into corruption in the banks, among many politicians, the housing industry and other sectors of big business. Their practice of contracts for friends worth billions, kickbacks, spending taxpayers' money on a champagne lifestyle, tax evasion, privatisation to enrich their mates, secrecy about how they spend our taxes, refusal to acknowledge the environmental crisis, are all far more

For international peace and security

Statement by Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba at the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, March 3

Mr President:

Seventy years ago, the United Nations Organisation proclaimed the purpose of maintaining international peace and security and promoting friendly relations among nations based on the respect for the principles of equal sovereignty and self-determination of peoples.

However, in 2013 the world military expenditures increased to the astronomical figure of US\$1.75 trillion dollars, while the survival of humankind is continuously jeopardised by the existence of more than 16,000 nuclear weapons.

The millions that are being spent on weapons should be destined to promote peace,

economic and social development and a decent life for all human beings.

The issues related to disarmament, which are the subject matter of this important Conference, are of an utmost importance and demand greater attention.

The "International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons" was first commemorated on September 26 last.

Cuba welcomes the broad international support given to that initiative and reiterates the words pronounced by Fidel Castro Ruz, the historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, when he said, and I quote: "In a nuclear war, the collateral damage would be the life of humankind ... Each and every government in the world has the obligation to respect the right to life of each and every nation ... Peoples have an obligation to demand of their political leaders their right to live ... nobody can afford to be indifferent; not one minute can be lost in demanding

respect for that right; tomorrow will be too late ... It is high time for the world ... to choose the path towards peace", end of quote.

Nuclear disarmament cannot be a goal whose achievement is continuously postponed. We denounce the role that nuclear weapons play in the security doctrines, policies and strategies as well as the threat to use them. We likewise demand respect for the inalienable right of States to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

During the First Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament in 1978, member States entrusted this forum with the mandate of negotiating multilateral treaties in the field of disarmament. This Conference has not fulfilled that mandate with regard to nuclear disarmament. Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which very clearly establishes the obligation to negotiate

nuclear disarmament in good faith has not been complied with.

Concrete actions are required to achieve the nuclear-free world we all hope for. The Non-Aligned Countries Movement submitted a proposal that was adopted by the UN General Assembly, calling for the beginning of urgent negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament aimed at the prompt adoption of a comprehensive Convention about nuclear weapons, which would ban the possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, threat or use of nuclear weapons and stipulate their destruction.

The Conference on Disarmament should urgently adopt a comprehensive and balanced working program that takes into account the real priorities related to disarmament. It is important for this forum not to give in to the lack of political will of a few countries.

If this Conference on Disarmament were to fulfil its mandate, it could decisively



pervasive and dangerous to the community than a few alleged crooks in the trade union movement.

But these are whitewashed while the trade union issues are highlighted daily in the media. Indeed, as an example if you need one, in *The Age* (25/11/2014) there was a feature article from Peter Reith, former notorious workplace relations minister in the Howard government, accusing the now Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews of being under the thumb of the CFMEU that he referred to in the media as “a union of thuggery, intimidation and links to unsavoury individuals”.

Peter Reith and his mates are an authority on thuggery, intimidation and links to unsavoury individuals. Cast your minds back to the MUA dispute of 1998 where Reith organised thugs with balaclavas and dogs to confront wharfies to “intimidate” them in their struggle for their jobs and their future. Thuggery and intimidation in full, Reith and his Liberal government had close links with “unsavoury individuals” from Patrick [stevedoring]. The waterside union had a proud record of defending members from appalling exploitation and an even prouder record of supporting the needs of the wider community.

This became apparent with the extraordinary display of comradeship and support from the many thousands of ordinary Melbournians who descended on the wharf to support the wharfies. My lasting memory is of being there with my family and watching with anger as the mounted police rode toward us to remove us, when behind those representatives of the state marched 500 hardhat-wearing CFMEU members, not thugs, to support their fellow unionists whose only crime was struggling to maintain their jobs. The police were forced to retreat. Nobody will ever destroy my faith in the union movement.

Unsavoury individuals

Our nation state is in the hands of unsavoury individuals – many politicians who do not hesitate when it comes to lies, misinformation and introducing brutal policies that affect the most vulnerable in our community in order to increase the power and profits of their mates. The treatment of people seeking asylum – this is the real thuggery. Corruption among politicians, corporations and individuals has been publicly exposed, but like icebergs, what lies below the surface unexposed is far greater than the little we have become aware of.

contribute to break the status quo and get rid of the paralysis of the disarmament machinery that only benefits the powerful.

The Conference on Disarmament is prepared to negotiate several issues at the same time, including a treaty that eliminates and prohibits nuclear weapons; another that prohibits the arms race in outer space; another that offers effective security guarantees to those States like Cuba which do not have nuclear weapons; as well as a treaty that prohibits the production of fissile material required for the manufacturing of nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices, which would also comprise nuclear stocks.

All the Conference members should take on the commitment to contribute to the success of the United Nations High Level International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament to be held in 2018 at the latest.

Mr President:

The official proclamation of the Latin

American and Caribbean Region as a Zone of Peace at the Second Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) held in Havana in January of 2014 marked a historical milestone. This proclamation emphasised the firm commitment of all CELAC member countries to the promotion of nuclear disarmament as a priority goal.

This Conference on Disarmament has the important responsibility of measuring up to the legitimate expectations of the international community and making a decisive contribution to international peace and security and the survival of the human species that is currently threatened by the existence of huge nuclear arsenals and climate change.

A new world order based on peace, human solidarity and social justice is indispensable.

Thank you, very much. ★

I have said before and I say again that Australia is a capitalist society and therefore a class society despite the efforts of both major parties to deny this. The struggle goes on between those who have power and those who don't, and if this struggle didn't occur, if there was no struggle to defend ourselves, we would be pushed back to the slave labour of Third World countries, which is exactly where this government would like to take us. The state of our nation is dire. The gap between the rich and the poor has never been wider and will continue to grow under these policies.

