



Corporate tax rorts

Offshore parasites

Tom Pearson & Anna Pha

As the saying goes, there are two certainties in an uncertain world: death and taxes. The corporate world, while unable to eliminate the former, is doing everything in its considerable power to eliminate the latter. As recent developments over the past couple of years show, transnationals are determined to not only dodge paying tax, but to pay none at all. The current ructions over the likes of Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton channelling billions through shell companies set up in places such as Singapore and Ireland are the tip of the iceberg.

As professor Pietro Guj of the University of Western Australia, who has been an advisor to that state's government, puts it, "A company has the right to conduct business wherever it chooses." Big business knows no borders, recognises no sovereignty. It was in 2005 that the Singapore government registered a new company called BHP Billiton AG Singapore Branch. It was given a special Pioneer Service Company status, which meant it would pay no income tax until 2020. Its Singapore tax-free profit is then sent to Switzerland. BHP Switzerland then pays 2.5% tax. The remaining profit is then paid as dividends to BHP Netherlands and considered tax free. This ruse is called dual-listed companies which function as two separate companies subject to two different tax authorities.

That's just one of the methods they use.

Of course, the system is there for them. As the big audit firm KPMG put it, the tech giants' tax structures are perfectly legal. That observation came as three of them faced a Senate inquiry this month. Representatives from Microsoft, Google and Apple made clear the class nature of the system: "The tax paid is in full compliance with Australian tax law" - Microsoft; "We are not opposed to paying tax. We are opposed to being uncompetitive" - Google; "We do not avoid tax, we pay all taxes that are due in the Australian market" - Apple.

Politically, it should be recalled that the mining companies spent tens of millions of dollars on advertising against Labor's 2010 Resources Super Profits Tax. The outcome: both Labor leader and PM Kevin Rudd and Liberal leader Malcolm Turnbull, who also supported the tax, were toppled in coups.

As has been reported in the *Guardian*, eight of the top 200 companies publicly listed on the Australian stock exchange (ASX 200) paid no taxes on profits averaging \$50 million and more than half a billion dollars over the decade to 2013! More than 20 (10 percent) of the top 200 corporations paid an average tax rate of five percent or less. Instead of rectifying



the situation the government keeps, telling the people of Australia that there is a "budget crisis", sacking thousands of public servants and slashing spending on social security, health, education, community, Indigenous and other services.

As a report released in September last year by the Tax Justice Network and the trade union United Voice reveals, "Almost a third of Australia's largest companies are paying less than 10 cents in the dollar in corporate tax, which has created a gaping hole in government revenues over the past decade."

The report found that overall the effective tax rate of ASX 200 companies over the last decade is 23%, compared with the official statutory rate of 30%. "If the ASX 200 companies had paid at the statutory rate it would have produced an additional \$8.4 billion in annual revenues" or more than \$80 billion over those ten years."

Tax havens

Fifty-seven percent reported having subsidiaries in secrecy jurisdictions (most likely zero or very low tax havens), between them a total of 1,078 subsidiaries. How many others there are is anyone's guess. Subsidiaries "overcharge" parents for goods and services, transferring profits offshore to low tax havens.

Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, British Virgin Islands, Mauritius, Luxembourg, Switzerland and the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey are amongst the most common tax havens. Bermuda and Jersey are home to at least 119 entities belonging to the ASX 200. Their tax rate is zero.

The report also revealed that 60% of the ASX 200 companies reported debt levels in excess of 75%, which is suggestive of tax avoidance set-ups. Otherwise why would they


continue running at a "loss"! They also borrow from offshore subsidiaries and between subsidiaries, so the tax deductible interest payments are in countries like Australia and the interest is in a tax haven with zero or close to zero tax rates.

United Voice national secretary David O'Byrne said, "The community will be shocked to learn that many of Australia's largest corporations can legally eliminate the need to pay tax at all or reduce their tax bill to 10% or less."

Corporate welfare

At the same time as the government is losing tens of billions of dollars in potential income it is handing out billions of dollars in corporate welfare.

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Superannuation: Hands off workers' retirement funds

The Superannuation Guarantee contribution rate was set to rise in small half-yearly increments to 12 percent by 2019. Following its election the Abbott government wasted no time in freezing the rate at 9.5 percent until July 2021. In the same mean, anti-worker spirit, Treasurer Joe Hockey also plans to abolish the Low Income Super Contribution in 2017. The LISC is a government superannuation payment of \$500 for workers on incomes below \$38,000 to help them save for retirement.

Hockey is also pushing for new laws to allow people to dip into their super savings for the purchase of a first home and other big budget items such as health or education. Not only would this eat away at workers' retirement savings but it would drive up the price of housing as more first home buyers could enter the market or would have larger deposits.

The financial company Merrill Lynch estimates that on retirement the superannuation savings of a young home buyer drawing \$40,000 from his or her super fund for a home deposit would be reduced by \$140,000 (at current prices) – \$100,000 of that loss being compound interest.

One of the main aims of the introduction by the compulsory superannuation guarantee system was to wind back the age pension. Labor is concerned that not enough people would have an adequate income from their savings, which would put the age pension under pressure.

Housing solution

Housing has become unaffordable for most people. The main reason is the shortage of properties on the market and lack of public housing. The way to solve this problem is to build more housing, in particular, public housing and bring in rental controls.

It is almost taken for granted now that rental or mortgage payments could take 50 percent or more of a worker's income. There was a time when banks limited loan repayments to no more than 30 percent of income.

Super could be used for housing but not by workers dipping into their savings. It should be made obligatory for a certain percentage of superannuation savings (industry, retail or self-managed) to be used for building public housing.

This would be a far better solution than workers eating up their retirement savings. Higher wages, a reversal of the casualisation of the workforce and abolition of TAFE and university fees would also help. But the Coalition is not concerned whether retired workers can live in comfort and with dignity. After all, what use are they to employers who have a younger fitter workforce to exploit? Their focus is solely on facilitating maximum profits for the corporate sector.

Super rort

While super is hardly likely to provide workers with enough savings to retire on, for the wealthy it is one big rort. They might be paying up to 47 percent (including Medicare levy) on income outside a superannuation fund, but on income on investments in the fund they pay little or no tax at all.

The official rate on income "earned" within a fund is 15 percent but the overwhelming majority of those with self-managed superannuation funds (SMSFs) are on higher incomes. They avoid tax by investing in shares delivering franked dividends – where the company has already paid tax on the income. They are credited as having paid that tax and deduct it from tax liable on their other income.

Close to 60 percent of SMSF members are over 55 years old. If they retire and begin drawing on their pension, they are exempt from tax on income from and inside the fund.

In 2013 there were 500,000 SMSFs holding almost \$500 billion (net) worth of assets and 28 percent of these held more than \$1 million.

Reform of the super system is long overdue. It is time to end the rorting and to stop robbing workers.

PRESS FUND

Federal coalition MPs Andrew Nikolic, Alex Hawke and Matthew Kavanac are spearheading a campaign to cripple environmental groups by stripping them of tax-free entitlements. Despite court rulings to the contrary, they argue that organisations like Friends of the Earth exceed their entitlement rights by engaging in political activity rather than simply taking part in remedial works such as land regeneration. The campaign is intended to protect the mining industry from protests over environmentally damaging activities like coal seam gas mining. We'll keep you posted on this story as it unfolds. But in the meantime we need your help by way of support for the Press Fund, so please, if you possibly can, send us a contribution for the next issue. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$20, NH \$20, HN \$20, Gianni Dittura \$5, Max Hunt \$500, Anon \$50

This week's total: \$620 Progressive total: \$2,566

Message to journalists re: metadata

All Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) members must take steps to protect their interactions with confidential sources in line with the ethical obligations of our craft, warns the journalists' union. The Data Retention Bill passed in the Parliament was amended to allow for the creation of "public interest advocates" and "journalist information warrants" offer no comfort – this new system operates entirely in secret and you will never know if your metadata has been accessed.

