



# Demand Your Rights at Work

Anna Pha

Tony Abbott came to government with a blueprint for Australia drawn up by big business for big business. The Abbott government's first budget was just the beginning. The "age of entitlement" is over, Hockey warned, as he presented a budget centred on slashing health, education, social security, community and Indigenous programs. The centrepiece of the blueprint is the employer's dream of smashing the trade movement and taking workers' wages and working conditions back to the dark ages.

Employers have been on the offensive ever since the election of the Coalition – attacking workers' wages and conditions and pushing the government to get along with its workplace "reform" agenda. The government, while turning a blind eye to breaches of industrial relations such as the super exploitation of 457 visa workers, is working to a plan.

The first step is to try to discredit the trade union movement and demonstrate there is a need for the undemocratic and anti-worker policies they are intent on imposing.

The government's main weapons in this process have been the so-called Royal Commission into Trade Union Corruption, the Australian Building and Construction Commission (renamed Fair Work Building and Construction Inspectorate by Labor), the courts and the Murdoch media.

The Royal Commission sets the scene for vilifying and criminalising legitimate trade union action. The already notorious ABCC, with its draconian and coercive powers, is responsible for unions in the industry forking out millions of dollars in fines and individual workers and officials penalties in the thousands.

The most recent arrival on the trade union scene is the "independent" Productivity Commission which usually provides neo-liberal policy advice on industry and government services.

## Employer agenda

The Productivity Commission is the vehicle for delivering the Business Council of Australia's policies, proposing specific "reforms" to the system. It recently published a set of issues papers seeking responses to a series of questions. From the questions it is clear that it is considering:

- gutting or abolition of modern awards
- retaining National Employment Standards, but re-examining what should be covered in them
- reducing minimum wage
- setting of minimum wage on state or regional basis

- cutting back what is permissible in an enterprise agreement
- abolishing or weakening unfair dismissal laws
- workers trading off conditions for pay rises
- abolishing penalty rates
- abolishing pattern bargaining
- unions not permitted to negotiate a single agreement with a principal employer that applies to all workers, including contractors, on building or other sites
- greater reliance on non-union, individual arrangements
- individual, non-union, common law agreements outside of the Fair Work Act – only required to meet legislated minimum requirements such as the National Employment Standards
- application of competition law banning cartels to trade unions – such as unions making common claims or negotiating similar agreements
- expanding what constitutes industrial action to threats or other areas
- imposing harsher enforcement arrangements for disputes
- changing to right of entry for union representatives to workplaces.

The Commission does not give consideration to the ABCC. The government wasted no time in pushing forward with legislation for a revamped and more powerful ABCC. At present it is pressuring cross-benchers to support it.

The Commission gives the impression of focusing heavily on measures to deregulate the industrial relations system for employers, exclude trade union representation and focus on individuals "negotiating" with employers.

Collective bargaining is an absolute right for all workers, to be negotiated between trade unions and employer organisations with rank and file involvement. Individual contracts leave workers completely vulnerable to the dictate of employers and should be abolished.

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) proposes the following rights as the basis of new industrial relations laws that would improve the position of working people:

## The Right to Belong

- unrestricted right of workers to join unions
- unrestricted right of unions to recruit new members (ACTU to determine areas of coverage)
- workers to have the right to access union representatives at any time including during working hours
- legally binding guarantees against discrimination because of union membership or affiliation



Photo: Craig Greer

- repeal of ABCC legislation

## The Right to Organise

- the right of unions to exist and be legally recognised as representatives of their membership
- union representatives to have the right to unlimited access to workplaces for recruitment and organising purposes
- paid union meetings and trade union training
- legislated rights for union and worker involvement in all industrial and OH&S issues in the workplace
- \* union elected OH&S officers with power to stop work on a site

## The Right to Protections

- the right to an adequate living wage and good working conditions of employment, with an immediate increase in the minimum wage
- the right for workers to industry-wide collective union-negotiated agreements and comprehensive awards that apply to union and non-union members alike
- abolition of individual employment contracts or other forms of "agreement" that allow employers to undermine negotiated wages or conditions, including those made under common law
- guaranteed wage indexation to, as a minimum, keep up with the cost of living plus productivity increases without trade-off of conditions
- right to permanent full-time work

- a 35-hour week without loss of pay
- five weeks annual leave, 15 days sick leave and carer's leave to cater for family and childcare issues
- leave loadings and penalty rates to be restored and increased to the highest current levels for all workers
- equal pay for equal work
- twelve months paid maternity leave
- repeal of contractors legislation so that subcontractors are employed with the same rights and benefits of other workers.
- no limit on conditions included in awards, EBAs, industry or pattern bargained agreements

## The Right to Strike


- no legal barriers to strike and other legal action as the basis of new legislation
  - repeal of all restrictions and penal provisions
  - secondary boycotts to be legalised.
- A change of government alone will not bring about the required changes. It will be the strength of the movement in workplaces, on the streets and in the education of workers and involvement of the wider community that will be decisive in delivering workers' and trade union rights such as those listed above.

The fight against the Abbott government is only beginning:

- Fight for our rights...**
- ... the right to belong
  - ... the right to organise
  - ... the right to protections
  - ... the right to strike ✪

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There will be no issue of the *Guardian* next week. The next issue will be on April 15.



## Guardian

Issue 1679

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### Dissent among the "free-marketeers"

A generation has grown up absorbing the "free" market mantra about unfettered competition delivering the best outcomes for society. Tales of how the "invisible hand of the market" ensures the availability of the best goods at the best price are repeated regularly in Australian high schools, universities, TAFE and other centres for vocational training – and not just in their economics courses. The media is dripping in the same "consensus" declared from on high.

The political line is held with great consistency by spokespersons representing capitalist interests. It is rare, and thus very interesting and revealing, when dissent appears in the class enemy's ranks in public. Comments by Fortescue Metal Group's Andrew "Twiggy" Forrest at a business function in Shanghai caught some off guard before discipline was reasserted. Forrest floated the idea that the big four iron ore producers operating in Australia could put a cap on production, thus limiting supply, to cause a rise in the price per tonne. If Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Vale put their heads together and limited production to 180 million tonnes a year, prices could back around the \$90 a tonne mark rather than the current \$50.

Foreign minister Julie Bishop initially thought it "worth considering". Her government is missing the tax revenues available at the height of the mining boom. Treasurer Joe Hockey, however, gave the official thumbs down to the idea, saying that it smacks of cartel behaviour. The rebukes of Forrest got sharper and sharper as the days went by. Rio Tinto boss Sam Walsh called the plan "absolute nonsense" and a "harebrained scheme". Eventually, Chairman Rod Sims said the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission was investigating whether Forrest was guilty of advocating a cartel – presumably a very serious offence but for which nobody in Australia is expected to do jail time. Ample evidence regarding petrol and food pricing has never quite fixed the issue in those retail industries.

"Twiggy" Forrest is hoping the exemption regarding exporters acting in the national interest will protect him on this occasion. Some smaller iron ore producers found all the free-market "purity" too much to bear. Tony Sage of Cape Lambert Resources pointed out that the big boys have cooperated happily in the past. "All of them have spent, combined, tens of billions of dollars getting their expansions to where they are today and if they did not see the consequences of that, they are not as smart as they think they are."

While big and medium-sized capitalists might fall out from time-to-time over the concentration of market share and predatory pricing, they are united on the core issues of the class struggle. All of them have contributed to the current campaign to portray trade unions, not as workers uniting to protect their interests from the predations of employers, but as something sinister. This line of attack is as old as the trade union movement itself. The Tolpuddle Martyrs were transported to Australia for "combining" and swearing oaths to support their fellow workers against the lowering of wages in England in the early 19th Century.

Since those times, Australian unions have been accused of being "red" conspiracies to bring down capitalism and illegitimate "rent takers". Lately, suffering under a barrage of workplace relations "reform", they are being legally defined as "third parties" that could be replaced by other, non-union representatives in bargaining or preferably, from the employers' point of view, no representative at all. The most recent and perhaps the most curious smear is that trade unions are "cartels" in the labour market, which should be as "free" (i.e. monopoly dominated) as every other market. Sanctimony about cartels is where we came in.

Workers have no defence of their living standards under capitalism without forming themselves into trade unions ready, willing and able to act in their interests. A lot of damage has been done to the image of unions in workers' eyes in recent times by the bosses, their media and some right opportunist leaderships in the trade union movement itself. That damage has to be repaired and the hypocrisy of the employers about "cartels", and so on, soundly rejected.

#### PRESS FUND

Federal Minister for Social Services, Scott Morrison says his new welfare policies will encourage far more mums back into the workforce after they've had their babies than was recommended in a recent Productivity Commission review. But previous opinion polls have indicated that the overwhelming majority don't need encouragement, they want to work, and Morrison's "encouragement" will probably involve downgrading social security benefits for new mums who can't find a job. We'll report on this and related developments as time goes by. However, we really need your help, by way of contributions to the Press Fund, so please, send us something for the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

Eric Durston \$10, Mark Manion \$5, Pio Pagliuca \$80, CG & PJ \$10

This week's total: \$105 Progressive total: \$1,946

## NSW Election

# Two-party system takes a hit

Anna Pha & Peter Mac

**The highlight of the NSW state elections on Saturday March 28 was the increase of Greens votes. At the time of writing, they could win as many as four seats, up from one, in the Lower House, a significant breakthrough. However, postal votes could change that situation.**

The Liberal/National Coalition have a clear victory, but with a reduced majority. Labor made some gains, but not as many as hoped for. It was not helped in the dying days of the campaign with a vicious attack by former Labor Resources Minister and ACTU president Martin Ferguson. Ferguson went as far as appearing on a Liberal Party TV/YouTube advertisement attacking the Labor Party. He even refers to Labor as his own Party.

In Ballina, a seat the National Party has held for 27 years, coal seam gas was one of the biggest issues. At the time of writing Greens and Labor were running neck to neck, with the Greens just in front.

Lismore is another seat where coal seam gas was a key issue in the northern region of NSW: the Greens candidate has won.

In Newtown, an inner suburb of Sydney, Jenny Leong won the seat for the Greens, with just under 50 percent of the vote. She campaigned strongly against WestConnex, in favour of same sex marriage, for Aboriginal housing to be maintained on the Block.

In another inner west suburb, Balmain, Greens incumbent Jamie Parker has been re-elected. One of the local issues was the demand for environmental regulations for cruise ships entering the Balmain shipping terminal, including a ban on high sulphur fuel. Jamie has fought hard for light rail, an upgrade of ferry services, to restore funding to local women's and youth refuges as well as around public housing.

#### Labor falls short

Labor had been reduced to 23 Lower House seats in 2011, compared with the Coalition's 42. The other eight seats were Independents. The stench of corruption and exposures in ICAC hearings left Labor on the nose with the electorate.

It looks as though Labor may gain around 10-12 seats, still far short of a majority.