A new Oxfam survey has revealed a great and growing disparity between Australia's rich and poor. According to Oxfam's report “Still the Lucky Country?” the gap continues to grow as Australia's wealthiest were found to be not paying enough tax. Tax evasion by these conglomerates is rife, and while government gives lip service to the need to tackle it, very little is ever done. There is growing concern about the inequality in Australian society as a result of people who have “too much influence”. The report said Australia's wealthiest one percent is richer than 60 percent of the population. The nine richest people in Australia have a net worth equal to the entire bottom 20 percent of the nation. The state of our nation means that vast numbers of people, particularly young people, are either unemployed or underemployed.

Youth unemployment is particularly acute. The Brotherhood of St Laurence has released a new report on the growing scourge of youth unemployment and underemployment in Australia, which is at the worst level since records began in 1978 with more than 580,000 Australians aged 15 to 24 either underemployed or unemployed.

Today, young people are more likely to be underemployed – to have some work but want more hours – than at any time in the last 36 years ... There is an old saying that a country should be judged on its attitude to the young and the old, and on this basis our country should be judged harshly. Youth are being scrapped by this government and so are the elderly.

We live in a punitive society. We punish without looking at cause. We marginalise Aboriginals, Muslims, youth, the poor, and blame them for their position in our society. If our society provided affordable education, secure work, socially just programs, and if we didn't tie our foreign policy to greedy adventurist US wars, there would be less chance of our young people becoming antisocial or wanting to be involved in foreign wars.

State of the world

It is my view that the state of our nation is also the state of many nations of the world. That is because we truly do live in a global world exploited by such organisations as the World Bank and the IMF, manipulated by US imperialist forces in order to serve the interests of world capital. So please note that more than half the world, nearly 3 billion people, live on

less than \$2 per day. The GDP of the poorest 48 nations (a quarter of the world's countries) is less than the wealth of the world's three richest people combined. Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their name. The poorer the country, the more likely it is that debt repayments are being extracted directly from the people who neither contracted the loans nor received any of the money. The underdeveloped world now spends \$13 on debt repayment for every \$1 it receives in grants. Twenty percent of the population in the developed nations consume 86 percent of the world's goods. A few hundred millionaires now own as much wealth as the world's poorest 2.5 billion people. Approximately 790 million people in the developing world are still chronically undernourished, almost two-thirds of who reside in Asia, and they die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and conscience of the world. That is around 11 million children per year.

The issues of concern about the state of our nation and the world are so many that one talk simply cannot cover them all in one address, but I want to conclude with a statement from a much loved and well-read book, which is at the same time, a source of pride and a warning. That book is *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England* by Raymond V Holt. Holt concluded his book with the following statement that I believe can still teach us valuable lessons today.

“The 19th century almost to its close was a century of hope and those who lived in it found it easy to believe in progress. They knew what immense changes for the better had been made in it. They could point not only to the physical improvements in health and housing and the comforts of life, but to a better education, a higher degree of freedom and a sense of responsibility spread among millions who in previous centuries had no share at all in the shaping of their own lives. They could rejoice in an increasing humanitarianism in all aspects of life and they hoped for still better things to come.

“They even dreamed of a world in which the satisfaction of men's common needs by trade would lead to co-operation and not antagonism and make an end of war ... Men and women in the 20th century will try to solve their problems in their own way, but if they abandon those ideals of truth, liberty, humanity and democracy which animated the best minds of the 19th century, the time may come when the historians of the future will look back with longing on that century as in some ways a little oasis in the history of man. And as later generations painfully take up again the work of striving to create a society in which the head is held high and the mind is free, they will wonder why those who came before them lost their nerve and threw away the gains of centuries.”

Our task as Unitarians is to continue to take up that work in 2015.

The Beacon ★



Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba.

Venezuela

US sanctions condemned

Emile Schepers

On March 9 President Obama announced a “special state of emergency,” saying that the situation in Venezuela is one that represents an extraordinary danger to US interests and foreign policy. He also imposed sanctions on seven Venezuelan officials, claiming that they were complicit in repressing Venezuelan civil society and freedom of the press.

Worldwide, and within the United States also, this set off an epidemic of head scratching, as people tried to figure out how internal developments in Venezuela somehow represent a danger for the United States. In Latin America, the reaction was more intense, as leaders and ordinary citizens recalled past instances in which US interventions have led to “regime change” involving the deaths of thousands.

In the 19th century, the United States seized more than half of Mexico and all of Puerto Rico, plus the Guantánamo Bay area in Cuba. In the first half of the 20th century, US troops directly intervened in all of the countries of Central America, plus Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic and some South American countries. In these interventions peoples’ movements for democracy were crushed, dictators put in and propped up in power, and dissident leaders murdered, such as Augusto Cesar Sandino in Nicaragua and Charlemagne Peralte in Haiti.

The CIA-engineered the overthrow of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, set off decades of civil war in which at least 200,000 people, mostly poor Indigenous farmers, died. Multiple projects to destabilise Cuba began with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, including the disastrous Bay of Pigs adventure.

In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson ordered the invasion of the Dominican Republic to prevent a dictator from being overthrown by pro-democracy forces. In 1973 the US, after having done everything possible to destabilise the Chilean economy, backed a military

coup against Socialist Party President Salvador Allende which led to the death of at least 3,000 and the imprisonment or exile of tens of thousands.

In the 1970s, the US government collaborated in “Operation Condor” in which South American dictatorships carried out mass killings of dissidents. In the 1980s, US interventions in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras created more bloodbaths. The United States was complicit in coups in Venezuela (2002), Haiti (2004) and Honduras (2009).