Furthermore, it is an offence to disclose or use information that a warrant "has been, or is being,

requested or applied for;" or to disclose information about "the making of such a warrant, the existence or non-existence of such a warrant, the revocation of such a warrant". Penalty: two years jail. The "public interest advocate(s)" will be appointed by the Prime Minister.

Counter-surveillance tools for journalists – MEAA urges members to take immediate steps to educate themselves about counter-surveillance tools that allow for anonymisation and encryption of your communications data in order to protect yourself, your sources and your journalism. Be alert to the changing vulnerabilities of these tools. MEAA House Committees and delegates are

urged to ensure their media employers introduce measures to protect sources and their information. MEAA will be arranging training courses for members on how to protect your data and your work.

Section 35P – The first tranche of national security laws amending the ASIO Act threatens up to 10 years jail for anyone disclosing information about "special intelligence operations" – that includes whistleblowers and journalists. The Independent National Security Legislation Monitor is conducting a review of the Act <http://meaa.io/1D3Vnvd> MEAA will be making a submission to the Monitor's review. ☘

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The federal government pays a fossil fuel subsidy of more than \$10 billion per annum. The private health insurance companies receive a direct subsidy of more than \$6 billion per annum in the form of the PHI (private health insurance) rebate (30-40% of cost of premiums. This indirectly subsidises the private hospitals and other private health services.

The only corporate subsidies being axed are the ones that seek to address climate change.

The report notes that "over the last five years, the proportion of tax on profits raised by the government from business shrank from 23% to 19%, while the proportion from individuals rose from 37% to 39%."

The "budget emergency" is a myth. But there is a tax emergency – which needs urgent addressing before the whole taxation base collapses.

Workers are not only carrying an increased income tax burden, but paying the GST which has been rising as a proportion of national income. On top of that, the government is using the short-fall in taxation as an excuse for its austerity measures and continuing to cut the company tax rate.

Instead of spending cuts which have such devastating consequences for the most vulnerable people, the government should focus on progressive reforms to the tax system so that the corporate sector pay a larger share. This would overnight result in a large budget surplus, and not a shortage of funds for people's needs.

These reforms should include repeal of the fossil fuel rebate, phasing out of the PHI rebate, an increase in company tax rates and marginal rates on higher incomes. It is time mining companies funded their own infrastructure. Huge savings could be

made by slashing the military budget which is headed towards \$40 billion and Australia pulling out of the Middle East. Both measures would strengthen our security.

The government should be taking strong and serious measures to close tax loopholes and the use of offshore tax havens.

GST increase push

The public is being softened up to accept the unacceptable as the unavoidable or inevitable. This is particularly so with the GST mentioned above which is a regressive tax that hits those on the lowest incomes the hardest.

The Hawke-Keating Labor government had attempted to introduce a goods and services tax in the 1980s but, not wishing to commit political suicide, backed off under considerable pressure from the public and within its own ranks.

It took the Howard government with the support of Australian Democrats leader Meg Lees in the Senate to get the highly unpopular GST up and running. It came into force in July 2000. The never-to-be-increased GST was set in concrete with a requirement that there be unanimous support of the federal and all state governments for it to be increased. Some goods and services were exempt from the GST, a concession gained by the Democrats from the Howard government before agreeing to the tax. It was the beginning of the end of the Democrats.

Unlike a progressive tax system, where those on higher incomes pay at a higher (marginal) rate in the dollar, the GST is a flat tax. Everyone pays 10 percent, regardless of whether they are on unemployment payments of \$259.60 a week or a business person on \$25,000 a week. Those on lower incomes also spend a

far higher proportion of their income on GST taxable goods and services.

The personal income tax system, despite its shortcomings, is more progressive, with those on higher incomes paying a higher rate in the dollar once their income reaches certain thresholds. It is an unfair tax that shifts the tax burden onto those least able to pay and lets the corporate sector completely off the hook. Not surprisingly big business is keen to slash company tax rates and increase the GST.

Lifting the present exemptions on fresh food, education, health, community care and residential services, childcare, water, sewerage and drainage, financial related exemptions could raise more than \$20 billion in additional GST revenue – the equivalent of almost \$1,000 extra per person. (Treasury's Tax Expenditures Statement 2013)

If the federal and state governments agreed to lift the exemptions and increase the rate, then the amount collected might rise from just over \$50 billion to \$85 billion (12% rate) or \$95 billion (15%). That's more than the corporate sector presently pays on its profits!

These estimates fail to take into account the impact of a higher GST on people's pockets. For the millions of Australians who are already financially stretched, it would be disastrous. It would result in increased hardship and the purchase of fewer goods and services and have a serious contractionary effect on the economy. As demand declined, more businesses would go belly up, and more workers would be sacked.

The tax system needs reform. The GST should be abolished. Company tax and the marginal rates on higher incomes should be increased. At the same time billions could be raised to meet social needs by slashing corporate welfare and closing the loopholes that allow highly profitable transnational corporations to pay peanuts or no tax at all. There is absolutely no economic justification for balancing budgets and swelling corporate profits at the expense of the people. ☘

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Perth

Homeless camp raided

Gerry Georgatos

Matargarup was raided again last month by 50 police officers who escorted City of Perth workers and other hired personnel. The City of Perth loaded onto trucks tents, swags, bedding, linen, and other daily essentials.

Ultimately, the City of Perth's councillors and the Lord Mayor stand shamed. It is their watch. They have done ever so little for the city's homeless. Indeed, their watch has led their response to homelessness to a deficit position.

Those present at the time of the raid on Matargarup were 20 women, most of them elderly. There were some young mothers with children and toddlers. There were less than 10 males as most of the homeless camp had left for a stretch off the island precinct. They left their tents unattended. Most of them being chronically homeless would return to find they have no tents or bedding. They will be sleeping on the earth, exposed to the night air, cold, vulnerable, as they are usually.

There was anger among the

homeless but there was mostly tears. There was sadness, there was despair. After the cruel raid concluded and the police muscle nicked off, a few of them embarrassed by their compliance to "only doing my job".

"Where are we to sleep tonight?"

"They take our bedding, our mats, our pillows."

"They take our tents."

"They just want us to disappear into dangerous places where often we get rolled, assaulted."

"We were safe here. We had company."

"We're less than dogs to them. They don't care about us."

"We weren't doing anything, just being safe."

"We beggars in our own lands."

"We not even that. They want us dead and buried, gone altogether."

"Why would they move us on from a place of safety?"

I was there and I was angered and demonstratively frustrated by the City of Perth's cruel conduct. I have spent a lifetime working with the vulnerable, with the homeless and in finding housing for the homeless. *The Stringer's* Jennifer Kaeshagen was there as the

raid occurred. Ms Kaeshagen coordinates the grassroots First Nations Homelessness Project. She has been securing safe shelter and housing for homeless families and individuals. Her capacity to home families should embarrass the Department of Housing, many well resourced non-government housing mobs and especially the state government.

What is next? Move on notices for Matargarup's homeless?

The Matargarup camp has been a safe space for the homeless who otherwise are vulnerable to the worst of violations on the streets, in congested squats and alleyways. The City of Perth and the state government stand disgraced. Their conduct to move on Perth's increasing homelessness into out of sight squats and traps, into alleyways should be condemned by all. The City of Perth's bent to move on the homeless.

The City of Perth should be working to provide a homeless friendly precinct. The City of Perth should provide safe spaces with laundries and showers, storage facilities, treatment centres and other basics. But they do not; this speaks for itself.