A number of Labor's gains can be attributed to the exchange of preferences with the Greens and likewise the Greens benefited from the exchange.

While electorates had their own local issues, TAFE cuts and fees, the Americanisation of the health system, housing affordability, eviction of low income tenants and sale of public housing, schools, WestConnex and

the environment were all often raised as issues.

The stench from ICAC does not seem to hit the Liberals so hard, even though nine of their ministers, including the Police Minister and Premier were forced out of their positions.

Labor campaigned heavily on "NSW NOT FOR SALE", a reference to Premier Michael Baird's privatisation plans, in particular, the state's electricity poles and wires, an extremely unpopular policy with the public. The ALP focused its resources on key electorates, those it had to win, and completely ignored Coalition strongholds.

Unions NSW (Trade and Labor Council) and individual trade unions campaigned hard, calling for the defeat of the Liberals. "NSW is Not For Sale ... Not now, not ever," they declared. No mention of electing Labor. "Put the Liberals Last."

At the time of writing not enough Legislative Assembly votes had been counted to indicate whether the Coalition would have control with Fred Nile and the Christian Democrat support or the Greens might win the last spot.

The Communist Party of Australia did not stand candidates but in Sydney campaigned for Greens candidates, in particular, Jamie Parker and Jenny Leong.

#### A parliamentary battle

The Baird coalition government's victory last Saturday does not necessarily mean it will be able to reconstruct the state's economy and public assets in the interests of big business.

The government claims it now has a mandate for privatisation of 50 percent of the state's electrical infrastructure, the "poles and wires". However, a closer look at the voting figures shows this claim is phoney.

There was a highly significant rise in the number of votes cast for the Greens, who oppose the "poles and wires" sale. However, the figures reveal the built-in advantage the electorate-based voting system gives the conservative coalition in the lower house, the Legislative Assembly.

At the time of writing one seat remains in doubt. Labor is likely to win 34 seats but 16 of the coalition's predicted 54 seats have been won by the National Party.

In terms of primary votes (the ones that tell you which party the voters actually wanted to have in government) the Nationals took four times as many seats as the Greens, even though they won a smaller proportion of the primary votes.

The discrepancy arises because rural and regional electorates tend to have far fewer voters than city electorates. As a result, and as demonstrated by last Saturday's election, country voters may have four times as much voting power as city voters.

A similar discrepancy exists, but on a far larger scale, with voting for the federal Senate. Each state is given the same number of parliamentary representatives, even though the largest state may have 20 times as many voters as the smallest.

Both these arrangements suit the conservative parties very well. Country voters tend to be more conservative than their city cousins, but during last Saturday's elections the Greens took two country seats, Lismore and Ballina, from the Nationals.

That's highly significant, but it was still not enough to wrest control from the coalition. If the number of seats won by the various parties had been in proportion to the number of votes cast for each of them, the Greens and the Nationals would each have won the same number of seats, and with the support of minor parties and/or independents the power sale policy could have been blocked in the lower house.

The key is now in the upper house.

Last Saturday 21 members of the upper house were elected, as well as all the members of the lower house. The results are as yet unclear. However, because the Legislative Council is elected by proportional representation, the government is unlikely to gain control of it, and will not be able to claim any sort of public mandate for its policies.

At the moment it is likely that the coalition will have 21 upper house seats, while Labor, the Greens and the minor parties, all of whom have expressed opposition to the power sale, will have the same number in total.

There are huge issues at stake for the people of NSW. Baird is using his clean-skin reputation to lay the ground for a tremendous raft of initiatives aimed at privatising state assets, not just the poles and wires.

He has now indicated that the rail line running south-west from the city to Bankstown is to be detached from the main network, and that the new privately-operated metro-style underground line from Rouse Hill to Chatswood, north of the city, is to be extended to the city and then to Bankstown.

That's a sure indication that the government intends to install new privately operated underground rail lines throughout the city and then dismantle the existing publicly-owned and government-operated surface rail system, in a long-term piecemeal privatisation strategy.

The people of Sydney and NSW will have to watch members of the upper house like hawks, to ensure that MPs who have opposed privatisation stick to their guns and don't let themselves be browbeaten, conned or bought off. ☘

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# Kimberley calls and the nation answers

The Kimberley called last week and the rest of the country answered.

Kimberley Aboriginal communities in the north of Western Australia declared a day of action last Thursday, March 19, against the forced closure of Aboriginal communities in their country and other remote areas.

Thousands of people around the country attended protests in cities and towns in every state and territory, while an online protest saw thousands more show solidarity under #sosblakaustralia.

Last year WA Premier Colin Barnett said the state had no option but to review the viability of 274 small Aboriginal communities, which have an estimated total population of 12,000, because the federal government had cut off essential services funding with a “parting gift” of \$90 million that would last two years.

While the Premier has said the government will consult with Aboriginal people, he has yet to have any significant dialogue with WA Elders.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott unwittingly drew national and international attention to the WA government’s plan when he said on radio that “it is not the job of the taxpayer to subsidise lifestyle choices”.

Jodie Bell and Mitch Torres, who

live in the Kimberley, said it was an “intrinsic fundamental human right to live in our own communities and our own country”.

“We hold significant cultural obligations to our ancestors to maintain sovereign ties to our lands,” they said.

“After successive breaches of Human Rights conventions and the forced removal of the Aboriginal community of Oombulgurri in 2014, we maintain a vote of no confidence in both the incumbent state and federal governments in their actions toward Aboriginal people.”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda told the *Koori Mail* that the WA government’s proposal would force Aboriginal people out of their homes.

“I think what they are saying is sanitising what they intend to do, which is cut services, power, water and sewerage – the sort of services almost every Australian takes for granted – in the hopes of forcing people off their country,” he said. “It’s actually as though they’ve already predetermined the outcome. Anything after that is pretending to be proper discussion.”

“The WA government needs to engage with our mob to talk about the future of remote communities across

WA. Let’s talk about what people mean by ‘viability’ – are they talking financial viability, cultural aspects, custodianship responsibilities?”

“Australia as a nation benefits from having people living in remote communities in all sorts of ways – security, immigration, quarantine issues – let’s articulate those values and start from that.”

More than 1,000 protesters in Perth marched to Parliament House, where MPs including Mr Barnett, Kimberley Labor MP Josie Farrer and Greens MLC Robin Chapple addressed the crowd.

“My issue is, and it’s your issue as much as it’s mine – probably more yours than mine – is how can we ensure that boys and girls go to school? How can we ensure that they are safe?” Mr Barnett asked the crowd.

“How can we reduce alcohol and drug usage? I would be failing you as the Premier of this state if I ignored those issues.”

A fortnight ago Mr Barnett said there was “appalling mistreatment of little kids” in remote communities. Kimberley Land Council chair Anthony Watson said the Premier needed to stop demonising Aboriginal people and consider the economic and social cost of closing remote communities.



Protestors spread their message during the day of protest in Perth. (Photo: Tash Nannup)

“We believe that closing communities will cost Aboriginal people in terms of identity, relationship to country, health, and wellbeing,” he said.

“These costs will be passed on to the already under-resourced larger towns, service providers, local governments; housing, health, costing the state for generations to come.”

“There is a better way forward. We have identified a wide range of measures that Aboriginal people and governments can take to improve efficiencies, save money, reduce

waste, develop employment, and strengthen communities.

“At the same time, people can live on and care for their country, providing a valuable service to the whole state. Instead of failure, we invite government to take a stake in developing a positive future for our people and our communities.”

Protests were staged in all capital cities and many regional centres including Broome, Alice Springs, Townsville, Yarrabah, Halls Creek, Lismore and Bellingen.

*Koori Mail* ☘

## Murray Darling Basin people call for reform

First Nations people from across the Murray Darling Basin are calling for a new approach to the region’s growing Aboriginal population. Representatives from the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) board and the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) gathered recently in Canberra to propose a partnership between government and traditional owners to secure key water reforms.

NBAN chair Cheryl Buchanan said the group had written to federal Parliamentary Secretary for Water Bob Baldwin and incoming Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA)

chair Neil Andrew detailing their position.

“So often, the public debate about water management is framed as a contest between irrigators and the environment,” Ms Buchanan said. “Many Australians may not be aware that the sovereign First Nations are the traditional custodians of the basin’s water resources.”

“We have rights, recognised at the international and domestic level, to manage and access these resources.”

MLDRIN chairperson Darren Perry said the group was seeking a new partnership on water that would benefit the whole community.

“The degradation and loss of

our rivers, wetlands and groundwater – our cultural landscapes – have been an absolute disaster for us and it is time for a new start,” he said.

The alliance, which includes representatives of 46 Aboriginal Nations, pointed out that a recent independent review of the *Commonwealth Water Act* and the National Water Commission’s 2014 National Reform Assessment report both highlighted the need to address First Nations’ rights and implement reforms.

“We are not just a stakeholder in basin water with private interests, we are sovereign First Nations with a cultural heritage in the water and land, with legal rights and interests

and a deep commitment to manage for the benefit of our peoples as well as the environment and economic wellbeing of the Australian community,” Mr Perry said.

Key measures being called for include obtaining water entitlements – cultural flows – as well as communities being supported to manage water in their own right.

“We are not trying to take the water away, we are asking for a fair share of the resource that our people nurtured for thousands of years,” Mr Perry said.

The alliance is calling on Queensland’s new Labor government to engage with First Nations people to properly consider water

resource plans as well as the impacts of coal seam gas and large-scale coal mining.

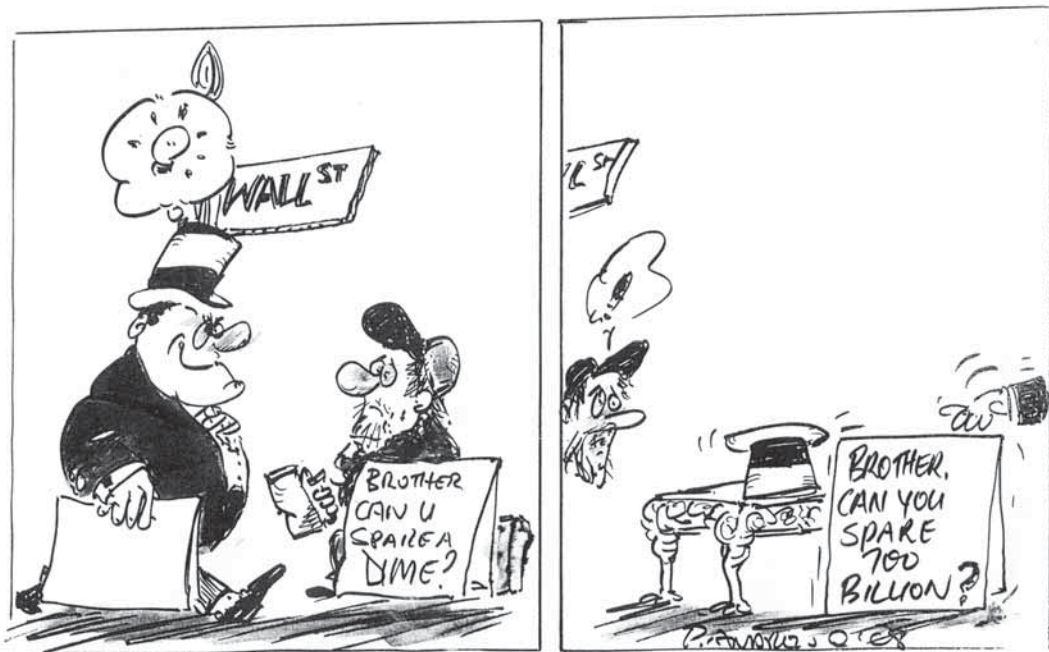
“Aboriginal populations in the basin are growing,” Mr Perry said.