In all of these interventions the purpose was to protect US corporations’ ability to exploit local populations and get hold of poor countries’ national resources. But always a pretext was proclaimed that the United States was defending human rights, democracy and good government. Today it’s “humanitarian intervention.”

So when this past week US State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki faced a press conference and claimed that the United States does not interfere in other countries’ internal affairs, she was met with incredulous responses from the reporters.

Reminded of past interventions, Psaki said it would be better not to get into history. But history happened and cannot be wished away. People in the United States are often unaware of this history, while people in Latin America are very acutely aware of it.

An appeal for support from Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro got an immediate positive response. Governments of Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador and Nicaragua, all linked to Venezuela through the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) issued support statements denouncing Obama’s announcement and especially the sanctions, as did Argentina and the People’s Republic of China, a major rival of the United States in South American trade.

Bolivian President Evo Morales expressed the views of the region when he said “We condemn, we repudiate, in the 21st century we



Commemoration of the second anniversary of the passing of President Hugo Chávez, Bolívar Square in Caracas, Venezuela, March 5. (Photo: Anna Pha)

will not accept this kind of intervention by the United States ... All of our solidarity, all of our support goes to President Maduro, and the revolutionary Bolivarian government and people of Venezuela.”

President Rafael Correa of Ecuador said, “It must be a bad joke, which reminds us of the darkest hours of our America, when we [suffered] invasions and dictatorships imposed by imperialism.”

UNASUR (The Union of South American Nations), which includes every independent country in South America, had already moved to help Venezuela by organising trade support to remedy some of the food scarcities which, along with inflation and dropping oil prices, are currently a source of disquiet. Also, UNASUR had assigned its Secretary General, former Colombian President Ernesto Samper, to talk to the Venezuelan government and its opponents for purposes of tension reduction. After Obama’s action, UNASUR passed a resolution condemning any outside intervention in

Venezuela’s internal affairs. UNASUR had a special emergency meeting on March 14.

Protests against Obama’s statement occurred in Venezuela and elsewhere, at a point at which the new US approach to Cuba had created some goodwill for a change. The Venezuelan government asked for, and got, passage of an enabling law to allow it to deal with any new security threat. At least part of the opposition in Venezuela hurriedly distanced itself from Obama’s proclamation. On April 10-12, Obama will have to face the hostility that this incident has created at the Summit of the Americas in Panama.

Some US officials are now seeming to say that they did not really mean that Venezuela represents an extraordinary threat to the United States, that this was legalistic language to make possible the imposition of sanctions on the Venezuelan officials, leading to more head scratching and quizzical looks.

People’s World ☛

Elections and Israeli apartheid

Ed Murray

Seven years ago, sitting in the office of a well-respected Israeli human rights group, a friend confided in me that he often wished his organisation failed more often. “That way,” he argued, “we might be closer to Mao’s principle that suffering of the people will hasten the revolution.”

I was shocked – two white, Western-educated and privileged men sitting in an office wishing more suffering on the Palestinian people was a deeply uncomfortable position. I’m sure that if you asked any of those suffering they would deem themselves as having endured more than enough injustice to hasten a multiplicity of revolutions. And they are correct.

But there is an essential truth in my friend’s observation: human beings respond only to crisis. Crisis forces us into action.

Anyone who has visited the occupied West Bank or Gaza Strip has seen the daily crisis for Palestinians. But for politicians who shift the status quo only under duress, the alarm bells have to be ringing loudly before they will act.

In a paper on campaign strategy,

Chris Rose, formerly a leading activist with Greenpeace, cites a 2000 study by Denis Loreti and Lori Peek in the *Journal of Hazardous Materials*. Loreti and Peek examine people’s response to warnings about nuclear power plants.

Their findings are fascinating. “People simply do not take action in response to warning messages as soon as they hear the first warning,” they write. “Instead, people seek more information about the impending hazard and appropriate responses from those they know personally, from the news media and from authorities.”

“People call friends, relatives and neighbours to find out what they plan to do, and they also turn on the radio and television to get more information. Unless there is a clear explanation of the need for an immediate response, they might wait for a second, third, or fourth official warning before responding.”

We’ve all been in a hotel or packed restaurant when the fire alarm is activated. Mostly we look at our companions, waiting for further instructions, perhaps complain about the noise or the lost sleep.

Very rarely do we immediately stand up and proceed towards the

nearest exit in an orderly fashion. The alarm bell itself is insufficient for us to act upon.

While this provides plenty of food for thought it also offers us a glimmer of hope: we shouldn’t consider an (as yet uncertain) victory for Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel’s general election just bad news. There may well be a silver lining.

Netanyahu’s attempt to shift the focus of Israeli voters from his failed domestic agenda on to the Iranian question has damaged US-Israeli relations seriously. Indeed, the US-Israeli relationship is now at its weakest since Dwight Eisenhower slapped the Israelis (and his British and French allies) on the wrist for their 1956 misadventure in the Suez Canal.

We should not be under the illusion that this damage is irreparable. After all, the US openly resupplied Israel with arms during the 2014 attack on Gaza.

However, Netanyahu’s ultra-belligerence leaves even the most pro-Israel of Western politicians with little room for moral equivocation.

Contrast this with the prospect of victory for Netanyahu’s electoral opponent, the Zionist Union bloc.

Victory for the Zionist Union will allow it to easily repair the damage to the US-Israeli relationship and present what appears to be an acceptable face of Israeli politics to the European public.

In turn this would allow Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni, the Zionist Union’s leaders, to resuscitate the endless peace process.

Since the Oslo accords, Israel has engaged in two decades of peace process theatre, where Palestinians are offered little but expected to sacrifice everything. This resulted in the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and a tighter noose around Gaza.