Homelessness is on the increase, especially in Western Australia. Matargarup's homelessness camp is a powerful statement of this state's silence and of the negligible response to homelessness. This is the nation's wealthiest jurisdiction but with the worst homelessness rates. This state has built only 700 public houses in the last six years but our waiting list is 48,000 people long.

Perth has many large families, with six, seven, eight children, who are homeless, on the streets, but Western Australia remains silent.

In Australia we have 20,000 children under the age of 12 years homeless. In the Kimberley, nearly seven percent of the region is homeless. Outside natural disasters and wars this is one of the world's highest homelessness rates. Nearly 100 percent of the Kimberley's homelessness is of First Peoples.

Does the City of Perth have the courage to meet with us and talk this through. Well, we know the City of Perth has been reading *The Stringer*. *The Stringer* ✪

Venezuela is not alone!

Bob Briton

US President Barack Obama's Executive Order declaring Venezuela a threat to US national security and foreign policy objectives must rank as one of the most spectacular political "own goals" of recent times. Since the thinly veiled declaration of war on the Bolivarian Revolution was made on March 9, world opinion has rallied in support of Venezuela's sovereignty and security. There have been some unprecedented expressions of solidarity, especially in Latin America where the mood is decidedly against turning the clock to a US-dominated Western Hemisphere.

Obama was previously on track for improved relations with Latin America following moves towards the normalisation of relations with Cuba. The threat to Venezuela

has soured the mood. There was a unanimous statement from the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which represents all 33 countries in the region, totally rejecting the order and the sanctions against Venezuelan officials, declaring the acts "coercive measures contrary to international law."

An international petition has gathered over 10 million signatures. Protests have taken place all over Europe, the Americas and even Gaza, whose people benefited greatly from the solidarity extended by the people of Venezuela. Bolivia has pledged military support. In far away Australia, disparate community and solidarity groups have rallied in support of the Bolivarian Revolution that has delivered so many benefits to the people of Venezuela. Protests against US aggression took place last weekend

in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. In Adelaide, the local chapter of the Australia Venezuela Solidarity Network was revived and plans made for future actions in support.

The US has sought to defuse the situation caused by the inflammatory Executive Order. The language used in the announcement was claimed to be "pro forma" in order to justify sanctions. The threat to Venezuela, however, remains in place. The Bolivarian Revolution has endured US-backed sabotage against the vital oil industry, capital flight, a business strike, hoarding of vital supplies and other economic sabotage, acts of random extreme violence and, of course, a bloody coup attempt in 2002. A recent coup plot was thwarted at a very advanced stage.

The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) has issued a declaration of solidarity with the

Venezuelan people and called for an international day of action on April 19.

"The objective of this event will be to give a clear and strong message to imperialism: Venezuela is not alone and the rest of the world supports and accompanies us," a letter from the PCV says. "This initiative is framed within the international and national anti-imperialist offensive of the Communist Party of Venezuela."

"Comrades, we count on your support and active solidarity. We extend fraternal greeting from the homeland of Bolivar, where the working class and people will continue to advance towards the construction of the socialist society."

The declaration finishes with a list of demands and goals fully backed by the Communist Party of Australia. We support efforts to:

• Express our full and active

solidarity with the Venezuelan people, the Communist Party of Venezuela and the government of President Nicolas Maduro, victims of a dangerous aggression by US government;

- Demand the repeal of the infamous and interventionist decree signed by President Barack Obama;
- Join the joint call for a Day of Global Action in solidarity with Venezuela, on April 19;
- Summon the movements and organisations which bring together and represent the working class and people so that they demonstrate their militant solidarity with Venezuela during the activities to be held on May 1;
- Refuse in each parliament the motions and actions directed against Venezuela and its legitimate right to self-determination. ✪

Pete's Corner



Sydney

CPA Port Jackson Branch

invites comrades and friends to join us for our

Port Jackson Discussion Hour

Tuesday April 28 (please note change of date)

What's wrong with the ANZAC commemoration?

Introduced by Comrade Denis

Tuesday May 5

Where did Australian manufacturing go & why?

Introduced by Comrade Steve

Tuesday May 19

Why you should be afraid of the TPP

Introduced by Comrade Steve

Tuesday June 2

Should Aborigines be included in the Constitution?

Introduced by Comrade Hannah

All classes 5:30 pm at 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills

Enquiries: Hannah 0418 668 098

Australia is in the middle of an unemployment crisis

Owen Bennett
Youth Unemployment
Coalition

Going by the official figures released for January 2015, 795,000 people in Australia are unemployed (6.4%), the highest notional rate of unemployment for 13 years. But this figure does not tell the whole story.

1. It does not show that just under half of those unemployed are between the ages of 15-24 (361,100), bringing the national youth unemployment rate to 16.1% (more than three times the total average).

2. It does not show that over 200,000 unemployed people are over the age of 50 - a 40% increase since 2010!

3. It does not show that there are over 1.2 million underemployed people competing against the unemployed for jobs.

4. It does not show that going by the latest figures for job vacancies, there are only 152,700 job vacancies. When you consider that there are over 2 million underemployed and employed people competing for these jobs, this means there are more than 13 applicants for each job vacancy!

5. It does not show that the rate of unemployment benefit is about half of what is needed to live above the poverty line, or that Newstart has not increased in real terms since 1994.

6. It does not show that one in four people collecting unemployment benefits has a significant disability and has over the last few years been

pushed onto Newstart from the Disability Support Pension or that there are 100,000 single parents who have also been forced onto the starvation rate of Newstart.

7. And lastly it does not show that long-term unemployment has, over the last few years, doubled to 500,000 - or that the average time spent unemployed, according to the Australian Council of Social Services, is four years.

So how has the government responded to this unemployment crisis that has been slowly building in Australia over the past decade?

Has the Coalition tried to increase the rate of jobs available?

No. In fact they have done the opposite and have been systematically slashing jobs in the public service. Since being elected, 100,000 Australians have become unemployed. Even the government's election promise to create 2 million jobs over the next decade is actually below the rate of expected employment growth!

Has the Coalition tried to take responsibility for its failure to create enough jobs by introducing a fair welfare system?

No. Instead, the Coalition has introduced the most wide-ranging series of attacks ever launched on the Australian welfare state since it was introduced in 1945.

Rather than attempting to fix this unemployment crisis, the federal government has launched an unprecedented range of attacks against the unemployed, pensioners, the disabled and families.

But most of you already knew about this.

The question that confronts us today is WHY and WHAT can we do about it?

Let's first look at the question of why successive governments - both Labor and Liberal - have been forcing more and more people onto the starvation rate of the Newstart entitlement.

While the government has repeatedly told us that all these cuts are necessary in order to balance the budget, this is a lie.

The real reason is far more sinister.

By forcing hundreds of thousands of people on to the starvation rate of Newstart, what the government is effectively doing is making unemployed people so desperate, so impoverished, that they would be willing to accept almost any work at any conditions. For the last two decades, this strategy has placed a strong downward pressure on wages and conditions. As a direct result of this, today the growth of real wages has fallen to its lowest rate for 17 years!

It's no coincidence that it was 17 years ago when John Howard first introduced the punitive Work for the Dole program and began an ongoing assault against the unemployed and the welfare state.

Seen from this perspective, the ongoing attacks against the unemployed, pensioners and the welfare state are essentially an elaborate form of welfare for business, paving the way for lower wages and conditions.



The ongoing attacks against the unemployed, pensioners and the welfare state are essentially an elaborate form of welfare for business, paving the way for lower wages and conditions.

This brings me to my next point: What can we do about it?

Considering the destructive impact the ongoing attacks on our welfare system have had on Australian society, the Australian Unemployment Union has been working to unite all Centrelink recipients against these attacks.