“We have continuing rights and aspirations to access water resources to sustain our cultural identity, to care for our ancestral homelands, support community development and build sustainable enterprises.”

“We are ready to collaborate with government to achieve these aims and objectives.”

*Koori Mail* ☘

### 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



# Working on weekends: sacrifice and necessity

As Parliament prepares to debate a Bill which would allow employers to force workers to trade off penalty rates and other conditions, the United Voice union has released its members' submission to the Productivity Commission in defence of the Australian weekend.

The United Voice submission to the Commission's Inquiry into Australia's workplace relations system recommends Inquiry Commissioners spend at least two weekends working alongside the union's members.

United Voice members work in diverse industries including aged care, cleaning, early childhood education and care, hospitality, healthcare, security, emergency services and manufacturing.

National secretary David O'Byrne says, "Workers across Australia are deeply concerned at the prospect of changes to penalty rates and erosion of the safety net.

"Statement after statement by our members reveals the critical role of penalty rates in their economic survival."

"With three children, working weekends is my only option for our household to survive. To be working in an industry that operates 24/7 – weekends being the busiest time – I have sacrificed on children's birthdays, family functions and sports just to make ends meet. Penalty rates have helped tremendously. Take penalty rates away and it means more time away from my children and day care that we simply cannot afford."

- Naomi, Casino worker, NSW  
 "United Voice members are well aware of employers' push to get rid of penalty rates," said Mr O'Byrne. "They know the government's weasel words on penalty rates and workplace relations mask a determination to look after their employer allies.

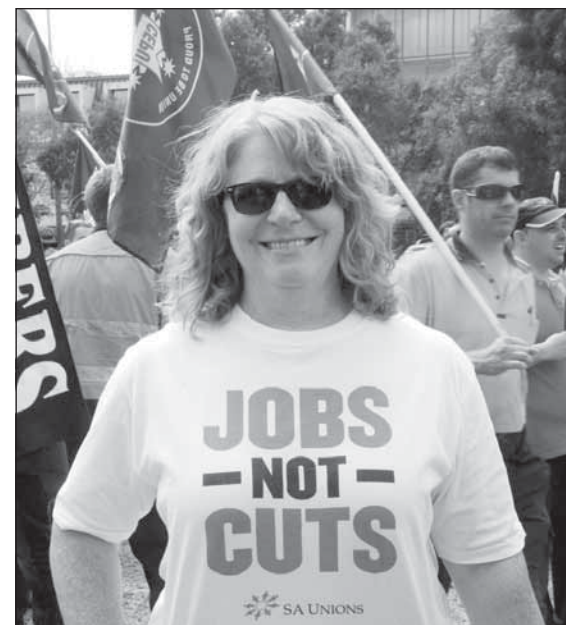
"Our members deserve better. They are the backbone of our community. They work around the clock to ensure our community is safe, cared for, educated, fed and entertained.

"The government should be support-

ing these workers, not undermining them at every opportunity."

The union's other recommendations to the Productivity Commission are:

- Given recent commentary by the Minister for Employment that penalty rates will not be considered as part of this Inquiry, that the Productivity Commission write to the Treasurer seeking clarification and an amended Terms of Reference.
- That any consideration of changes to minimum wage rates and conditions take into consideration the current inadequacies of the safety net as evidenced by United Voice members in this submission.
- That the Commission explicitly rules out considering income from tips in its findings.
- That the Commission undertakes analysis into the historic benefit that the Australian economy has derived from penalty rates. ✪



## Mental health sector call on PM for certainty of funding

Mental Health Australia has delivered a letter to Prime Minister Tony Abbott imploring that the Commonwealth take urgent action to ensure continuity of services and programs for Australians who live with mental illness.

The letter includes 70 signatures from key mental health organisations including Headspace, the Black Dog Institute, Suicide Prevention Australia, R U OK and SANE Australia. Right now, hundreds of contracts for community based mental health services and programs funded by the Department of Health are due to end June 30, 2015.

"While we understand the government will be formulating its

response to the National Mental Health Commission's Review of Mental Health Services and Programs, the continued uncertainty has now reached crisis point," Mental Health Australia CEO Frank Quinlan said.

"Services have already begun to shut down, and staff have left to take up more secure positions. Certainty of funding is desperately needed so that community organisations can continue their important work."

**The Hon Tony Abbott MP  
 Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia**

Dear Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned, are writing to implore the Australian government to take urgent action to ensure continuity of services and programs for Australians who live with mental illness, and those who care for them. Right now, hundreds of contracts for community based mental health services and programs funded by the Department of Health are due to end June 30, 2015.

While we understand the government will be formulating its response to the National Mental Health Commission's Review of Mental Health Services and programs, the continued uncertainty is now resulting in staff attrition and service wind down.

This issue has now reached crisis point. Our Mental Health Parliamentary Advocacy Day on February 11, 2015 brought this to the attention of the Parliament, with our members receiving a good hearing from many parliamentarians, including members of government, but as yet we have not received any definitive advice regarding the future of programs.

Some agencies have indicated that without this advice, they will have to give staff notice of termination of employment in a matter of days. This ongoing uncertainty is causing a huge disruption to organisations and, increasingly, deep anxiety amongst the people they serve.

Following the Mental Health Parliamentary Advocacy Day we were delighted that Minister Fifield was able to provide some measure of certainty for community based mental health services and programs funded by the Department of Social Services.

We thank you for giving this matter your urgent attention and providing certainty for the vulnerable Australians who depend on these services.

Sincerely

## 457 Visa workers left broke, homeless

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) has come to the aid of a group of 457 Visa workers who were not paid wages for six weeks at Victorian building sites, leaving them broke, scrimping for food and sleeping on the floor of their employer's office.

The AMWU and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) stepped in after a complaint from one of the Australian employees of Schneider Elevators, among 17 workers exploited by the firm.

The 457 Visas workers, mainly Filipino nationals, were left with nowhere to stay so slept and cooked in the company's South Melbourne office, their food and belongings stored on the floor in plastic bags.

Schneider Elevators Australasia owes the workers at least \$172,000 for weeks of work, but managing director Terrence Donnelly claims he has no money.

The AMWU has ensured those men now have proper accommodation

and is organising food for them. This week the AMWU helped organise job interviews with another lift industry employer.

AMWU and ETU comrades from Kone Lifts also pitched in with \$12,000 for the troubled ex-Schneider workers, who were given supportive applause when introduced at the AMWU Victorian Delegates' Forum.

"This shows the cruelty of the poorly-regulated 457 visa program; these workers were brought in on a promise of lucrative wages to send back to their families but find themselves exploited, and paid well below industry standards," said AMWU Victorian assistant secretary Craig Kelly.

Mr Kelly said with unemployment in Victoria at 6.9 percent and an excess of skilled trades workers, there should be no need for employers to use and exploit foreign workers.

The Senate has voted in favour

of a new inquiry into the system of working visas.

The Abbott government also plans to allow employers to bring in more guest workers outside the 457 Visa system, for up to a year without any need for proof the firm has first looked for local labour.

When AMWU officials investigated, it was found that 12 of the 17 workers were fitters on 457 Visas, being paid well below industry standards.

Schneider Elevators has also been deducting its visa charges and a range of other building industry fees from their wages, leaving the men with wages of between \$150 and \$500 for an 80-hour week of work.

"This situation – without the union we are still in slavery treatment of our employer," said one of the workers. "Hopefully we can find another job here. We came here for our family, to give them a better future." ✪

## TV commercial producers to the table

TV commercial producers will negotiate crew rates and conditions with the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) after initially trying to bypass the bargaining process and introduce an agreement that lowered rates and conditions.

Last week MEAA received correspondence from the Commercial Producers Council (CPC) that they will recognise MEAA's right to bargain on behalf of members. It is anticipated that negotiations will commence this week.

The CPC has also retreated from the May 1 deadline they proposed for implementing their industry agreement.

"Our hard working and highly skilled members were dismayed at the lack of consultation and the short deadline imposed by CPC," said MEAA's director of Entertainment, Crew and Sport, Mal Tulloch.

Agreement-making in Australia is governed by the Fair Work Act and lays out the process of consultation, negotiation and registering enforceable agreements. In accordance with the Fair Work Act, MEAA notified each TVC Company with a bargaining notice.

"Screen technicians in this sector have been without a standard agreement for too long. The CPC's attempt to push through an agreement that worsened work conditions without any consolation or negotiation was a provocative move," said Tulloch.

MEAA will continue to engage members in negotiations for a fair and reasonable agreement for the TVC sector. That will involve industry meetings to report back of the progress and build a united log of claims. ✪



## Film review by Ed Rampell

# Queen & Country

In the extremely enjoyable *Queen & Country* legendary English director John Boorman treads familiar ground we've seen in various films wherein recruits are in conflict not so much with the enemy du jour but the military brass. *Queen* is far lighter than Fred Zinnemann's 1953 *From Here to Eternity* and Stanley Kubrick's 1987 Vietnam antiwar classic *Full Metal Jacket*. Like Robert Altman's 1970 *MASH*, it is a humorous movie set during the Korean War era.

In addition, *Queen* has the wink-wink nods some filmmakers lovingly include, referencing movies in order to give shout-outs to their cinematic influences and roots. *Queen*'s characters quote Bogie in 1942's *Casablanca*, Clifton Webb saying, "Murder is my favourite crime" in 1944's *Laura*, 1950's *Sunset Boulevard*, Hitchcock flicks and so on. Boorman even visually quotes from one of his own most popular pictures, 1972's *Deliverance*, with a river scene, wherein he also seems to cite Dziga Vertov's 1929 masterpiece *The Man with the Movie Camera*.

These insider asides are, in particular, found in French films, especially in François Truffaut's oeuvre. Indeed, with *Queen*'s semi-autobiographical allusions to anti-regimentation by regiments as well as to motion pictures, it reminded this film historian of Truffaut's wonderful 1968 *Stolen Kisses*, wherein his screen self, Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud), is in or leaving France's armed forces.