Tzipi Livni formerly served as chief Israeli negotiator with the Palestinian Authority and in 2010 Al Jazeera released documents known as The Palestine Papers which included meeting records between Livni and her Palestinian negotiating partners.

These leaked documents exposed Livni’s contempt for her opposite number and her determination to expand Israeli control, irrespective of the cost for Palestinians.

If Netanyahu is an ultra-belligerent then Herzog and Livni are “belligerence-lite.” Both have

supported Israel’s human rights violations against the Palestinians, from the apartheid wall in the West Bank to the various attacks against people in Gaza.

The Zionist Union’s election platform commits it to a continuation of the existing policies of siege on Gaza and expansion of the settlements across the West Bank. Ironically, given that the Zionist Union is fighting the Israeli election on the issue of a housing crisis inside Israel, no mention is made of repairing the damage done to thousands of homes destroyed in the latest offensive against Gaza.

On the other hand, Benjamin Netanyahu is increasingly the global face of the ugliest side of Israeli politics. Successive attacks against Gaza, sabre-rattling about the Iranian “threat” and coalescing with the ultra-right in Israel have all served to turn public – and elite – opinion further from Israel than ever before in both Europe and the US.

When the history books are written, we may find that Benjamin Netanyahu proved to be the loudest alarm bell of them all.

The Electronic Intifada ☛

Canada

Push to curb civil liberties

Tim Pelzer

VANCOUVER: Canadian conservatives aren't slowing down their steamroller attempt to impose legislation criminalising dissidents. The right-wing conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper used its majority in Parliament to end debate on Bill C-51 and pass it on February 23, a little more than three weeks after it was introduced on January 30. The Conservatives and Liberals voted in favour of Bill C-51 while the centre left New Democratic Party (NDP) opposition and the lone Green Member of Parliament voted against it.

The bill is now before the public safety committee where MPs are listening to public comments on Bill C-51 until the end of March. The NDP MPs have filibustered the committee to extend hearings on the legislation. The Conservatives want to limit hearings so it can be sent to the Senate where a Conservative majority will likely assure its passage. "This really is a reckless pace for such a sweeping piece of legislation that will drastically undermine age-old civil liberties. It's clear the Conservatives are moving at such breakneck speed in order to ram this through before opposition can make itself felt."

Open Media's David Christopher told the *Peoples World* in an interview. Open Media is a coalition of 60 groups, ranging from the National Firearm's Association to major unions, fighting against evasive legislation that undermines privacy rights and civil liberties.

The Conservatives have also started running TV ads to build public support for Bill C-51. A wide range of organisations and parties inside and outside of Parliament have opposed the legislation: the Greens, Communists, NDP, trade union and environmental movements, civil liberties associations, Open Media, the Federal Privacy Commissioner Daniel Therrien as well as groups on the right such as the Libertarian Party.

Bill C-51 defines terrorism as "interference with the capability of the government of Canada in relation to intelligence, defence, border operations, public safety, administration of justice, diplomatic or consular relations, or the economic or financial stability of Canada; changing or unduly influencing a government in Canada by force or unlawful means; interference with critical infrastructure; interference with global information infrastructure; an activity that causes serious harm to a person or their property ... an activity that takes place in Canada and undermines the security of another state."

The legislation will give spy agencies new powers to, among other things, override privacy protections to increase information sharing between government agencies and security agencies. It would expand the Canadian Security Intelligence Service's (CSIS) – Canada's version of the CIA – powers to include placing Canadians on a no-fly list. It criminalises advocating, promoting and supporting terrorism online – even when the person has no intention of carrying out a terrorist act – and will allow the CSIS to apply for court orders to remove websites. The bill also allows police to arrest suspects and detain them for one



"It's clear the Conservatives are moving at such breakneck speed in order to ram this through before opposition can make itself felt."

week without charge, based on mere suspicion they might carry out a terrorist act.

Critics fear that Bill C-51's broad new definition of terrorism will allow the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and CSIS to clamp down on the environmental and labour movements, for example, if they interfere with critical infrastructure or economic and financial stability. It will also allow security agencies to go after supporters and organisers of the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions movement against Israeli apartheid policies as potential terrorists because it is "activity that takes place in Canada and undermines the security of another state." Critics assert that the police already have enough power to deal with domestic terrorists with existing Canadian law.

Even exiled US whistleblower Edward Snowden weighed in against Bill C-51 recently. In video clip from Russia, he warned that the legislation threatens civil liberties and political freedoms in Canada.

The Conservatives counter that the legislation has built-in safeguards because judges will have to approve intelligence operations and that it excludes legitimate dissidents from being targeted.

Meanwhile, an open letter signed by 100 academics and law professors opposing Bill C-51 has been sent to Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The letter, among other things, criticises the legislation because:

- The law defines "activities that undermine the security of Canada" in such an exceptionally broad way that "terrorism" is simply one of nine examples, and only "lawful advocacy, protest, dissent and artistic expression" is excluded. Apart from all the civil-disobedience activities and illegal protests or strikes that will be covered (e.g. in relation to "interference with critical infrastructure"), this deep and broad intrusion into privacy is made worse by the fact there are no corresponding oversight or review mechanisms adequate to this expansion of the state's new levels of information awareness. Concerns have already been expressed by the Privacy

Commissioner, an officer of Parliament, who has insufficient powers and resources to even begin to oversee, let alone correct abuses within, this expanded information-sharing system.