Furthermore, we have been, conducting a campaign to reach out to the trade union movement to help us in our common struggle for a fair

wage for all and to bring the humanity back into our welfare state.

If our common struggle is to succeed, we firmly believe we must show the trade union movement - and the general public more broadly - that to fight for a humane welfare state, for a fair rate of Newstart entitlement, for a fair rate of pension, and more broadly, for a fair opportunity of secure employment, is something that will benefit all Australians.

The Beacon ☘



Adelaide

May Day March - Fight For Your Rights

Saturday May 2

10:30am to 11:00am start

Torrens Parade Grounds to Light Square

Live music with SA's own *Babylon Burning*

Food, drink, stalls and fun for the kids

For more info visit maydaysa.com.au

May Day Workers Memorial

Sunday May 3

10:00am Black Diamond Cnr, Port Adelaide

Followed by a gathering at The Semaphore Workers Club

Perth

March on May Day

Sunday May 3

From 10:30am March at 12 noon

Freemantle Esplanade

Free: Kiddy rides, music, stalls, events, BBQ, drinks...

CFMEU WA - Construction Union

Sydney

The Annual Sydney May Day Toast

Friday May 1

6:00 - 8:30pm

The Workers, Level 1, 292 Darling St, Balmain

Live music, food @ refreshments \$50 per person

For enquiries & to book 02 9881 5999

or cdeprat@unionsnsw.org.au

May Day Rally

Sunday May 3

Assemble 11am Town Hall

Celebrate the International Workers Day!

Call for moratorium on CSG

Lock the Gate Alliance president Drew Hutton says he "supported wholeheartedly" all 20 of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Certain Aspects of Queensland Government Administration related to Commonwealth Government Affairs.

Hutton called on the ALP to reverse its opposition to recommendations calling for a moratorium on new coal seam gas (CSG) approvals, a Royal Commission into the human impacts of CSG mining, and the ban on fracking in Queensland.

"It's a shame Labor opposed four of the most crucial recommendations," Hutton said. "Now is the time for the ALP to clear the decks and cut its links with the former state Labor administration and the former Liberal National Party (LNP) government."

"Queenslanders know some really dodgy deals went down under both the previous ALP and LNP governments and now is the time to right those wrongs."

He pointed out that the report highlights the reasons why the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation powers should not be handed back to the states - that they just cannot be trusted as the sole approving authority for major developments.

"Both the new ALP state government and the federal government should be pushing for a Queensland ICAC and a Resources Ombudsman to stamp out corruption and bring transparency back to this state."

"The report highlights the harrowing evidence given by people living in the gasfields who have experienced negative impacts on their health, their farming businesses and their land values."

"We are very disappointed that the Liberal Senator issued a dissenting report and that the Liberal Senators did not even bother turning up at sittings to hear evidence from people living in gasfields."

Mr Hutton congratulated the members of the committee, particularly Queensland Senators Larissa Waters and Glenn Lazarus who acted in an exemplary manner despite the appalling behaviour of Coalition committee members who constantly tried to undermine the proceedings.

The federal government Energy Whitepaper released last week is another missed opportunity to reassure the community on unconventional gas says the Lock the Gate Alliance.

"After the issue playing out in the Victorian and NSW state elections, Energy Minister MacFarlane has failed to take community concerns seriously," said National Coordinator, Phil Laird.

"Legitimate concerns raised by the NSW Chief Scientist were not referred to at all by the Energy White Paper, nor the recommendations of the NSW Gas Supply Inquiry."

"The government has taken the simplistic hands off approach of leaving gas regulation to the

market. The Whitepaper does not provide a framework to ensure rigorous environmental protection but seeks to streamline environmental approvals via a one stop shop.

Further there is no process to determine the existing gas supply volumes, domestic and export demand and future gas commitments so that government planning decisions are made in Australia's long-term national interest."

He said the Alliance does welcome a proposal for an Australian Competition and Consumer Commission investigation into market transparency and price discovery in the upstream gas market and that it has been clear for some time now, that a number of public statements have been made to financial markets and the community at large in a coordinated scare campaign that there will be gas shortages.

"These public statements have been made by a range of companies who seek to benefit by ramping up CSG and unconventional gas development on the eastern seaboard."

"The misinformation, price gouging and cartel-like behaviour deserve further investigation as does the revolving door between industry and government."

"This is the next piece of the puzzle for affected communities and gas consumers alike who are wondering why the regulation of this industry has gone so wrong and who will be held accountable for its abuse of market power." ☘

Asylum seekers Labor, Liberals legacy

Peter Mac

A few weeks ago when federal Labor MP Janet King appeared on the ABC's Q&A program she acknowledged that governments of both Australia's major political parties have mistreated asylum seekers who arrive unannounced by boat.

That's the first admission of any fault with regard to asylum seeker policy by a representative of either party since a small group of coalition MPs courageously voiced their objection to the policies of the former Howard government.

The policies of both parties constitute a vindictive assault on the human rights of the asylum seekers, and have brought Australia's international reputation into disrepute.

Labor's performance has not been more praiseworthy than that of the Liberals. Labor PM Paul Keating introduced the draconian mandatory detention policy, and former Labor PM Kevin Rudd proposed incarcerating asylum seekers in Papua New Guinea and banning them from ever gaining Australian citizenship.

Rudd's idea was accepted and amplified by the Abbott government, which now wants to exile them in one of the world's poorest nations, Cambodia. Moreover, the current Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop, is currently attempting to persuade the government of Iran to accept the enforced repatriation of Iranian asylum seekers whom the Australian government considers are not genuine refugees.

Their refugee status will probably be determined under the recently-introduced policy in which assessments are made following interviews as short as 20 minutes. If the subject says he or she is looking forward to an improvement in their standard of living they will probably be deemed an "economic refugee", and therefore unacceptable in the government's criteria.

As a result of this grossly biased process hundreds of asylum seekers may be sent back to Iran, a country from which they had fled because of serious danger of persecution, injury or death.

Reversing cruel policies

The competition between Labor and the Liberals to appear more "tough" on unauthorized arrivals has resulted in both parties adopting almost neo-fascist policies in which

asylum seekers are, in effect, treated not only as criminals but as an inferior human species.

This approach directly contradicts the views of two of the most notable former leaders of the Liberal and Labor parties. The government of Labor leader Gough Whitlam took deliberate steps to break down barriers between immigrants and other members of the community.

With Whitlam's support, Liberal leader Malcolm Fraser increased the immigrant quota and introduced measures to facilitate resettlement of refugees from Vietnam. Fraser's subsequent disgust with the asylum seeker policies of the Howard government was one reason why he left the Liberal party.

As far as asylum seeker policy is concerned, the Liberals are now inheriting a whirlwind of condemnation. The UN has stated that the government's conduct not only violates our obligations under the Refugee Convention but also contravenes the UN convention against torture.

In response Prime Minister Tony Abbott arrogantly declared he was sick of complaints from the UN and that they should praise the government for having "stopped the boats", as the government falsely claims.

However, the Human Rights Commission's subsequent report revealed appalling conditions and a pattern of abuse and rape of detainees in the Nauru and Manus Island centres.

The government then launched an attack on the credibility of the report's author, Commissioner Professor Gillian Triggs, having tried unsuccessfully to bribe her to quit the Commission and take up a lucrative government overseas posting.

The government claims it will send the first consignment of refugees to Cambodia very soon, but detainees held on Manus Island and Nauru have failed to volunteer, which is hardly surprising.

Meanwhile, protests against the seemingly never-ending detention of asylum seekers in appalling conditions on Nauru and Manus Island are continuing, despite a ban and the threat of two-year prison sentences and \$3,000 fines.

Last week Nauru detainee Saeed Hansonloo hovered near death in a Perth hospital after having been on a hunger strike for many days. His condition is said to be improving, but the precedent has been set for similar action, which may lead to detainees dying in protest against the government's policies.