Having said this, just because *Queen*'s themes and sensibility may be familiar, it doesn't mean that I have contempt for them. Rather, I welcome both as old friends – movie historians can never get enough of those in-the-know moving picture citations. (It makes us feel smug that we "get it.") Plus, American and UK audiences – whose governments are endlessly at war with the world, invading this or that non-offending nation whose natural resources and the like are coveted by their ruling classes – can never get enough

anti-militaristic, anti-authoritarian messages.

Indeed, *Queen* opened in LA right after the Academy Awards beat back the threat of conferring Oscar's imprimatur upon Rory Kennedy's odious "mockumentary" *Last Days in Vietnam* and on Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper*, which celebrates the psychopathology of unprovoked invasions of nations under false pretexts that did us no harm – and the atrocity of picking off 160 human beings trying to defend their country from foreign intruders who have absolutely no right being there.

In this sequel of sorts, *Queen* follows the writer/director's alter ego, Bill Rohan, the child growing up during the Battle of Britain in Boorman's 1987 *Hope and Glory*. A decade or so later, His/Her Majesty has embroiled the UK in the latest of those perpetual wars Britain is forever fighting, this time in Asia, which the grown-up Bill (Callum Turner, who appears in the latest screen iterations of the literary classics *Frankenstein* in 2015 and the 2016 mini-series *War and Peace*) has been drafted to fight. However, unlike *MASH*, *Queen*'s action takes place on the home front, not in embattled Korea. (So presumably the BBC and the picture's other producers need not worried about being hacked by Kim Jong-Un, LOL.)

The comic coming of age of Bill and his fellow conscript Percy Hapgood (Caleb Landry Jones) is complicated by being draftees and having to contend with military rules, regulations and officers. In particular, they go up against Sargent Major Bradley, expertly portrayed by David Thewlis as one of those clueless, humourless, by-the-book, ramrod-up-the-rear-end, mirthless, mindless militaristic martinets. Richard Grant likewise excels as the aptly named Major Cross.

There are the usual hijinks and pranks committed by irrepressible youth, aimed at deflating authority figures and the hierarchy of power relations, as the irreverent conscripts confront brigadiers, brigades, the brig and court martials



Callum Turner as Bill Rohan in *Queen & Country*.

and, in general, question the Cold War. During their leaves Bill and Percy pursue sexcapades, go to the movies – Bill and his girl Ophelia (Tamsin Egerton portrays the Oxford-attending blonde who is out of Bill's league) watch Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* – and the like. Bill lives in an islet in the River Thames near Shepperton Studios and watches movies being made – which could account for Boorman's choice of avocations.

If so, we lucky moviegoers are the better for it. Boorman's credits are too long to list in their entirety, but highlights include the stylish 1967 thriller *Point Blank* and 1968's pacifistic *Hell in the Pacific*. Both starred Lee Marvin; the latter was shot at one of Palau's Rock Islands, and every Palauan of a certain age has their favourite Lee Marvin story, which usually involves lots of drinking and carousing. In any case, *Hell* co-starred Toshiro Mifune (who is glimpsed in *Queen* during the above-mentioned *Rashomon* sequence – a sly tip of the homage hat, if ever there was one!) who is stranded on a tiny island with Marvin during WW2, and was seen as an anti-Vietnam War allegory.

Boorman went on to helm the 1972 *Deliverance* (which could have been subtitled "The Hillbillies are Alive with the Sound of Snorting") with Burt Reynolds, Jon Voight and who can ever forget a desperate Ned Beatty, grunting like a pig? 1985's *The Emerald Forest* likewise had an environmental theme – although its "savages" were far nobler than *Deliverance*'s demented hillbillies. As indicated, 1987's *Hope and Glory* was Boorman's movie memoir of growing up during the Nazi blitz of London. 1995's *Beyond Rangoon* starred this year's Best Supporting Actress Oscar winner for *Boyhood* in this pro-human rights feature opposing Burma's Rangoon goons. And so on.

Like Jean-Luc Godard, the 82 year old John Boorman is still going strong, but *Queen & Country* could, alas, be his cinematic swan song. Be that as it may, it is a well made, entertaining movie about the human spirit rising above military madness and depersonalisation in a quest for love and art.

People's World ✪



"When the government commits troops to war, it becomes an extremely long-term decision and I don't think the community is fully aware of that," stated Professor Philip Clarke, of the University of Melbourne and the lead author of the study into disability rates of Vietnam veterans. More than 60,000 Australians were in Vietnam and an alarming 70 percent of them are receiving a war-related disability pension. A third of this number are judged to be totally or permanently impaired. The study found the rate of accepted disability claims rose significantly in the 20 to 30 years after deployment. It is partly due to later onset or late recognition of health problems as well as changes to legislation in 1994 which made it easier for veterans to substantiate claims. The study shows that almost half of Vietnam veterans on disability support cite mental conditions. Eye and hearing disorders are common as well. PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) is already the biggest single accepted disability among veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the official patriotic fever before Anzac Day it is worth remembering that three times as much money is being spent on that day than on services for the disabled veterans.

BTEX chemicals – benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylenes – are banned for use in fracking in NSW and Queensland. However, late last year Hunter Water in the Hunter Valley NSW discovered that AGL and its contractor Transpacific Industries discharged waste water from AGL's seam gas operations near Gloucester into the Hunter Valley's sewage networks. Of particular concern was the fact that BTEX and other toxins could kill bacteria used to treat sewage. It could potentially trigger a shutdown in operations serving Newcastle and the region. A brief investigation by the EPA in January had cleared AGL and Transpacific of any breaches. And despite Hunter Water's opposition to the waste water being released into its network it might face penalties if there is any damage from the discharges.

Pamela Nathan, director, CASSE Aboriginal Australian Relations Program has reminded of the vital importance of a place to call home in regard to Indigenous people's connections to country. "In 1964, 50 percent of Pintupi people in Central Australia died in four months when they were moved from their ancestral lands to the centralised community of Papunya. With Mr Abbott's proposal, (the planned closure of remote communities) trauma, violence, suicide, addictions and depression will be the norm again as they became then. Health costs will explode. A plethora of clinical and forensic services will be required and if they aren't then psychological crises will build with the destructive force of a cyclone. Surely avoiding such potential misery is not a "lifestyle choice" (as Abbott called it).

Sydney

On the 13th anniversary of the defeated military coup against Hugo Chavez, rally to demand



No more coups!

End foreign intervention!

Respect Venezuela's revolution!

Saturday, April 11, 12 noon

Town Hall, George St, Sydney

Let's stand up together to tell the world that Venezuela is not a threat but rather an example of what real democracy looks like.

Organised by the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.



# EU making NATO defunct?

Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya

**An EU military force is being justified as protection from Russia, but it may also be a way of reducing US influence as the EU and Germany come to loggerheads with the US and NATO over Ukraine.**

While speaking to the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag*, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker announced the time has come for the creation of a unified EU military force. Juncker used rhetoric about “defending the values of the European Union” and nuanced anti-Russian polemics to promote the creation of a European army, which would convey a message to Moscow.

The polemics and arguments for an EU army may be based around Russia, but the idea is really directed against the US. The underlying story here is the tensions that are developing between the US, on one side, and the EU and Germany, on the other side. This is why Germany reacted enthusiastically to the proposal, putting its support behind a joint EU armed force.

Previously, the EU military force was seriously mulled over during the buildup to the illegal Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 when Germany, France, Belgium, and Luxembourg met to discuss it as an alternative to a US-dominated NATO. The idea has been resurrected again under similar circumstances. In 2003, the friction was over the US-led invasion of Iraq. In 2015, it is because of the mounting friction between Germany and the US over the crisis in Ukraine.

## Re-think in Berlin and Paris?

To understand the latest buildup behind the call for a common EU military, we have to look at the events stretching from November 2014 until March 2015. They started when Germany and France began showing signs that they were having second thoughts about the warpath that the US and NATO were taking them down in Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

Franco-German differences with the US began to emerge after Tony Blinken, US President Barack Obama’s former Deputy National Security Advisor and current Deputy Secretary of State and the number two diplomat at the US Department of State, announced that the Pentagon was going to send arms into Ukraine at a hearing of the US Congress about his nomination that was held on November 19, 2014. As the *Fiscal Times* put it, “Washington treated Russia and the Europeans to a one-two punch when it revealed its thinking about arming Ukraine.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry responded to Blinken by announcing that if the Pentagon poured weapons into Ukraine, Washington would not only seriously escalate the conflict, but it would be a serious signal from the US that will change the dynamics of the conflict inside Ukraine.

Realising that things could escalate out of control, the French and German response was to initiate a peace offence through diplomatic talks that would eventually lead to a new ceasefire agreement in Minsk, Belarus under the “Normandy Format” consisting of the representatives of France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine.

Pessimists may argue that France and Germany opted for diplomacy in February 2015, because the rebels in East Ukraine or Novorossiia, as they call it, were beating Kiev’s forces. In other words, the primary motivation of diplomacy was to save the government in Kiev from collapsing without a fair settlement

in the East. This may be true to an extent, but the Franco-German pair also does not want to see Europe turned into an inferno that reduces everyone in it to ashes.

Trans-Atlantic differences were visible at the Munich Security Conference in February. US Senator Robert Corker, the chair of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, commented during a question-and-answer session with German Chancellor Angela Merkel that it was believed in the US Congress that Berlin was preventing Washington from publicly ratcheting up US and NATO military aid to the authorities in Kiev.

Chancellor Merkel was explicit in her response when she told Senator Corker that the simmering crisis in Ukraine could not be resolved by military means and the US approach would go nowhere and make the situation in Ukraine much worse. When Merkel was pressed on militarising the conflict in Ukraine by the British MP Malcolm Rifkind, the chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee of the British Parliament, she said that sending more arms to Kiev was useless and unrealistic. Merkel told the British MP “to look reality in the eye.” The German Chancellor also pointed out that there cannot be security in Europe without Russia.

Germany’s public position at the Munich Security Conference flew in the face of US demands to get its European allies to militarise the conflict in Ukraine. While US Secretary of State John Kerry went out of his way at the gathering to reassure the media and the public that there was no rift between Washington and the Franco-German side, it was widely reported that the warmonger Senator John McCain lost his cool while he was in Bavaria. Reportedly, he called the Franco-German peace initiative “Moscow bullshit.” He would then criticise Angela Merkel in an interview with the German channel Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), which would prompt calls by German MP Peter Tauber, the secretary-general of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), for an apology from Senator McCain.

## German resentment

Back in February, Bloomberg wrote:

“For all the alarmist rhetoric about Russian barbarians at the gate, NATO countries are reluctant to put their money where their mouth is. Only the countries closest to Russia’s borders are increasing their military spending this year, while other, bigger ones are making cuts. Regardless of what their leaders say about Vladimir Putin, they don’t seem to believe he’s a real threat to the West.”