- Making it criminal to advocate or encourage terrorism could affect people advocating armed revolution or rebellion abroad. If Bill C-51 had been in effect during the apartheid period, it would have affected thousands of Canadians who supported the African National Congress's efforts to overthrow the apartheid government.
- Allowing the CSIS – which can currently only collect information – to intervene and disrupt activities is dangerous because the organisation defines the threat to the security of Canada "so broadly that CSIS already considers various environmental and Aboriginal movements to be subject to their scrutiny."
- It also highlights that Bill C-51 will subvert the role of judges who are there to assess whether legal measures violate laws and instead turn them into agents for security agencies to pre-authorise violations of Canadian law. "Now a judge can be asked to (indeed, required) to say yes in advance to measures that could range from wiping a target's computer clear of all info to fabricating materials (or playing agent provocateur roles) that discredits a target ..."
- The letter criticises the lowering of the threshold for preventive detention and allowing the CSIS to place people on no fly lists. It concludes by criticising the conservatives for limiting debate on bill C-51: "It is sadly ironic that democratic debate is being curtailed on a bill that vastly expands the scope of covert state activity when that activity will be subject to poor, even non-existent democratic oversight or review."

Leadnow, Open Media, BC Government Employees Union, and others are staging joint demonstrations across Canada on March 14 to oppose Bill C-51.

People's World ☪



Region Briefs

People across Asia celebrated International Women's Day on March 8. Women workers in Pakistani province of Sindh staged a rally, demanding the provincial government fulfil its promise to recognise and protect the rights of workers who are working from home. A large number of Pakistani female workers work at home, manufacturing products for factories. The President of the Vietnam Fatherland Front Central Committee, Nguyen Thien Nhan, attended the Kovalevskiaia 2014 awards, honouring 16 outstanding women scientists. He said that the Communist Party of Vietnam and the state always remembered Vietnamese women's contributions to the national development.

Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung asked the Vietnamese General Confederation of Labour to increase coordination with the government, for better protecting workers' interests and rights. Both sides agreed to co-organise labour movements, increasing production and improving workers' living standards. Chairman of the Confederation said that they would work closely with the government, continuing to protect workers' rights and contribute to the country's development. The confederation plans to increase its current eight million membership to ten million by 2018.

The Japanese media and public have urged Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his government to face up to the country's war-time history during the last two centuries, quoting from German Chancellor Angela Merkel's speech during her recent visit to Japan: "Facing World War Two crimes is key to reconciliation (with neighbours)". Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) at first refused to comment on Merkel's speech, but later replied that Japan and Germany were in different situations during the war. At the same time, Inada Tomomi, the Chair of the Policy Research Council of the LDP, continued to deny the government's involvement in sex slavery during the war.

China's "Two Sessions" opened earlier this month. The Two Sessions refers to the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). The NPC is the country's highest legislative institution. It is made up of elected delegates nationwide; The CPPCC is the country's highest advisory body, roughly two thirds of its members are drawn (by mutual discussion) from other Chinese political parties besides the Communist Party of China (CPC) and independent members. The CPPCC offers suggestions to the CPC. During the Two Sessions, environmental protection issues were repeatedly discussed. China's Environmental Protection Minister Chen Jining claimed that China, as the world's second largest economy, is faced with the unprecedented conflict between environmental protection and development in human history. Chinese president Xi Jinping also stressed, "We are going to punish, with an iron hand, any violators who destroy ecology or environment, without exception". China reforested 90.41 million hectares in 2014.

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
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Surry Hills NSW 2010



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Thugs and charmers

Celebrating International Women's Day is great. Lots of wonderful stories about amazing women, history of the women's movement, achievements and things still to achieve. There should be more stories every day about us – working men and women who contribute to society, build things and raise our children.

But what really, really annoys me especially around the IWD are those politicians who behave like thugs all through the year and on March the 8 or thereabouts turn on "charm" and pretend they are the true champions for women's rights.

Promises are made to fight domestic violence – while millions of dollars are withdrawn from women's refuges and services. Parliament House has become a place of abuse passing for robust discussions. It reminds me of a guy who was before court for domestic violence – he came in very neatly dressed and with a white ribbon on his lapel. It is cynical and degrading.

Let's judge our politicians by their deeds, not their promises and lip-service on the day.

Mati English
Sydney

Criminalising youth

As you read this our politicians are pushing through a disastrous new law, one that will steal the futures of our Indigenous kids.

Right now the "Home Burglary Bill" is being debated in Western Australia's Parliament, despite overwhelming evidence that it won't actually reduce burglaries.

What it definitely will do is send more young people to prison, thanks to expanded mandatory sentencing laws for 16 and 17-year-olds. The situation is most dire for Indigenous kids. WA already locks up Indigenous kids at a higher rate than anywhere else in Australia.

If you're an Indigenous kid in WA, you're 58 times more likely to be in detention than your non-Indigenous peers.

If the Bill passes, three "strikes" for burglary and you're in prison, even if you've never been to court before. Gone will be the option to send kids to diversion programs or use community-based orders focused on rehabilitation. Judges will have no other choice but to lock up even more young people – a breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

If it passes, this Bill will cost Western Australian taxpayers \$43 million by the fourth year, and another \$93 million if another detention facility is needed.

It's labelling kids as unreformable criminals before they've even reached adulthood, and giving them no path in life except towards a prison cell.

If we don't act now, this Bill could be law by the end of the month.

Premier Barnett has previously made a "personal commitment" to reduce the number of Indigenous people in the state's jail system, and deaths in custody.

If enough of us call this Bill out, he'll have no choice but to scrap it or risk renegeing on his commitment.

Julian Cleary
Indigenous Rights Campaigner
Amnesty International Australia

PS. It doesn't take a criminologist to see that cutting out the options for diversion programs and rehabilitation is likely to increase crime.

Something to say?
Write to the Editor!

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland



Climate change and a Red prom

The respected British newspaper *The Guardian* has come out fighting on the subject of climate change. The paper's editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger in a statement says that "climate change stands out as perhaps the single most important issue now facing humanity" and notes that "climate change will probably, within the lifetime of our children, cause untold havoc and stress to our species."