Barrister and human rights activist Julian Burnside has previously suggested that in order to reduce the numbers of asylum seekers risking their lives at sea, the government should establish an office in Indonesia and give applicants for asylum a written undertaking to assess their applications as soon as possible.

He has also suggested that asylum seekers who reach Australian territory by boat should not be forced back to their port of departure or subjected to imprisonment in exile, but rather:

- Boat arrivals would be detained initially for one month, for preliminary health and security checks, subject to extension if a court was persuaded that a particular individual should be detained longer;
- After initial detention, they would be released into the community, with the right to work, Centrelink and Medicare benefits;
- They would be released into the community on terms calculated to make sure they remained available for the balance of their visa processing;
- During the time their visa applications were being processed they would be required to live in specified regional cities. Any government benefits they received would thus work for the benefit of the regional economy. There are plenty of towns around the country that would welcome an increase in their population.
- Provided that applicants were preferably located in towns where labour is needed, and that they were offered pay and conditions at current award rates, the proposal offers an entirely practical solution to the current impasse. It would rescue our sullied international reputation, and according to Burnside save the nation at least \$4.5 billion per annum.

But it is impossible to envisage the coalition government adopting such an approach, and Labor has painted itself into an ideological corner by competing with the Liberals for the most vindictive asylum seeker policy. As Burnside says, both parties have incited and then harnessed public xenophobia.

This incredibly cruel treatment of asylum seekers must change, lest it will rank with the odious white Australia policy and the vast tragedy of the stolen generations as vile, indelible stains on the nation's history. ❖

If you come here by boat without a visa

**YOU WON'T
BE SETTLED
IN AUSTRALIA**



For more information call 1300 724 010
www.australia.gov.au/novisa

An Australian government advertisement that is targeting asylum seekers.



There are jokes and there are idiots who think they are funny – usually at somebody else's expense. Dozens of Commonwealth public servants were told by their bosses that their jobs were to be axed in an April Fool's day in Canberra. More than 30 low-ranking workers at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade were greeted by a message on a big TV screen in the office that their workplace was being broken up and moved to Melbourne. Many of the public servants are on temporary contracts and they were advised to submit expressions of interest if they wanted to keep their jobs by moving interstate. The people responsible for this "hilarious" prank were bosses at the Passport Office's Canberra Regional Eligibility Centre and they kept the message on display for five hours, despite the growing distress among the public servants at the centre.

The Abbott government and its leader are not all that popular, to put it mildly. Economic stagnation, cuts to services and everyday struggle for many people to provide adequately for their families are things that worry many people. Last year's budget's smell is still hanging around and there is another one to be had soon. But it will come as no surprise that instead of at least trying to work out how to assist the population, Abbott and friends are concerned about how to save their own positions. We shall all rejoice at the news that Prime Minister Abbott appointed a new personal photographer. Don't know how much taxpayers will be paying for that in the tough economic times. News crews are provided with the footage provided by Mr Abbott's press office and news photographers will be excluded from direct access to him. NSW Premier Mike Baird plays the same game, posting a staged photo on Twitter. As my Mum used to say – "handsome is as handsome does". Ugly policies will not enhance politicians' images no matter how much they are polished.

Air quality in Australia is quite good by world standards but it could be better. Environmental and health groups want to see new laws to curb rising pollution from toxic substances and heavy penalties for companies that breach pollution controls. Environmental Justice Australia has completed a three-month study tracking five years of data (voluntarily submitted by polluters to Australia's National Pollutant inventory), which tracks particle emissions estimates for 93 toxic substances. Emissions of dangerous fine-particle pollution from the coal industry has increased by 52 percent in the past five years, compared with a general increase across all industries of 14 percent. The Environmental Justice Australia study found coal was the leading source of particle pollution. "We have failed to protect the communities of Australia. Air pollution kills more Australians than car accidents – that was noted by the Senate inquiry into the health impacts of air pollution in 2013," researcher James Whelan said. Air pollution contributes to premature deaths and a range of respiratory and cardiovascular problems.



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Simon Trinidad, imprisoned, connects with Colombian peace process

WT Whitney

Ricardo Palmera, alias “Simon Trinidad,” is a political prisoner and more. Even as such, his 60-year sentence and constant solitary confinement are extraordinary. Post-sentencing legal services are not always available. His mail is blocked, visitors are limited, and he is shackled when they see him. Trinidad occupies a “Supermax” cell in the United States, in Colorado. In Colombia he’s an enemy of the state.

Simon Trinidad was a leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) with responsibilities for political education, financial overview, and peace negotiations. He participated with the FARC in talks with the Colombian government in 1998-2002. In Ecuador prior to his capture in January 2004 – with CIA help – he was preparing to meet with United Nations representative James Lemoyne to review the situation of FARC prisoners of war.

On being detained, Trinidad was moved to Colombia, and then on December 31, 2004 he was extradited to the United States. Colombia had asked US authorities to request his extradition. The United States at the time had no outstanding charges against him and Colombian officials had to fashion allegations. Later Colombian courts convicted Trinidad in absentia, and he faces jail time there.

Trinidad, although imprisoned in the United States, remains a political force beyond prison walls. The FARC’s negotiations with the Colombian government to end civil war there began in Cuba in November 2012. The FARC still regards Trinidad as one of its leaders, and at the outset of the talks, the guerrillas named Trinidad as one of their five accredited representatives to the negotiations. In group photos he stands with other FARC negotiators as a life-sized “cut-out” image.

The FARC has repeatedly demanded his release from prison so he can serve as a negotiator. Rumours circulated recently that Colombian officials, listening to the FARC, are asking US counterparts for Trinidad’s release.

Negotiators now dealing with the post-conflict fate of guerrilla leaders are discussing issues having to do with imprisonment and extradition. Critics say Colombia’s tendency to extradite prisoners to the United States is problematic for Colombian sovereignty. Simon Trinidad is a case in point.

Trinidad personifies another point of contention. Are FARC soldiers criminals or are they soldiers fighting in a war? Terms bandied about such as “banditry,” “terrorism,” and “drug-running” suggest the former. But to the extent that the FARC’s anti-government rebellion led to internal armed conflict, FARC guerrillas are fighting a civil war.

International law

The latter view squares with international law, which recognises the right of revolution. If a peace settlement accepts that notion, then prisoners are exchanged and they return home. Meanwhile, it’s illegal under international law for civil war combatants like Trinidad to be sent off to a foreign land.

US accusers said Trinidad helped the FARC kidnap three US contractors after their reconnaissance plane had been shot down by FARC guerrillas in 2003. The US claim is that the hostages were civilians who were fighting drug traffickers. But their FARC captors saw them as military contractors deployed under Plan Colombia, the mechanism through which the US military took on leftist guerrillas in Colombia. The contractors went free in 2008.

At his first trial, in late 2006, Simon Trinidad faced five charges. Three of them each

carried the accusation of conspiring to kidnap one of the three captive contractors. Two more charges had implications for the so-called US war on terrorism. Prosecutors charged Trinidad with membership in a hostage-taking conspiracy, also with providing “material support to terrorists”, namely the FARC. Conviction on either charge would have suited the larger US purpose of imprisoning adversaries anywhere who could be portrayed as “terrorists”. It was the time then when prisoners of war were morphing into “unlawful combatants”. In 1997 the US State Department identified the FARC as a terrorist organisation.

But Simon Trinidad told jurors about his life story and why the FARC was fighting. His presentation, even in translation, was convincing enough for jurors to refuse to convict him on any charge.

Then the Justice Department had to find a new judge for the second trial. The first judge had illegally talked with jurors to gain information about their deliberations that would assist prosecutors in the second trial. That trial ended with Trinidad being convicted on the single charge of conspiracy to take the contractors hostage. He was sentenced in early 2008. Two subsequent trials on allegations of narco-trafficking ended in mistrials.