Washington, however, did not give up. When the Franco-German peace offensive began in February, General Philip Breedlove – who is the supreme commander of NATO’s military forces – said in Munich that “I don’t think that we should preclude out of hand the possibility of the military option” in Ukraine. General Breedlove is a US Air Force flag officer who takes his orders from the US government, thus subordinating NATO’s military structure to US command. While Berlin and Paris were trying to de-escalate, Washington was upping the ante using Breedlove and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

After speaking to the Armed Services Committee of the US House of Representatives, General Breedlove would claim that Russian aggression was increasing in Ukraine. Germany, however, would rebut Breedlove’s statements calling them “dangerous propaganda”.

“German leaders in Berlin were stunned. They didn’t understand what Breedlove was



European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

talking about. And it wasn’t the first time. Once again, the German government, supported by intelligence gathered by the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), Germany’s foreign intelligence agency, did not share the view of NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR),” *Der Spiegel* reported on March 6.

While Berlin has tried to downplay the reports about a rift with NATO over General Breedlove’s misleading comments, German Foreign Minister Steinmeier candidly admitted that it was true that the Germans disagreed with the US and NATO while he was in Latvia on March 7. What Steinmeier actually did was diplomatically rebuke and dismiss both the US and NATO statements about the “Russian aggression” in Ukraine.

In Latvia, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini added her voice to Steinmeier’s. She told reporters in Riga that the EU will pursue a realistic approach with Moscow and will not be pushed or pulled by anyone into a confrontational relationship with Russia. This was a tacit message to Washington: the EU realises that there can be no peace in Europe without Russia and does not want to be positioned as a US pawn against Moscow.

## Destabilising Eurasia

Germany itself is the ultimate prize for the US in the conflict in Ukraine, because Berlin has huge sway in the direction that the EU turns. The US will continue to stoke the flames in Ukraine to destabilise Europe and Eurasia. It will do what it can to prevent the EU and Russia from coming together and forming a “Common Economic Space” from Lisbon to Vladivostok, which is dismissed as some type of alternative universe in the Washington Beltway.

*The Fiscal Times* put it best about the different announcements by US officials to send arms to Ukraine. “Given the choreographed rollout, Washington analysts say, in all likelihood this is a public-opinion exercise intended to assure support for a weapons program that is already well into the planning stages,” the news outlet wrote on February 9.

After the Munich Security Conference it was actually revealed that clandestine arms shipments were already being made to Kiev. Russian President Vladimir Putin would let this be publicly known at a joint press conference with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Budapest when he said that weapons were already secretly being sent to the Kiev authorities.

In the same month a report, named “Preserving Ukraine’s Independence, Resisting Russian Aggression: What the United States and NATO Must Do”, was released arguing for the need to send arms to Ukraine – ranging from spare parts and missiles to heavy personnel – as a means of ultimately fighting Russia. This report was authored by a triumvirate of leading US think-tanks, the Brookings Institute, the Atlantic Council, and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs – the two former being from the detached ivory tower “think-tankistan” that is the Washington Beltway. This is the same clique that has advocated for the invasions of Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Iran.

## United EU military?

It is in the context of divisions between the EU and Washington that the calls for an EU military force are being made by both the European Commission and Germany.

The EU and Germans realise there is not much they can do to hamper Washington as long as it has a say in EU and European security. Both Berlin and a cross-section of the EU have been resentful of how Washington is using NATO to advance its interests and to influence the events inside Europe. If not a form of pressure in behind the door negotiations with Washington, the calls for an EU military are designed to reduce Washington’s influence in Europe and possibly make NATO defunct.

An EU army that would cancel out NATO would have a heavy strategic cost for the US. In this context, Washington would lose its western perch in Eurasia. It “would automatically spell the end of America’s participation in the game on the Eurasian chessboard,” in the words of

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# The failings of "Operation Slipper"

Binoy Kampark

It was made as a special statement. The Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott wanted it known that Australian soldiers who had fought in Afghanistan in what has been the country's longest war should not be treated like those who had fought in Vietnam. "Afghanistan is a better country because Australia was there," he explained to returning soldiers on March 21. Then, a nice little contortion of language, and reality. "That war ended, not with victory and not with defeat, but with hope, hope for a better Afghanistan and a safer world."

This statement of ritual stalemate on Operation Slipper – the Australian mission in Afghanistan – is suggestive. The Vietnamese War was marked by false logic, misguided ideology, and hare-brained cultural assumptions that led to a generation of Australian soldiers being ridiculed and vomited on as cultural abominations. Prime Minister Robert Menzies, on April 29, 1965, spoke of fears how "the takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia and all the countries of South and South-East Asia. It must be seen as a part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans." Tinker with such terms as "communism" and replace with "global fundamentalism," and the *raison d'être* for unlimited war is revived.

A great evasion has therefore developed towards the role of Coalition forces in Afghanistan, clothed in the language of humanitarianism and the stuffing of good feeling. Notable Australian voices such as Professor Hugh White have argued that Australia's mission, and by implication those of others, was a "total failure". White, writing in 2013, was examining the withdrawal of Australian forces from Oruzgan province. Its objectives, he argued, had not been achieved. "That

means that Australia's military operation in Afghanistan has failed."

Every measurement of success, taken through the doctrine of counter-insurgency (COIN) suggested the converse. The Afghan government backed by foreign forces continues to be debilitating in its corruption. "Any government that is too weak to win a counterinsurgency without massive outside help is too weak to be worth supporting." The reasons for placing troops in Afghanistan to deny it to Al-Qaeda "never made sense" – the terrorist franchise was out of Afghanistan and sprouting like well-fed fungi "long before we went to Oruzgan."

Others like Peter Jennings of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute engage in acts of gymnastic overstretch, hoping to grasp a rationale as to why Australia was there. He is only left with naked, circular presumptions – Australian soldiers were obviously engaged because it was necessary for Canberra to have a presence. "My view is that Australia's participation in the war was necessary; it has produced some positive outcomes and created the basis for cautious optimism that Afghanistan will have a better future." Jennings takes it as a given that, if the US was in Afghanistan to fight that grand nonsense of "global terrorism," then Australia had to be as well.

Standard economic measures are wheeled out in the manner Graham Greene so significantly skewered in *The Quiet American* – the good forces of modernisation fighting nationalist primitives in the name of a civilising mission finds virtue in buildings, infrastructure, and roads. "Progress in social and economic development has been made of a type that probably looks more impressive to Afghan than Australian eyes." Abbott's own commemorative address noted those materialist achievements: "girls' schools, roads and bridges where there were none."

The mid-road here comes from such

commentaries as those of Army veteran and Lowy Institute fellow James Brown. First, the deployment of Australian troops was deemed necessary to back US interests – every satrap needs his calling, and "it was entirely correct to support this mission with our military forces."

But the mission changed. Brown, without any evidence, suggests that the deployment did reduce the threat of terrorism in Australia, another example of how empirical evidence persists in being an enemy of the good, let alone necessity. Neither side of politics could quite explain the "why" of Australian involvement as the torpor began setting in. This, Brown chewed over, had little to do with reality and everything to do with image. The ADF had "forgotten many of the lessons of the East Timor conflict. Like finding a way to tell your story and get the media on side." The right war was simply fought in a "dumb" way.

For all of that, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, on whose behalf foreign forces were fighting and dying for, found little room for sympathy. His reflections typify how gratitude can never be possible for occupation forces, however efficient their mission or purpose. "The war on terror was not conducted where it should have been, which was in the sanctuaries and the training grounds beyond Afghanistan, rather than what the US and NATO forces were conducting operations in Afghan villages, causing harm to the Afghan people."

Importantly, the most brutal observation from Karzai lies in the failings of the mission. It is something that will, and should haunt, endeavours of such intrusion and blindness. This was a defeat of NATO and US forces, since there was never any victory to define, let alone gain.

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former US national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The intelligentsias in the US are already alarmed at the risks that an EU military would pose to American influence. The American Jewish Committee's influential *Commentary Magazine*, which is affiliated to the neo-cons in the Washington Beltway, has asked, as the title of the article by Seth Mandel illustrates, "Why Is Germany Undermining NATO?" This is while the *Washington Examiner* has asked, as the title of the article by Hoskingson says, "Whatever happened to US influence?"

This is why Washington's vassals in the EU – specifically Britain, Poland, and the three Baltic states – have all been very vocal in their opposition to the idea of a common EU military force. While Paris has been reluctant to join the calls for an EU army, French extreme right opposition politician Marine Le Pen has announced that the time has come for France to come out of the shadow of the United States.

British Prime Minister David Cameron's government responded to Jean-Claude Juncker by slamming his idea as an outrageous fantasy, declaring that the military is a national responsibility and not an EU responsibility. Poland and Latvia also reacted sceptically towards the proposal. These statements all serve US interests in preserving NATO as a tool for its influence in Europe and Eurasia.

10 Downing Street has contradicted itself about the military being a national issue and not a collective issue. Just as recently as 2010, London signed treaties to essentially create joint naval units with France and to share aircraft carriers in what is an amalgamation of the military. Moreover, the British military and military-industrial sectors are all integrated to varying degrees with the US.

There are some very important questions here. Are the calls for an EU military, meant to pressure the US or is there a real attempt to curb Washington's influence inside Europe? And are moves being made by Berlin and its partners to evict Washington from Europe by deactivating NATO through a common EU military?

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the gathering to  
between Washington  
warmonger  
portedly, he



## The 12th Battalion Marches Through Hobart

Such a chunk of island life  
hacked out.

Twelve thousand two hundred Tasmanians  
in 1914,  
a sea of slouch-hat finery  
conscripted to the aid of robber barons.  
Two thousand five hundred  
never again to greet  
the jeweled rivers  
of the Apple Isle.

What street, farm, community  
did not slip into the void of loss?

Some came home with  
inflamed scars, hell  
clawing at their sleep.

Given unyielding earth to till  
as a soldier's reward,  
they planted their tangled mass  
of love and devotion  
with a bitter determination,  
and a kind of grief.

Tom Pearson



# TPP – NAFTA on steroids

Reverend Jim Conn

Unless you've spent the winter lost on the Pacific Crest Trail, you know that incomes have slipped again. In fact, everyone's wage is down except for the top ten percent. Median incomes for the bottom 20 percent fell four percent; for the middle by six percent, and hourly wages have barely kept pace with inflation.

Why? Conventional wisdom says hordes of unemployed workers could return to the market place at any moment. That makes current employees afraid to change jobs to find higher incomes, or they are fearful about also joining the ranks of the long-term jobless. But there is a better reason for stagnant wages that mainstream commentators seldom mention – free trade agreements.