The paper has launched a series of major articles that it says will cover "what governments can do to attempt to regulate, or otherwise stave off, the now predictably terrifying consequences of global warming beyond 2C by the end of the century." The paper comes down firmly on the side of the view that the majority of the planet's unexploited fossil fuels – our remaining reserves of coal, gas and oil – must stay in the ground. That puts the paper at odds with our infamous climate-change denier Tony Abbott, who amazingly ignored all the scientific evidence to go on record in praise of coal!

The Guardian also published an extended excerpt from Naomi Klein's award-winning and best-selling work, *This Changes Everything*: "We know that if we continue on our current path of allowing emissions to rise year after year, climate change will change everything about our world. Major cities will very likely drown, ancient cultures will be swallowed by the seas, and there is a very high chance that our children will spend a great deal of their lives fleeing and recovering from vicious storms and extreme droughts. ... There are ways of preventing this grim future, or at least making it

a lot less dire. But the catch is that these also involve changing everything. For us high consumers, it involves changing how we live, how our economies function, even the stories we tell about our place on earth.

"What if," she asks, "we realised that real disaster response means fighting inequality and building a just economy – that everyone working for a healthy food system is already a climate warrior? So too, are people fighting for public transit in Brazil; housing and immigrant rights in the United States; battling austerity in Europe; extraction in Australia; pollution in China and India; environmental crime in Africa; and the bad trade deals that lock in all these ills everywhere."

As readers of our *Guardian* know, "fighting inequality and building a just economy" means doing away with capitalism and replacing it with Socialism for there is no other way to achieve that aim. People who want to build a just economy while retaining capitalism (which is predicated on inequality and exploitation of the many by the few) are doomed to disappointment.

Klein also dismisses "the assertion that we have been held back [in combating climate change] by a lack of technological solutions." She points out that "Power from renewable sources like wind and water predates the use of fossil fuels and is becoming cheaper, more efficient, and easier to store every year. The past two decades have seen an explosion of ingenious zero-waste design, as well as green urban planning. Not only do we have the technical tools to get off fossil fuels, we also have

no end of small pockets where these low carbon lifestyles have been tested with tremendous success."

She wants to see the same kind of approach used to achieve "the kind of large-scale transition that would give us a collective chance of averting catastrophe" and is puzzled by the fact that apparently it continues "to elude us".

She rejects the idea that it might be "human nature" holding us back. "In fact," she says, "we humans have shown ourselves willing to collectively sacrifice in the face of threats many times". We could point to the extraordinary sacrifices of the Soviet people in defeating fascism, but Klein uses examples drawn instead from the Anglo-US experience in the same conflict. "To support fuel conservation during World War 2, pleasure driving was virtually eliminated in the UK, and between 1938 and 1944, use of public transit went up by 87% in the US and by 95% in Canada. Twenty million US households – representing three fifths of the population – were growing victory gardens in 1943, and their yields accounted for 42% of the fresh vegetables consumed that year."

What is holding us back, of course, is the fact that capitalism makes its top priority not the well-being of humanity or even the planet, but the pursuit of profit.

Something else our readers know is that today the US and the other imperialist powers are desperately trying to re-invigorate the Cold War. So they can't be thrilled when the people adopt positions that reflect a desire for peace

and friendship. Recently the students of the Cottonwood Classical Preparatory School in the US city of Albuquerque voted online to hold a Communist-themed prom they dubbed "prom-munism".

The goal of the school is to provide "a dynamic environment where students learn to think for themselves." Apparently they are doing just that. Of course, precisely what they envisage by the term "Communist-themed prom" is debatable. Nevertheless, the decision has apparently "sparked some turmoil among conservative students". I bet it did!

US historian Webster Tarpley, author of the book *9/11 Synthetic Terror: Made In USA*, has raised the question that, if the US really thought that the terrorist organisation "Islamic State" (IS) was a monstrosity that must be destroyed at all costs, "Why wouldn't the White House join the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the legally recognised government and a UN member state, in the fight against the jihadists and crush them once and for all?"

Tarpley points out that the money that supports IS and its operations comes from Saudi Arabia, a key US ally in the Middle East. Tarpley believes the US could have applied pressure to Saudi Arabia to stop sending arms and money [and mercenaries] to the terrorists in Iraq and Syria. He also wonders why US ally and NATO member Turkey, with a huge army, doesn't "simply wipe the jihadists off the face of the earth in a matter of weeks"? Why indeed? ☺



Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sunday March 22 –
Saturday March 28

Bourgeois democracy is an extremely complicated ritual that involves the whole population in the unconscious acting out of an extraordinarily complex pretence, designed to maintain the crucial illusion that the people have actual power in the land. In fact, of course, the real power lies with the corporations and financial institutions that own the means of production and exchange. Under capitalism, the big decisions are made in the boardrooms of corporate power not the committee-rooms of parliaments.

It is vitally important for capitalism, however, to maintain the illusion that parliaments do in fact run their respective countries. Put bluntly, it keeps the people subdued between elections and willing to wait for the next one, when they believe they can “change the government”.

No bourgeois parliament is more steeped in ritual than “the mother of parliaments”, Westminster. The new observational documentary series *Inside The Commons* (ABC Sundays from March 22 at 7.40pm) filmed inside the House for over a year, presents a picture of this farcical parody of genuine democracy that is genuinely revealing, in ways the filmmakers probably never intended.

Nowhere is the sheer phoniness of the whole “parliamentary procedure” more evident than in the manipulation and “theatre” of Prime Minister’s Question Time.

There is a renewed Cold War against Russia and the other countries – like China, Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia etc – that are not willing to meekly follow where US and European capitalism leads. SBS’ latest contribution to that Cold War is *Dateline Presents: Putin’s Way* (SBS ONE Sunday March 22 at 9.30pm) which “investigates the accusations of criminality and corruption that have surrounded Vladimir Putin’s reign in Russia”.