Trinidad was a member of Colombia’s elite. When on December 5, 1987 Ricardo Palmera – he was not yet Simon Trinidad – left his home city of Valledupar, in Cesar department, to join the Caribbean Bloc of the FARC, he left behind a family, his bank-managing job, an economics professorship at a local university, and family assets which he managed – a cattle ranch and cotton and fruit-growing properties.

His father had been a respected lawyer, law professor, and Colombian senator for the Liberal Party. His maternal grandfather had served as governor of Santander. The future prisoner attended a private secondary school in Bogota with a “strong social and democratic ethos”. He studied at a naval academy in Cartagena, where President Juan Manuel Santos was a fellow student. Trinidad graduated in economics from a private university in Bogota and obtained a master’s degree in business economics from Harvard University in the United States.

In Valledupar, Palmera Trinidad joined the “New Liberalism” party, which after 1982, locally at least, became “Common Cause”. That organisation would later affiliate with the Patriotic Union (UP by its Spanish initials) which emerged following a peace agreement between the government and the FARC. Demobilised guerrillas, Communists, and other leftists entered electoral politics as UP candidates. They achieved victories, and then fell victim to nationwide slaughter. In Valledupar in 1987, many of Trinidad’s Common Cause comrades died, one by one. Others went into exile. One of them, in her published recollections, described the climate of fear and desperation. Trinidad stayed.

The Colombian Army cracked down on Common Cause members in 1982. With others, Palmera was arrested, “handcuffed, taken ... to Barranquilla in a cattle truck, deprived of sleep, food, and water for three days, subjected to cruel interrogation, and released after five days.” At his first trial Trinidad identified the murder of charismatic UP presidential candidate Jaime Pardo Leal on October 11, 1987 as a watershed moment. He’d had a meeting with Pardo Leal scheduled for the next day.

All of this is Trinidad’s story. His case is complicated, and for the sake of further elucidation, an interview conducted on March 21, 2015 with Denver lawyer Mark Burton appears below. Burton has recently undertaken to serve as Simon Trinidad’s lawyer in the United States. *El Espectador* reporter Maria Flores



Mark Burton.

interviewed him in Bogota. Burton discusses Trinidad’s possible release from prison in relation to the peace negotiations.

El Espectador: Is it actually possible the US government might free “Simon Trinidad?”

Mark Burton: I think it’s really feasible, because the decision to put him at liberty is in the hands of President Barack Obama. Colombia needs Trinidad at the peace talks; he is a well-informed man, capable, and brings his experience of having been a negotiator at the Caguán [peace talks] during the government of Andrés Pastrana. The FARC has accredited him as one of its representatives and it’s crucial that he be in Havana.

EE: Is there a favourable atmosphere within the Obama administration for dealing with an eventual release?

MB: I can’t speak for the US government, but I can certainly tell you in this regard that for Obama to have designated Bernard Aronson as a delegate to the peace process is very important. It’s a clear sign that the President of the United States supports the talks and to that extent I think there are great possibilities. Legally, just as Obama has the power to pardon somebody, he can also reduce a sentence. That would be the most effective way, although everything depends on overtures the Santos government makes.

EE: Have they looked at possible opposition from civil society in the United States?

MB: Look, last December, when the United States freed the three Cuban agents, there was a lot of noise, because the Cuban exile community in Florida is very strong. But Colombia is very different. In that sense, I don’t think the scenario would be particularly unfavourable.

EE: What possibilities might “Trinidad” expect in US courts?

MB: He was sentenced to 60 years in prison thanks to pressure at the time from the Colombian government. Later he lost his appeal. But we are reviewing the case and looking at alternatives. I want to make it clear that it’s been very difficult for him to pursue his defence, because at key times there was no lawyer available for him to rely on. The public defender he had during the trial has maintained contact with

him strictly on a basis of friendship and human rights. Beyond that, he’s been kept in absolute isolation now for 11 years. That violates the [United Nations] Convention against Torture.

EE: Do you share the theory that his trial in the United States had a political tinge?

MB: I think it was a set-up, of course. [Colombian President] Alvaro Uribe requested that the US government ask for Simon Trinidad’s extradition. Because the United States told him that no charges were pending against him, the Colombian government looked for supposedly trustworthy information to use for extraditing him. He was never convicted because of drug-trafficking, never because of terrorism, but instead through what happened to some CIA contractors. He never knew them, and furthermore, they were deployed in a war zone. Uribe wanted to punish Simon Trinidad, and there are many reasons making one think this was a political trial.

EE: Aren’t you exaggerating to suggest that US justice lent itself to fashioning a “set-up” for a guerrilla chief?

MB: George Bush and Alvaro Uribe were good friends. One couldn’t say they talked about all this over a cup of coffee, but there was an understanding between the two governments. Besides, no one can be extradited for political reasons.

EE: In Colombia people wondering about a possible settlement make the point that victims deserve justice. How do you respond?

MB: In this country there are many kinds of victims. It’s been brought up in the negotiations, for example, that political prisoners also have to be recognised as victims. The peace process is justifiably looking toward an end to armed conflict and to the possibility of social peace so that no one will be victimised any longer. Political considerations do exist that some want settled in the courts. Even though there are sectors in Colombia who want to continue the war, we believe Colombians support the process and that, in the end, Uribe and his friends will be in the minority. If you weigh the choice for a country like Colombia between having peace and having a prisoner in the United States, anyone can definitely see that peace is more important.

Counterpunch ✪

The farmer's friend?

Dionne Bunsha

Farming was the only life that Dhanraj Pawar, a farmer from Maharashtra in central India, had ever known. His farm had been handed down through several generations of his family, and his life and aspirations were firmly rooted in his land. But last year, worn out and mired in debt, he threw down his plough, sold his ancestral land and quit.

Every sowing season, he had put his faith in the latest variety of Bt cotton seeds, hoping for the bountiful yields they promised. Developed by Monsanto, these genetically modified seeds justify their high cost by claiming to generate bumper harvests by guaranteeing protection from the deadly pest called the bollworm that can ravage the crop.

But these seeds were a bitter disappointment for Dhanraj. "After 10 straight years of losses, I had to sell my buffalo and all my land," he says. "When I started using Bt seeds, expenses on chemical fertilizers and pesticides soared. And the price of cotton is too low to make any profit."

Now he plans to uproot his family and move to a nearby city to work as a daily wage labourer. Dhanraj may be bankrupt and landless but, ironically enough, he is a survivor. In what is the worst agricultural crisis in modern India's history, more than 296,400 cotton farmers have killed themselves in the past 20 years, according to National Crime Bureau Records.

Some have swallowed a bottle of pesticide, others have hanged themselves. A number of factors are at work in this heartbreaking story of farmer suicides – including the failure of agricultural banking, the loan sharks that take its place, and the unfair international trade regime.

While Bt cotton seeds are not solely responsible for the rise in suicides in India, they are far from the magic solution they are touted to be. "There is a multiplicity of policies working against Indian cotton farmers, such as low prices, high costs, subsidised agriculture in the West, and the growth of seed monopolies," says Vijay Jawandhia, a farmers' leader from Maharashtra.

"Even though yields have increased, farmers are making losses, because the price they get for their cotton is lower than it was 10 years ago, while farm expenses have multiplied."

He points out that Bt cotton seeds are meant for irrigated farms. But more than 80 percent of Indian agriculture is non-irrigated, so the seeds don't deliver the yields promised. "This high-cost GM technology is only making agriculture more risky and farmers more vulnerable," he says.