The Reagan Administration's infamous attack on unions, and its deregulation of industries from trucking to airlines, put jobs at risk everywhere, because those industries' pay scales were backed by the power of organised labour. Then so-called New Democrats under the Clinton Administration joined with Republicans to adopt NAFTA – the North American Free Trade Agreement – and more good manufacturing jobs (again, many of them union) fled across the border. American companies seized the opportunity to set up maquiladoras – manufacturing zones just south of the Mexican border – and shut unionised factories here. Suddenly everything from car parts to jeans came from low-wage locations, which created work in Mexico, but also massive dislocation, even as it closed jobs here.

The high-tech boom created a mythology that dominated the

business pages for a decade. The American working class would now become the "creative" class. Americans no longer needed to make things – we'd invent and design them, and somebody else would make them. So from iPhones to underwear, Americans designed and the people of Mexico, or China, or some other low-wage place, made them. It fit the postmodern economic analysis that American jobs in the future would no longer be found on menial assembly lines.

Apparently nobody noticed that this system neither grew the economy nor ended lousy jobs – it just paid less for tedious tasks. I can remember when a good working-class job in Los Angeles earned \$30 or \$40 or even \$50 an hour. Now it pays \$15-20. In the last five years 65 percent of jobs created in this country pay \$20 an hour or less. People are either making a lot of money or no money.

Now comes another "free trade" deal. Known as TPP – the Trans Pacific Partnership – it links some Western Hemisphere nations to Asia. Some of us think it is NAFTA on steroids.

Proponents – including the president – claim TPP will create 600,000 jobs and stir the economy from its torpor. But even such free trade agreement fans as the *Washington Post* fact-checked the claim and concluded that it would likely create no jobs. Zero. Nada. Michael Hiltzik, business columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, thinks it likely grows neither the economy of the US nor of the other nations involved.

Beyond that, TPP carries some insidious side-effects that could do a lot more damage. One element allows multinational corporations



to sue national, state and even local governments in international courts of arbitration for environmental or financial regulations that curtail their current practices. Raising the minimum wage, mandating a skull and crossbones on a pack of cigarettes, or limiting air pollutants could end up not in local courtrooms but in some obscure office far, far away.

All of this is being negotiated in secret. The media only know some

of these details because of leaks. Actually the elite of wealth and power probably know a lot more because they discuss these kinds of things over drinks at Davos and other power hangouts. Furthermore, the president wants this agreement "fast-tracked," which means voted on by both houses of Congress within 90 days, no amendments and no filibuster.

Asleep yet? That's exactly what the people who negotiate these kinds

of deals want so you won't notice that another nail has been put into the coffin of organised labour and the American working class. It's another reason why the hotel workers, retail clerks and truck drivers are fighting for better wages for jobs that can't be shipped overseas. It's why all of us fight to protect the earth on which and through which "we live and have our being," as St Paul put it.

People's World ☸

## Ukraine oligarchs top contributors to Clinton Foundation

From 2009 up to 2013, the year the Ukrainian crisis erupted, the Clinton Foundation received at least US\$8.6 million from the Victor Pinchuk Foundation, which is headquartered in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, a new report claims.

In 2008, Viktor Pinchuk, who made a fortune in the pipe-building business, pledged a five-year, US\$29-million commitment to the Clinton Global Initiative, a program that works to train future Ukrainian leaders "to modernise Ukraine." The *Wall Street Journal* revealed the donations the fund received from foreigners abroad between 2009-2014 in their report published earlier this week.

Several alumni of the program have already graduated into the ranks of Ukraine's parliament, while a former Clinton pollster went to work as a lobbyist for Pinchuk.

Between 2009 and 2013, the very period when Hillary Clinton was serving as US secretary of state, the Clinton Foundation appears to have received at least US\$8.6 million from the Victor Pinchuk Foundation.

That places Ukraine as the leading contributor among foreign donors to the Clinton Foundation.

Clinton Foundation donors:

- Ukraine: \$10.0 million
- England: \$8.4

- Saudi Arabia: \$7.3 million
- Germany: \$6.7 million
- Ireland: \$6.5 million
- India: \$5.0 million
- Canada: \$4.5 million
- Argentina: \$2.0 million
- United Arab Emirates: \$1.4 million
- China: \$1.3 million

The Pinchuk Foundation said its donations to the Clinton-family organisation were designed to make Ukraine "a successful, free, modern country based on European values." It went on to remark that if Pinchuk was hoping to lobby the US State Department about Ukraine, "this cannot be seen as anything but a good thing."

However, critics have pointed to some disturbing aspects regarding the donations, including the coincidence of the Ukrainian crisis, which began in November 2013, and the heavy amount of cash donations being made to the Clinton Foundation on behalf of wealthy Ukrainian businessmen. In any case, given that Hillary Clinton appears to be considering a possible run in the next presidential elections, more scrutiny will be devoted to her past work with the charity that bears the Clinton name.

First, as already mentioned, Clinton was serving as the US secretary of state at the time that the donations to her family's charity

were being made. Although it is true that the Clinton Foundation refused donations directly from foreign governments while Clinton was serving in the Obama administration, the door remained wide open to donations from public citizens like Pinchuk, who has advocated on behalf of stronger ties between Ukraine and the European Union.

Political connections in the Pinchuk family run deep. Not only did Viktor Pinchuk serve two terms as a Ukrainian parliamentarian, but his wife is the daughter of former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma.

After being introduced to former US President Bill Clinton by Doug Schoen, a political analyst and pollster who has worked for both Clintons, Pinchuk and his wife began making donations to Clinton-family charities, the *Wall Street Journal* reported.

During Hillary Clinton's time at the State Department, Schoen began work as a congressional lobbyist for the Ukrainian oligarch. Schoen defended his lobbying activities, saying there was no connection to Pinchuk's hefty donations.

"We were not seeking to use any leverage or any connections or anything of the sort relating to the foundation," he said.

Schoen said he and Viktor Pinchuk met on several occasions with



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Clinton aides including Melanne Verveer, a Ukrainian-American who holds membership in the influential Council on Foreign Relations, as well as the Trilateral Commission.

The purpose of these meetings, according to Schoen, was to encourage the US government to pressure Ukraine's former President Viktor Yanukovich to release his jailed political opponent, Yulia Tymoshenko.

Whatever the case may be, Ukraine entered a period of severe crisis on November 21, 2013, when Yanukovich suspended plans for

the implementation of an association agreement with the European Union. The announcement triggered mass protests that led to Yanukovich fleeing Kiev on February 22, 2014.

Social unrest eventually consumed the country, as the eastern part of Ukraine attempted to gain more independence from Kiev. Recently, both sides have agreed to a tense ceasefire, hammered out in Minsk, Belarus by the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany.

RT ☸



# Invading Yemen

## Criminality in support of hegemony



Adel Al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the United States.

Ajamu Baraka

Last week Adel Al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the United States, announced that Saudi Arabia had commenced military operations against the Ansarullah fighters of the Houthi movement in Yemen. The Saudi intervention was not unexpected. Over the last few weeks there were signs that the US and the Saudis were preparing the ground for direct military intervention in Yemen in response to the Houthis seizing state power in January.

The appearance of a previously unknown ISIS element that was supposedly responsible for the massive bomb attack that killed over 130 people and the withdrawal of US personnel were the clear signals that direct intervention by the Saudis was imminent.

And last week with the fall of al-Anad military base, the base where the US military and CIA conducted its drone warfare in Yemen, to Ansarullah fighters and the capture of the port city of Aden where disposed President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi had fled, it was almost certain that the US would give the green light for its client states to intervene.

The Saudi Ambassador cloaked the role of Saudi Arabia within the

fictional context of another grand coalition, this time led by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – the corrupt collection of authoritarian monarchies allied with the US and the other Western colonial powers.

Ambassador Al-Jubeir announced that before launching operations in Yemen all of its allies were consulted. The meaning of that statement is that the US was fully involved in the operation. Even though the Ambassador stressed that the US was not directly involved in the military component of the assault, CNN reported that an interagency US coordination team was in Saudi Arabia and that a US official confirmed that the US would be providing logistical and intelligence support for the operation.

And what was the justification for launching a military operation not sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council? According to the Saudis they have legitimate regional security concerns in Yemen. Their argument was that since they share a border with Yemen, the chaos that erupted over the last few months that culminated in what they characterise as a coup by the Houthi insurgency, forced them to intervene to establish order and defend by "all efforts" the legitimate government of President Hadi.

But this is becoming an old and

tired justification for criminality in support of hegemony.

The intervention by the Saudis and the GCC continues the international lawlessness that the US precipitated with its War on Terror over the last decade and a half. Violations of the UN Charter and international law modelled by the powerful states of the West has now become normalised resulting in an overall diminution of international law and morality over the last 15 years.

The double standard and hypocrisy of US support for the Saudi intervention in Yemen and Western and US condemnations of Russia's regional security concerns in response to the right-wing coup in Ukraine will not be missed by most people.

And so the conflagration in the Middle East continues.

US and Saudi geo-strategic interest in containing the influence of Iran has trumped international law and any concerns about the lives of the people of Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain. Militarism and war as first options has now become commonplace as instruments of statecraft in an international order in which power trumps morality and law is only applied to the powerless.

Information Clearing House ✪

## Protest ride against nukes

Peter Lazenby

**BRITAIN: Anti-nuclear activists are mounting a two-wheeled protest against Trident by cycling 60 miles from London to Britain's nuclear bomb factories at Aldermaston and Burghfield in Berkshire.**

Aldermaston and Burghfield manufacture warheads for the nuclear submarine program.

The cyclists left from the symbolic start point of arms giant Lockheed Martin's offices near Piccadilly Circus.

The trek will take two days, and en route the cyclists will visit communities affected by government cuts

and visit the offices of other arms companies profiting from government subsidies.

Parliament is due to give the go-ahead for updating the controversial system in 2016, at a cost to the taxpayer of more than £100 billion.

But even though Parliament has yet to give formal approval, advance work on the modernisation is known to have started at Aldermaston.

Among the cyclists is Ian Pocock, a long-time campaigner against the arms trade, from London.

Mr Pocock, who was recently made redundant, told the *Morning Star* that the aim was to put a focus on the insanity of Trident in the run-up to the general election.

"We hope the politicians will listen and realise that Trident is totally immoral, offensive and a waste of money," he said.

The cyclists have called their trek "Wheel Stop Trident."

Stopping-off points include Ealing Hospital, which is facing the closure of its maternity unit.

"Ealing Hospital's future is still uncertain," said Laura Stringhetti of Ealing Save Our NHS.

"The government tells us that austerity is necessary as there is no money left, while there is money for nuclear weapons and wars."

*Morning Star* ✪

Cuba

### Call for the 10th International May Day Brigade

April 27 to May 10, 2015

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

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



## Region Briefs

According to a survey from Nomura Research Institute, rich people in Japan doubled their financial assets in the past decade, whilst the number of households receiving welfare benefits reached 1,619,196 in the end of 2014, the number almost tripled from 601,925 in 1995. Despite Japan's terrible economic performance, the House of Representatives recently passed the budget that planned to cut social security services, increase military spending and reduce taxes for large corporations. By contrast, the Japanese Communist Party called for the government to increase budget spending to support the poor and disadvantaged people, and improve their living standards. With the help of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, the Abe government launched the fifth spy satellite within a year. With a designed life of five years, the satellite cost more than A\$273 million. It enables Japan to monitor ground surfaces with the capability of taking high-resolution images, and it raised concerns not only because of its cost, but also because it was operated by Japan's intelligence services.