Note the terminology: “Putin’s reign”, and the blatant smear “accusations of criminality and corruption”. But it gets better: the Russian leader’s career is traced in terms of “his remarkable ascent from unemployed spy to modern-day czar”. In the traditions of classic Cold War propaganda,

the program draws heavily on the testimony of emigrés (“exiled Russian business tycoons, writers and politicians”), as well as the “exhaustive research of scholar and best-selling author of *Putin’s Kleptocracy* Karen Dawisha”, to expose Putin’s “alleged money-laundering activities and ties to organised crime, [and] a secret personal fortune said to be in the billions”.

There are some very bright graduates of some of the leading universities of the USA, the UK and Europe, whose sole job is to formulate stuff like this, and very well-paid it is, too. Clearly, we are going to see a lot more of it.

Some years ago, the actors who played the two leading detectives in the BBC crime series *Softly, Softly* did an exhaustive TV investigation into the notorious Jack the Ripper case. They ran into a brick wall: certain key evidence was inaccessible, being under official lock and key, “not to be opened”.

The inescapable supposition is that the British ruling class was protecting itself against a damaging scandal of some sort. One theory is that one or more of the Ripper’s prostitute victims had been taking part in some upper-class debauchery, and were killed to silence them. The killings stopped abruptly when that goal had been achieved.

However, no such implications bother *The Missing Evidence: Jack The Ripper* (SBS ONE Wednesday, March 25 at 8.30pm) which claims – incredibly – that “hidden diaries and letters point toward a new suspect, a woman by the name of Lizzie Williams”.

Can you imagine the furore such a discovery would make if these diaries and letters were real? Instead, they’re virtually unknown except on this program. ‘Nuff said?

Stop Laughing ... this is serious (ABC from Wednesday March 25 at 9pm) is a three-part documentary series that tries to trace the development of Australian comedy. Naturally, given its source, it has a strong emphasis on television comedy. However, stand-up, cabaret, radio and even *The Bulletin* and Lenny Lower are briefly covered. Radio, however, is poorly treated – given its importance in our cultural history. The series also has a regrettable tendency to regard Australians as somehow unique: “Australians’ greatest characteristic is our ability to laugh at ourselves” (other nationalities don’t?).

The series does examine the way humour has reflected and responded to multicultural Australia, gender issues, and politics. From early Aussie battlers Dad and Dave, to Paul Hogan and Edna Everage, the mousy Melbourne housewife, and Sandy Stone – the man to whom nothing ever happens – and on to school kids like Kylie Mole and Ja’mie, we realise, as Barry Humphries says, that what’s right under our very own nose is often the funniest thing of all.



You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger (SBS ONE Saturday March 28 at 8.30pm).

Woody Allen is a distinctive talent among US filmmakers. His 2010 film *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* (SBS ONE Saturday March 28 at 8.30pm) is the fourth film he made in London, following *Match Point* (2005), *Scoop* (2006), and *Cassandra’s Dream* (2007).

Taking its title from the prediction fortune-tellers use to beguile their marks, this film illustrates with wry humour how easy it is for our illusions to make fools of us all. It features Antonio Banderas, Josh Brolin, Anthony Hopkins, Gemma Jones, Freida Pinto, Lucy Punch, Naomi Watts, Roger Ashton-Griffiths and Pauline Collins.

Kirk Honeycutt of *The Hollywood Reporter* described it as “A serviceable Woody Allen comedy that trifles with its characters rather than engaging with them.” AO Scott said: “There are hints of farce, droplets of melodrama, a few dangling loose ends and an overall mood of sloppy, tolerant cynicism.”

Two reviews expressed opposing viewpoints about where the film stands among Allen’s films shot in London.

Owen Gleiberman of *Entertainment Weekly* stated “The film is notable, if that’s the word, for being the first movie Allen has made in London that is every bit as bad as his most awful New York comedies, like *Anything Else* and *Melinda and Melinda*.”

David Gritten of *The Daily Telegraph* wrote “It sounds like damning with faint praise, but Woody Allen’s *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* is easily the best of his recent London-based films ... a fanciful fable ... with an idealised London as its setting.”

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Sydney

Defend Public Housing Film Night and Sausage Sizzle

6:30pm Wednesday 18 March
Old Fire Station –113 Mitchell Street, Glebe

Max Solling will speak on: Where has the public housing gone vision gone?

Films: Historical and new short films on public housing

Entry \$10, concession \$5

Organised by Hands off Glebe 0418 290 663

Sydney

POLITICS IN THE PUB

March 19

THE ABBOTT GOVERNMENT’S NEW LAWS GIVING EXTRAORDINARY POWERS TO INTELLIGENCE SERVICES & POLICE MUST BE RESISTED BY ALL THOSE WHO OPPOSE THREATS TO DEMOCRACY

Stephen Blanks, President, NSW Council of Civil Liberties;
Alison Broinowski, Dr, Former Ambassador and now Visiting Fellow, ANU;

March 26

IS THERE SPACE IN OUR CITIES FOR POORER PEOPLE?

Mary Perkins, Executive Officer, SHELTER, NSW;
Peter Phibbs, Professor, Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning;

April 2

NO MEETING: EASTER

Public holiday;

April 9

ANZACS AND THE MILITARISATION OF AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

David Stephens, Dr, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, UNSW;
Noah Bassil, Dr, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University;

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Save Woodlark Island's forests

Steven Katsineris

"This island is biologically and culturally unique and it's now in real danger. It's vital that the world watch Woodlark Island very carefully." William Laurance, director of scientific organisation ALERT [Alliance of Leading Environmental Scientists and Thinkers].

Woodlark Island (also known as Muyua Island) is a small, unspoiled tropical island paradise located off the east coast of Papua New Guinea. The 6,000 inhabitants of Woodlark live in harmony with the ancient rainforests of their island home, a biodiverse ecosystem shared for thousands of years between tribal peoples and a myriad of rare, endangered and endemic animal species.