Bullied and short-changed

GM seeds are created by merging DNA from different species. The foreign genes may come from bacteria, viruses or other sources. The purpose of genetically modifying seeds is to create herbicide-, insect- and drought-tolerance, or crops with enhanced nutritional qualities.

Some GM seeds, like Bt cotton, contain toxins that kill bugs without having to spray pesticides that disturb the entire farm. However, pests have developed resistance, leading to increased use of pesticides and herbicides, and greater damage to the environment.

Monsanto, which pioneered the use of genetically modified seeds, describes itself as a "sustainable agriculture company". It proclaims: "We are focused on empowering farmers – large and small – to produce more from their land while conserving more of our world's natural resources such as water and energy."

But farmers across the world have a strikingly different story to tell. Far from being empowered or sustained, they feel bullied and

short-changed by Monsanto's products and its aggressive methods to enforce its seed patents.

Farmers in Guatemala, Mexico and Ghana are part of growing resistance to Monsanto and GM. Organic growers in the US, Canada and Australia are fighting against contamination of their fields and destruction of their livelihood by GM crops from neighbouring farms or wind drift.

So, why don't farmers boycott Bt? Why does GM cotton dominate the market? As Monsanto itself points out, "If Bt cotton were a root cause of suicidal tendencies, why do Indian farmers represent the fastest-growing users of biotech crops in the world?"

Farmer Dhanraj Pawar has an answer: "There is no other seed available in the market. Before Bt seeds, we used hybrid seeds. But we can't find the old seeds in the shops any more," he says.

"Monsanto has tied up with state governments and local seed companies that distribute its patented seeds, while they collect the royalties," explains Kavitha Kuruganti, an activist with the Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture (ASHA). "That's how they have monopolised the seed market."

Having friends in high places helps. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Clinton Global Initiative, and the US Agency for International Development, all partner with Monsanto and encourage the use of their seeds in the Global South, especially in Africa. But farmers' organisations are not easily taken in.

In Burkina Faso, the National Union of Agropastoral Workers (Syntapa) is battling against Bt cotton and biofortified sorghum because they have impoverished farmers and had adverse effects on the environment. While the cost of Bt cotton seed in Burkina Faso has tripled, there has been no increase in yields, according to Syntapa leader Ousmane Tiendrébéogo.

"The government has every interest in encouraging GM in order to continue to attract funders and international donors like the US, which make their development aid conditional on the adoption of GMOs," says Tiendrébéogo.

Several governments have proposed new laws that restrict farmers from saving, breeding and bartering seeds on which they rely. Some, including Ghana and Canada, are attempting to change their laws in line with the 1991 Act of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants.

This is supposed to help protect plant variety and to encourage plant breeders to develop new varieties. However, farmers and campaigners see this as strengthening corporate control over seed patents, while disempowering the rights of farmers to save seeds, which may result in further losses of biodiversity.

Around 75 percent of plant genetic diversity has vanished since the 1900s, as farmers have abandoned their local seed varieties for genetically uniform, high-yielding varieties, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Taking farmers to court

In the West, pro-corporate patent laws have been used against several family-run farms. The Canadian farmer couple Percy and Louise Schmeiser became icons of the anti-GM movement when they received a lawsuit notice from Monsanto in 1998 accusing them of patent infringement for cultivating Monsanto's Roundup Ready canola (rapeseed) without a licence.

They said that they had never bought Monsanto seed nor intended to have it on their land.

Monsanto seeds inadvertently reached their farm either from their neighbour's farm or from passing trucks. But Monsanto stated that Schmeiser was a "patent infringer" who knowingly



planted this seed in his field and used Monsanto's patented technology without permission or licence.

When Monsanto sued the Schmeisers for damages of up to \$400,000, the couple fought the case in the Canadian Supreme Court. Eventually, the court ruled that while the Schmeisers had infringed on Monsanto's patent, they did not have to pay damages since they had not in any way benefited from the seeds.

Monsanto has filed 145 lawsuits against farmers since 1997 in the United States alone. The company says filing these cases is necessary because the loss of revenue hinders investment in research and development to create new products to help farmers.

In order to prevent further litigation against small farmers, the Organic Seed Growers & Trade Association filed a case against Monsanto in 2011 to prohibit Monsanto from filing lawsuits against organic farmers whose farms may have been contaminated by Monsanto's seeds.

The court rejected the organic growers' case, stating they had no reason to try to block Monsanto from suing them since the company had given its assurance that it would not file lawsuits against organic growers if GM seeds accidentally mix in with organics. Monsanto states that two separate courts in 2012-13 acknowledged that Monsanto took no action against organic growers for crosspollination.

Though Monsanto often appears to have the law on its side, in Brazil there have been rulings against it. Around five million Brazilian soybean farmers sued the agrochemical giant for charging excessive royalties on crops planted using seed from the previous year's harvest. The company justifies its royalties by saying it reinvests US\$2.6 million a day in research and development "that ultimately benefits farmers and consumers".

But in 2012, the court ruled in favour of the Brazilian farmers, saying Monsanto owes farmers arrears of around US\$2 billion in lieu of the excess royalty charged to them since 2004. Monsanto reached an agreement with the farmers to end the litigation.

Later, however, Monsanto asked soy exporters in Brazil to collect royalties on the company's behalf so that it did not miss out on royalties from seeds that are being reused. Brazilian traders have been reluctant to do so, leading to growing tension between them and Monsanto.

When farmers lost their crop to a pest attack despite using Monsanto's pest-resistant corn seeds, the Association of Soybean and Corn Producers of Mato Grosso region asked Monsanto and other seed producers to reimburse them for money spent on additional pesticides.

Maui fights back

The most impressive victory against Monsanto has been in Maui, Hawaii, in November 2014, when residents voted in favour of a temporary ban on the farming of GM crops. This will hold until Maui county conducts an analysis of the health effects of genetically modified farming and foods.

Monsanto and Dow Chemical conduct field trials of genetically modified crops in Maui and also grow engineered seed for commercial purposes.

This has created several problems, including chemical pollution, birth defects, surface water contamination and glyphosate (the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup seeds) toxicity in residents, according to the website of the Sustainable Hawaiian Agriculture for the Keiki and the Aina (SHAKA) Movement which led the campaign for the moratorium.

Monsanto and Dow Chemicals spray over 80 chemicals on their GMO fields in Maui, which is unregulated by the US Environment Protection Agency, according to the SHAKA Movement.

"The moratorium protects small farmers from having to use more and stronger chemicals to control the newly resistant weeds and insects being created in and around neighbouring GMO fields," says the website of the SHAKA Movement. Crops were contaminated by unwanted GM crops and the farmers were sued for patent infringement. Monsanto and Dow are fighting the ban.

Across the world, farmers who have felt the fallout of GM seeds have staged valiant resistance movements against the biotech giant, despite the odds. Yet Monsanto's monopoly keeps growing and its markets expanding.

"The farmer is always in search of the next miracle. Monsanto's marketing appeals to that vulnerability," says Maharashtra farmers' leader Vijay Jawandhia. "Why do people still buy the lottery? We are always hoping."

New Internationalist ★

Crops were contaminated by unwanted GM crops and the farmers were sued for patent infringement.

Marines go to Honduras

WT Whitney

Honduran military authorities announced March 27 that some 250 US Marines arriving soon will be based at the US airbase at Soto Cano. Equipped with a high-speed "JHSV Spearhead" catamarans at least four "CH-53E Super Stallion" helicopters, and possibly "MV-22 Osprey tilt rotors and KC-130 Hercules tankers," they are part of the "Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-South (SPMAGTF)."

The official version of their mission is to carry out "training for forces in the region, humanitarian assistance missions, and anti-drug operations."