At a monthly press briefing, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng said that the country will invite military representatives from countries that fought against fascists in the Second World War to participate in a military parade in September marking the 70th anniversary of the victory of the war in Asia. He added that the purpose of the parade was to "highlight China's firm stance, with all nations in the world, to safeguard the outcomes of the war, as well as world peace".

Tibetans who live in China's Sichuan Province enjoy a 15-year free education from kindergarten to high school, provided by the provincial government. In 2014, two local governments in the province, Aba and Qiang, invested around A\$1.6 million to help students from poor families go to school, including 26,000 kindergarten children, 94,000 primary and middle school students, 15,000 high school students and 2,900 vocational school students. The province will invest more than A\$1 billion in 2015 to improve living standards in the areas of medical care, public health, social insurance, cultural development, poverty alleviation, housing for herders and farmers, and free education.

US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter plans to visit South Korea early next month, ensuring the deployment of the US THAAD missile defence system in the country. South Korea's ruling Saenuri Party repeatedly stresses the need for THAAD, although it has been criticised by other domestic political forces and neighbouring countries. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea claims that the deployment of THAAD is part of American war preparation,

A delegation led by the Lao Women's Union Chairwoman Sisay Ludetmounsone visited Vietnam and received a warm welcome from Vietnam Women's Union Chairwoman Nguyen Thi Thanh Hoa and Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Thi Doan. The two unions discussed their situations and recent activities, and agreed to increase future cooperation. The delegation attended a working session with the Vietnam Women's Academy on training and education.



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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

## Sleight of hand on NDIS

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is supposed to provide better services. NSW is one of the first states to get an increase in overall funding for disability support.

According to the scheme, individuals receive direct funding that can be used in the private sector to access services instead of the model

of block funding non-government organisation (NGO) services backed up by a solid public system. The NDIS was not intended to replace disability support across the range of public services but that's what is going to happen in NSW.

The NSW government is linking the privatisation of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) to the roll out of the NDIS. Home Care will be sold off to a for-profit provider, with the assets transferred to NGOs. ADHC provides essential services for people that will not be funded under the NDIS.

There was no consultation with unions representing disability workers nor the people directly affected by the changes. People with disabilities in need of home care will have to navigate the private sector for their basic needs previously provided by ADHC. And if they cannot afford to pay to a private provider – bad luck, they'll have to do without.

Workers in the disability services will be losers as well.

They fought hard for their conditions and entitlements and many of those will go under private providers.

Mati English  
Sydney

## Agricultural work injuries

An analysis of injuries in the farm sector shows an incredible 193,632 working weeks were lost across the cotton, grain, mixed farming, sugar, marine and aquaculture industries over a four-year period. Across all of agriculture and fisheries, injury claims and associated costs were worth more than \$300 million over the same period, as reported in *The Land* newspaper.

The research was commissioned by the Primary Industries Health and Safety Partnership (PIHSP) and

conducted by Tony Lower at the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety.

Lower said that on average, there were almost 50,000 weeks of work lost each year across the included industries. This means about 930 people were off work due to injury every week.

While there have been significant improvements in workplace health and safety in primary production over the past 20 years, there is still a lot of work to be done. It's important to remember that workers' compensation data significantly underestimates the burden of injuries – in fact probably only 50-60 percent of the true cost – due to people who don't report incidents or make a claim. On top of that, it doesn't capture any injuries to non-workers like children or visitors to a farm or boat.

The analysis shows the five leading types of injuries consistently accounted for around 75 percent of

all claims. This illustrates the importance of developing and targeting approaches to assist farmers and fishers in addressing these core issues.

As always, quad bikes and vehicles featured consistently as a danger across land-based industries.

Lower said that action plans to ensure that proactive strategies are put in place to manage and control those risks will lead to a genuinely safer workplace.

T Southern  
Brisbane

Something to say?

Write to  
the Editor!

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland



Prime Minister for Aboriginal Affairs fawning over Gina Reinhardt.

# Gina, Tony and others of that ilk

My son Max wrote three of these items, for which I am grateful.

There was a photo of the Prime Minister for Aboriginal Affairs fawning over Gina Reinhardt. I'm not sure what his "out-of-shot" hand is doing, but Gina seems pleased. For those who've never heard the quote before, this is what Gina's father, Lang Hancock, said about Indigenous Australians ...

"I would dope the water up so that they were sterile and would breed themselves out in the future, and that would solve the problem".

Did you see where the report commissioned by Scott Morrison to exonerate his department of the allegations brought by the Australian Human Rights Commission – allegations of rapes, sexual assault, and that the Transfield guards routinely traded drugs for sexual favours in Australia's detention centre on Nauru – has come down AGAINST HIM! Instead, the Moss report has exonerated Save The Children of the claims brought against them by Morrison! The Moss Report goes on to find its own evidence that sexual abuse of women and children by Transfield guards is indeed happening, and that Save the Children's account of the miserable conditions on Nauru was correct.

So, next time Scott and Tony cry that the evidence against them is just politically motivated propaganda spread by their enemies to tarnish their reputation, let's remember that that's just what every don says when he's in the dock.

Ever since the British Tories privatised the country's railways, with disastrous effects on services and costs, people have been campaigning for their return to public ownership. One

line, the East Coast Main Line was returned to public ownership but after five years of successful operation has now been privatised again. TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady slammed the decision as "a costly mistake".

"The government has ignored the evidence, which shows that under public ownership East Coast returned increased profits, has record-high passenger satisfaction levels and has added £1 billion to Treasury coffers." That's a very tempting prize for the private rail operators. And after all, profits, not customer satisfaction is what they are interested in.

Britain is in strife over something else, too: the Iraqi army shot down two British planes in early March as they were carrying weapons for the ISIS terrorists in Al-Anbar province. "The Iraqi Parliament's National Security and Defence Committee has access to the photos of both planes that are British and have crashed while they were carrying weapons for the ISIS," said the head of the Committee, Hakem al-Zameli. The Iraqi parliament has asked London for an explanation.

Supplying weapons to ISIS terrorists is clearly a "false flag" operation, an almost routine venture for imperialist governments. I wouldn't hold my breath waiting for an honest answer from British Intelligence or the British government!

Changing the subject abruptly, homeopathy emerged in the 18th century, when advances in genuine science made people susceptible to the scientific-sounding claims of pseudo-science. The notion that diluting a medicine somehow strengthens it is of course ludicrous, but gullible people who have not been taught to think

critically still fall for the claims of the "homeopaths". However, we notice that the Australian Homeopathy Association has admitted they are "baffled by the concept of cordial". According to the 18th century principles of homeopathy, adding water to cordial should make the entire mixture stronger, not more dilute. Homeopathic researchers admit they are baffled by this, as well as by their inability to turn water into wine, which should be a simple process of gradually adding a large amount of water to a small amount of wine until it all turns to purest wine. Which, for some reason, it hasn't yet. I wonder why?

The capitalist media has made much of the murder of a prominent member of the right-wing opposition in Russia. Boris Nemtsov was gunned down as he walked across a bridge with his girlfriend, a 23-year-old Ukrainian model. The main opposition in Russia, which the capitalist media rarely mention, is the left-wing opposition, mainly the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF).

Nemtsov was a major player in the Yeltsin regime, but his pro-USA stance put him at loggerheads with the Putin leadership. He was a frequent visitor to the USA, where he would often meet with Senator John McCain, a leading member of the pro-war lobby in Washington. In recent months he had taken the lead in opposing Crimea's return to the Russian Federation. He also opposed Russia's support for the anti-Fascist resistance in Eastern Ukraine.

Western propaganda promptly blamed Putin for the murder, although Russian police are working on half a dozen different motives. KPRF leader Gennady Zyuganov pointed out

that "No matter what versions of this murder one may discuss, it must be borne in mind that enemies of our country, all sorts of scoundrels, will use it to destabilise the situation in Russia". Even Mikhail Gorbachev agreed: "The assassination of Boris Nemtsov is an attempt to complicate the situation in the country, even to destabilise it by ratcheting up tensions between the government and the opposition."

Also being ratcheted up is the USA's renewed Cold War, especially over the situation in Ukraine, where the fascist/oligarch regime in Kiev is persisting with so-far futile attempts to militarily crush the popular opposition in the east, which has Russian support. At the same time, US ally Japan upped its aggressive stance towards China, Japan has made a big issue of denying any involvement in acts of aggression during WW2. Former Russian ambassador to Tokyo Alexander Panov commented: "Official [Japanese] propaganda has been trying to persuade people to believe that their country was a victim rather than an aggressor."

Curiously, this denial of Japanese aggression against Pearl Harbour and other US bases across the Pacific and against such British possessions as Hong Kong, Malaya and Singapore has drawn almost no critical comment from US or British imperialism. They are instead busy encouraging Japan to become even more aggressive towards their perceived main enemy, China.

In January, on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Soviet army, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that attempts to distort and rewrite history were unacceptable and immoral. ☹





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

Sunday April 5 –  
Saturday April 11

**Margin Call** (SBS 2 Monday April 6 from 8.30pm) is a 2011 thriller from the US entangling the key players at an investment firm during one perilous 24-hour period in the early stages of the 2008 financial crisis. Directed by JC Chandor, it stars Kevin Spacey, Paul Bettany, Simon Baker, Jeremy Irons, Stanley Tucci, and Demi Moore.

The critics were impressed. AO Scott of *The New York Times* wrote: "It is hard to believe that *Margin Call* is Mr Chandor's first feature. His formal command – his ability to imply far more than he shows or says and to orchestrate a large, complex drama out of whispers, glances and snippets of jargon – is downright awe inspiring."

Roger Ebert wrote in the *Chicago Sun-Times* how "its characters are concerned only by the welfare of their corporations. There is no larger sense of the public good. Corporations are amoral, and exist to survive and succeed, at whatever human cost. This is what the Occupy Wall Street protesters are angry about: They are not against capitalism, but about Wall Street dishonesty and greed." [Actually, I think a lot of them had decided that it was precisely the capitalist system that was the problem – RG.]