However, the pristine forests of Woodlark Island are now under threat from a Malaysian logging company, Karridale Limited, which wants to clear at least a quarter of the island's forests against the wishes of the majority of islanders who reject the project.

Many locals feel overwhelmed and deeply concerned about the future of their home. They and wildlife researchers fear that the project will inevitably lead to the extinction of numerous animal species that rely on the island's rainforest as their habitat.

The destruction of Woodlark Island's forests would be a crime against the natural world. These rainforests are home to countless wildlife, to date scientists have identified at least 42 species found only in the rainforests on Woodlark Island. More than 40 endemic plant and animal species would lose much of their habitat and are at risk, including seven frogs, four reptiles, four insects, 19 land snails and the Woodlark Cuscus, as well as seven plants. Scientists and environmentalists also believe that there are other as yet unknown species inhabiting the island awaiting discovery.

The Woodlark Cuscus is a tree-dwelling marsupial that inhabits primary and secondary tropical forests with a preference for the dry lowland forest. Since it makes up the eastern half of Woodlark Island, there is a higher prominence of the Woodlark Cuscus here compared to the dense rainforests of the western half of the Island.

Before 1987, there were only eight specimens of Woodlark Cuscuses identified so it was believed that the species was in fact on the brink of extinction. Later observations in 1987 showed that they are abundant on the

"Woodlark Island is a biological jewel - home to at least 42 species that occur nowhere else on Earth,"

eastern half of Woodlark Island and on nearby Alcester Island. However, they were still considered vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) because of their restricted range. It is currently listed as endangered by the IUCN. While the Woodlark Cuscus is hunted by the locals, it plays only a small part in their diet and this does not impact on population numbers on the islands. The biggest threat to the Woodlark Cuscus is the clearance of its rainforest home. While it is not known how massive this project will be, it will have adverse effects on the native forests and wildlife on the island.

Simon Piyuwes, a local medical doctor who is leading the struggle against the destruction of his island home says, "I'm so exhausted and depressed at the thought of losing Woodlark's nature to plunderers." Simon Piyuwes is hoping for outside support, as in 2008 when a palm oil company wanted to clear the island's forests for a plantation. With international backing, the locals managed to convince the company to abandon the project.

Karridale Ltd wants to clear at least 17,600 hectares of forest - around one quarter of the island, but locals fear that the company has its



The biggest threat to the Woodlark Cuscus is the clearance of its rainforest home.

eye on more than half of the island's forests. Time is running out for them, however, as the Malaysian company has set up logging camps and is ready to start felling the island's trees for lumber and patio furniture.

A leading elder of Woodlark's Malasi Clan says only a minority of the islander community approved the project, while the general population was kept in the dark until very late. The company's permits are dubious at best.

It's not too late to stop the project, as the response to a planned gold mine on Woodlark has shown: Governor Titus Philemon criticised the "dismal and half-hearted" efforts by government agencies to inform the islanders about the environmental impact of the three planned open-pit mines and put a stop to the project until the peoples' concerns are addressed.

Scientists express grave concerns

"Woodlark Island is a biological jewel - home to at least 42 species that occur nowhere else on Earth," said William Laurance, a professor at James Cook University in Australia and director of ALERT.

The leading scientific group is concerned that a tropical island rich with unique wild animal species and Indigenous peoples could be overrun by industrial logging. The Malaysian logging company, Karridale Limited, plans to log a large swath of the island. Estimates of the extent of planned logging range from 20 to over 50 percent of the island.

"The customary land owners on Woodlark Island are extremely nervous, they rely on the forest and land for their livelihoods and fear they could lose control over large swaths of the island," said Laurance.

"The company is being elusive about its plans and doesn't appear to have consulted adequately with the local communities," said Professor Corey Bradshaw at the University of Adelaide.

"There's been many conflicts between logging corporations and indigenous groups in

Papua New Guinea," said Dr Erik Meijaard, who studies logging in the Asia-Pacific region.

"For nature conservation, a plan this ambitious sets off alarm bells," said Professor Stuart Pimm from Duke University in the USA. "This island is jam-packed with unique species, many of which have tiny geographic ranges and so are highly vulnerable to major disturbances.

"The devil is in the details," said Pimm. "Careful, small-scale logging is one thing, but many Malaysian logging corporations are known for aggressive, large-scale logging."

Large-scale logging of Woodlark's forests will destroy this unique lowland rainforest and a huge percentage of the habitat available to the island's unique plants and animals and will endanger the island's precious flora and fauna. These intact rainforests, the wildlife that inhabit them and the land rights of the Indigenous people should be protected from this logging project. It should not be allowed to go ahead.

On their own, the 6,000 inhabitants of Woodlark Island do not have the means to alone avert the destruction of their home. They need our support. Please take up the cause of the Woodlark Islanders and help to put a stop to this destructive project. Your input can greatly assist the people to save their island's rainforests, the Woodlark Cuscus and other threatened wildlife. And these efforts will also contribute to highlighting rainforest destruction and help in saving the world's precious remaining rainforests.

What to do:

Please raise this issue and publicise it by write letters to the newspapers expressing your concerns.

Please sign and share these petitions to help save the forests and rare animals of Woodlark Island from logging companies.

Go to www.rainforest-rescue.org and do a search for "Woodlark Island" and sign the petition.

Sources - Rainforest Rescue, EcolInternet and ALERT 🇺🇦

Hands of Venezuela!

Protest US aggression
against Venezuela
outside US
Consulate

Speakers
from the
community

Solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution

Martin Place, Sydney - 12:30pm, Saturday March 21

Organised by the Communist Party of Australia



Communist Party of Australia

Guardian

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