The critic for the British paper *The Guardian* was typical: "The confident cinematic debut of writer-director JC Chandor, an experienced maker of commercials, *Margin Call* is the best fictional treatment of the current economic crisis. ... In fact, it stands up to comparison with the 1992 film of David Mamet's magnificently squalid play *Glengarry Glen Ross*, which in many ways it resembles, not least in featuring a peerless ensemble cast. *Glengarry Glen Ross* takes place during a couple of days in a seedy provincial branch of a national company where desperate salesmen peddle worthless real estate. *Margin Call*, also set

over some 36 hours or so, initially appears to be located in an altogether more honourable and affluent place, the Manhattan headquarters of a respected investment bank. But the year is 2008, the sub-prime crisis is under way and except for their Hugo Boss and Armani suits and the stainless steel and plate glass skyscraper they work in, there's little to distinguish the smooth operators earning \$1m bonuses on Wall Street from the grifters in *Glengarry Glen Ross*."

As the drama builds towards its climax, "the grey areas get darker, the ironic euphemisms become coated with free-floating obscenities, scapegoats find themselves staked out, the rich protect their backs and get richer, and the public gets screwed. Chandor's language is as precise and convincing as Mamet's, [and] the realism never slips into cheap cynicism."

**The Great Australian Fly** (ABC Tuesday April 7 at 8.30pm) is a potentially fascinating documentary about the many species of fly in Australia, spoiled by an overly arch commentary. Nevertheless it contains much interesting information. Did you know, for example, that more flowers are pollinated by flies than by bees?

There were two highly-regarded seasons of the urban-Aboriginal themed drama series *Redfern Now*. Now the characters return in a one-off telemovie (ABC Thursday April 9 at 8.30pm). Written by the AACTA award-winning Steven McGregor and directed by the ADG award-winning Rachel Perkins, the film revolves around a sexual assault that is not reported to the police.

The central character, Lorraine, is played with her usual skill and understanding by the very talented Deborah Mailman.

I must be a very dull person. My wife and I spent our holidays exploring the Australian countryside. Where possible, we avoided the main roads and instead meandered along traffic-free stock-routes, revelling in the scenery, the wild-life and the solitariness. We always had a great time, but that sort of holiday seems totally out of fashion today. Instead people seem unable to have a holiday unless they go to a popular "resort", whether it's the Gold Coast or Bali (for Australians) or Ibiza or Phuket (for Brits).

However, as the 8-part series *Big Trouble In Thailand* (SBS 2 Thursday April 9 at 9.30pm) shows, getting drunk as a skunk in Thailand is not necessarily the ideal holiday. Last year nearly 288 Britons were killed there and over 40 ended up in prison.

With behind-the-scenes access to the Thai Police's operations, this



Deborah Mailman as Lorraine and Kelton Pell as Raymond – *Redfern Now – the Telemovie* (ABC Thursday April 9 at 8.30pm).

series captures it all: drug busts, organised tourist scams, scorned lady-boys, violent brothel disputes, bar room brawls, brutal murders, street robberies and sexual assaults.

The British observational documentary *A Special Kind Of Mum* (ABC Friday April 10 at 8.40pm) follows two young mums, raising young children. What makes them noteworthy is that both mums are disabled (one is under three feet tall – her toddler is taller than she is – and the other cannot use her arms or her legs). The film is quite uplifting as they struggle to overcome their physical challenges – watching the "armless" mother change a nappy and do other mothering tasks with her teeth is enough to make anyone realise how well off most of us are.

But they also have to cope with prejudice on a daily basis from people who assume just by looking at them that their children must be neglected. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

As with some other long-running police series (notably *Taggart* and *New Tricks*), when the actor playing the lead character dies or wishes to retire they don't end the series, they simply replace the actor and carry on. When the actor playing DCI Barnaby in *Midsummer Murders* retired, they replaced his character with another also named DCI Barnaby, supposedly a close relative who was also a copper!

The first episode of the latest series of this very long-running franchise – most notable for its charming scenery and absurdly high body-count – goes to air this week (ABC Saturdays from April 10 at 8.30pm).

Set during a local literary festival honouring a dead author, I found it quite suspenseful. The links between the murders and the late author's works are as usual highly contrived, but that is part of this series' odd appeal. Neil Dudgeon, as Barnaby, is in good form. ☺

## POLITICS IN THE PUB PERTH

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Sydney

## POLITICS IN THE PUB

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;

April 16

**THE MARKET POWER OF THE DUOPOLY OF COLES & WOOLWORTHS; THE GROWING COST TO CUSTOMERS, SUPPLIERS AND COMMUNITY; CONSUMER ACTIVISM EFFECTIVE AND NOW ESSENTIAL**

**Chris Zinn**, Independent Consultant & former Director of Campaigns and Communications for CHOICE;

**Adrian Cameron**, Dr, Senior Research Fellow, Faculty of Health, Deakin University;

April 23

**BIG COAL – AUSTRALIA'S DIRTIEST HABIT**

**David McKnight**, Professor, School of Arts and Media, University of NSW;

**Peter Colley**, National Research Director, Mining & Energy Division, CFMEU, Sydney;

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# Foreign mercenaries will worsen the Boko Haram insurgency



Boko Haram was not always a militant group. They first became violent after security forces attacked its members who were attending a funeral in the city in 2009.

Andrew Noakes

Seven years ago, a group of US private military contractors massacred a crowd of unarmed civilians at a busy traffic junction in Baghdad. The contractors, who were employed by the notorious private security firm Blackwater, killed 17 people using heavy machine guns and grenades.

Together with the torture scandal at Abu Ghraib in 2003, the incident became one of the most ignominious episodes in the Iraq War. It solidified anger towards the US and added fuel to the fire of Iraq's insurgency. That year, 2007, ended up being the bloodiest for US forces in the entire war, with nearly 1,000 American soldiers killed.

When photographs of Western-looking private military contractors atop armoured vehicles in north-east Nigeria appeared on Twitter a couple of weeks ago, they sent shivers down the spines of analysts, for whom the memory of the Blackwater atrocities was still fresh.

The photographs were followed by reports of a South African military advisor being killed by Nigerian troops in a friendly-fire incident, and then by explosive reports in the *New York Times* and *Voice of America* that Nigeria has hired hundreds of foreign mercenaries to clear Boko Haram out of its northeastern strongholds.

The reports include claims that mercenaries from South Africa, Ukraine and Georgia are carrying out night-time ground attacks against Boko Haram and conducting airborne bombing runs against the insurgents.

The Nigerian government has denied the reports, claiming the mercenaries are simply advisors who are training soldiers to use and maintain newly acquired military equipment.

It's unclear how much the reports are exaggerated. But Boko Haram, an Islamist

insurgency now in its sixth year, had the Nigerian army on the run up until February. The sudden reversal in fortunes in recent weeks, with the Nigerian government pushing Boko Haram out of almost all its former territory in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states, seems remarkable.

## Saviours of Borno?

It's easy to think foreign mercenaries might be the quick-fix solution Nigeria needs to stop Boko Haram. Last year, as the insurgents rampaged through the countryside capturing town after town throughout the north-eastern region, the Nigerian army seemed overwhelmed.

Hampered by badly maintained equipment, insufficient resources, and inadequate training, soldiers often had little choice but to flee the communities they were tasked with protecting. Mercenaries offer an obvious solution – if the Nigerian army can't defeat Boko Haram, hire one that can.

The arrival of Western military advisors in north-east Nigeria may have set Boko Haram back militarily, but in the long term, it could be a political gift for them.

And Borno state badly needs a quick solution to Boko Haram, as it has been the worst hit by the group's violence. At the end of last year, the insurgents had pushed the government out of as much as 70 percent of the state's territory. Those left behind in the areas controlled by Boko Haram were subjected to forced conscription, summary executions and rape.

The population of Borno's capital city, Maiduguri, is swollen with people who have fled Boko Haram's terror. Its residents, new and old, have been living under the threat of an imminent Boko Haram takeover for months. Anecdotal evidence suggests some are relieved to see foreign advisors intervening to protect them.

One former resident of the city told me last week that his friends who remain there are "happy to see them [foreign advisors]", while a local human rights activist told me "they are being celebrated as saviours". But the true picture is likely to be more mixed.

## Fuelling insurgency

When US troops first rolled into Baghdad in 2003, many Iraqis were seen celebrating the end of the regime, but the images obscured a more complex reality. That lesson should be instructive for Nigeria.

Boko Haram was not always a militant group. It was originally a grassroots movement of Salafi Muslims based in Maiduguri. The group first became violent after security forces attacked its members who were attending a funeral in the city in 2009. After a series of skirmishes, its founding leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was summarily executed. Boko Haram thereafter dedicated itself to armed insurrection.

Before the violence, Boko Haram operated freely out of a mosque in Maiduguri, where Yusuf would preach. In his sermons, he blamed colonialism and the West for the moral corruption of Islam and Nigeria, saying in one sermon that because of "the Europeans destroying Islam and its values... the Europeans created the situation in which we [Nigerian Muslims] find ourselves today."

He argued contemptuously that when the colonial powers withdrew from Africa, they "insisted on the secular nature of the contemporary state and established democracy and human rights in all sorts of different places. Islamic flags and symbols were replaced with national flags and symbols. The sharia, Qur'an and Sunna were replaced with secular law."

Yusuf's anti-Western sermons were popular with locals in Maiduguri, and the group's

mosque was often well attended. Before 2009, Boko Haram is believed to have had thousands of members who identified with its political and religious messages.

Though some may now welcome the foreign military advisors to Maiduguri, there is clearly also a constituency there for Boko Haram's stridently anti-Western sentiments.

Indeed, anti-Western insurgencies can be counted on to become a lot more popular once Western boots are on the ground. The arrival of Western military advisors in northeast Nigeria may have set Boko Haram back militarily, forcing them to return to their hideouts in the countryside and wage the guerrilla war they are more used to fighting, but in the long term, it could be a political gift for them.

In recent months, the insurgency has struggled to attract voluntary recruits and stay on the right side of public opinion, due to its increasingly brutal tactics.

The arrival of Western soldiers on Muslim lands may well reverse that trend, bringing Boko Haram more support, swelling its ranks of fighters and reinvigorating the insurgency for a war not just against the Nigerian state but, if the insurgents can set the narrative the right way, against the old colonial enemies.

## The right side of public opinion

To avoid fuelling the fire of insurgency even more, the foreign military advisors would do well to stick to the mission the Nigerian government claims to have given them – to train, advise and maintain equipment. They should stay as far away from combat zones as possible.

Public opinion is only likely to turn sharply against them once events require assigning blame. The moment Western soldiers start killing Muslim civilians, whether accidentally or deliberately, the slide will begin. Human rights abuses and atrocities in particular are a lightning rod for hostile public opinion.

Though foreign advisors may have a positive role to play away from the battlefield, ultimately only the Nigerian government and armed forces can win the war against Boko Haram.

If foreign mercenaries get directly involved in this fight, now or in the future, the short-term gains on the ground could soon be eclipsed by the dire long-term consequences.

*New Internationalist* ✪

**To avoid fuelling the fire of insurgency even more, the foreign military advisors would do well to stick to the mission the Nigerian government claims to have given them – to train, advise and maintain equipment.**



**Communist Party of Australia**

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