The SPMAGTF, based at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, is part of Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) II. According to the Marine Corps' web site, a "MEF possesses the capability for projecting offensive combat power ashore while sustaining itself in combat without external assistance for a period of 60 days. A similar [Marine Corp] expeditionary force is based at Moron Air Base in Spain as support for the US Africa Command."

The announcement of the Marines' arrival coincided with the opening in Tegucigalpa of the Central American Regional Security Conference. The official purpose was to build a "shield against organised crime." Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez welcomed the gathering of military, intelligence and drug-war officials from 14 nations. US Marine General John Kelly, commander of the US Southern Command, told attendees that, "There is a large contingent of US officials here ... Ms Erin Logan is here from the White House. ... [T]his is the first time we've had someone from the White House, at that high a level, attend this conference." The region is among President Obama's "top four national security and national policy priorities."

The Soto Cano airbase has been emblematic of the US military's long

presence in Honduras. It's home-base for 500 US troops and was the organisational centre for US support for the anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s. Critics of a US role in the 2009 military coup that overthrew elected President Manuel Zelaya often cite the Soto Cano base. They point to the stopover there of the plane carrying Zelaya from the capital to exile in Costa Rica.

Others displeased with the US military presence in Honduras note the recent construction there of three Navy bases costing millions of dollars. Defence Department officials have identified Honduras as the centre for US military communications in Central America and drug-interdiction efforts. The country, which claims one of the highest murder rates in the world, is in fact a way station for illicit drugs moving from south to north.

Condemnation of the outsized US military presence in Latin America and the Caribbean is not new. In that vein, former Colombian President Ernesto Samper, no radical, recently proposed the elimination of all US military bases in the region; they are a left-over of "the cold war epoch", he said. Samper was speaking on behalf of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), established in 2008 to promote continental unity and political and economic cooperation. Samper is the UNASUR's secretary general. He wants his proposal on the agenda of the upcoming Summit of the Americans set for Panama on April 10-11.

He could have been thinking of the report in mid-March that some 3,500 US Marines will be deployed to Peru over the next year for either short or long stays. Peruvian spokespeople say they will be training Peruvian counterparts for drug-war missions. There are hints however, as to counter-insurgency purposes for the US troops and references to Peru's strategic location between Bolivia and Ecuador, each with a leftist government.



Long said she was pleased the Colombian "military is studying other threats in the region represented by their neighbours, like Venezuela."

These recent developments will hardly smooth the way for President Obama at the upcoming Summit of the Americas. He's already fending off criticism of the US sanctions against Venezuela that he announced on March 9.

And to have old-timers in US governing circles speculating about Colombia's future military needs, especially as regards Venezuela, complicates matters for the president. Former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former State

Department, CIA, and NSA official Mary Beth Long recently attended a meeting in Bogota called by the Colombian Defence Minister Pinzon and attended by President Juan Manuel Santos. Ostensibly they were helping the Colombians plan a role for their military after any peace agreement with FARC insurgents takes effect.

At a press conference on March 28, Long said she was pleased the Colombian "military is studying other threats in the region represented

by their neighbours, like Venezuela." Giuliani opined that, "local crime is terrible but it's much better than to have to be concerned about the FARC and drug-traffickers taking over the government."

Interviewed later, Giuliani foresaw the Army fighting "other lawless groups." He advised that neither the size nor the budget of Colombia's military be reduced. Venezuela, he said, "is like a true tragedy [with things] going from bad to worse." *People's World* ✪

House of Saud playing dirty in Yemen

The US-backed House of Saud has long been playing different Yemeni governments, the Houthis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Al-Qaeda all against one another in a real life version of *Game of Thrones*.

While Yemen is currently being bombed into accepting the US-Saudi authoritarian order, one could hardly imagine that the House of Saud has previously worked with the Houthis, supporting the idea of a Zaidi imam and exploiting the sectarian group as a counterbalance against the Muslim Brotherhood's influence in Yemen, Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, an author and geopolitical analyst noted.

"The Kingdom's engagement of the Houthi movement was part of the House of Saud's hoary and trite dirty game inside Yemen. In this regard, the House of Saud has been playing different Yemeni governments, the Houthis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Al-Qaeda all against one another in a Saudi real life version of George RR Martin's best-selling book series *Game of Thrones*," the analyst emphasised.

During the Cold War the House of Saud together with the United States, the United Kingdom and

Israel supported North Yemen and a Zaidi group against South Yemen's republicans.

However, after the republicans won the war Riyadh began funding Wahhabi sectarian schools in North Yemen in order to split the society.

Remarkably, after South Yemen gained independence from the UK in 1967, Britain, the US, Saudi Arabia and Israel began to support the Muslim Brotherhood movement as a tool in their fight against the communist-led People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

In 1990 the country reunified, but Saudis continued to use the Muslim Brotherhood and its Al-Islah Islamist party in order to control the Yemeni government.

However, when the Arab Spring protests erupted in the Middle East and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh was ousted, the House of Saud shifted goalposts and decided to exploit the Houthis against the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Islah, fearing the influential Islamist group would get the upper hand in Yemen.

The Saudi strategy to manipulate the Houthis against Al-Islah eventually resulted in the rise of the Houthi movement in Yemen, Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya elaborated.

Why then has Saudi Arabia recently unleashed the deadly military campaign against its former allies?

"Despite the fact that the Houthis were willing to reassure the Kingdom for months and approached the House of Saud to sue for peace days before the war, the Kingdom wants total obedience from the Houthi movement," the analyst stressed, adding that neither the Houthis, nor the Yemeni General People's Congress can accept this.

The ultimate goal of the House of Saud is suzerainty [feudal overlord] over Yemen. So far, the US-backed House of Saud opted to bomb the Yemeni state into submission, the analyst emphasised.

The Saudi-led aggression has already claimed the lives of nearly 1,000 Yemenis, including women and children. Although Riyadh asserts it is attacking the positions of Houthi insurgents, in reality it is bombing residential areas and civilian infrastructure.

Thus, Riyadh is trying to bomb one of the poorest Arab states into accepting an authoritarian regime of ousted Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, a loyal vassal of Saudi Arabia and the US. *globalresearch.ca* ✪



Smoke rises from Yemen's Defense Ministry's compound in Sanaa in 2013. The Defense Ministry said an attack had targeted a hospital inside the complex.

Shot to the Heart

Jennifer Nauright

My brother-in-law is black. Until yesterday, the fact that his skin colour is more than a few shades a darker than mine seemed insignificant. Until yesterday, my brother-in-law was simply my sister's husband.

Until yesterday.

My brother-in-law is kind and loving and giving. He has a heart as big as his booming resonant voice. His laughter is contagious. He adores my sister and dotes on her sons. He checks on his parents and our mother daily. He works long, brutally physical hours as a labourer. He has a strong work ethic and more times than not works overtime. He owns a home and a car. Two out of their four collective children are graduating from college this spring, and the other two begin higher education in the fall.

My brother-in-law is new to our family, having only married my sister two years ago. He came into our lives with a refreshing sincerity and exuberant joy. Sure, we were nervous and wondered how they would navigate the complexities of their interracial relationship in the Deep South. We worried they would find themselves ostracised simply because of their colour. We were concerned that small town South Carolina wasn't quite ready for them.

My sister and now brother-in-law decided to marry. We are fortunate to belong to a truly loving and supportive church where they have been welcomed with sincere love and kindness. They made a home. They continued to raise their children. We all allowed ourselves to forget the differences in our skin colour.

Until yesterday.

Racial discrimination and profiling are not new. We were aware and watched in horror as the events unfolded in Ferguson and New York. We discussed Trevon Martin. We tried to ignore the obviously racial slurs against our President. We assured ourselves that this was a problem driven by ratings hungry media. We didn't want to believe how pervasive a problem we were facing. We didn't want to see that this could happen in our backyard.

Until yesterday.

Yesterday, I Skyped my sister for a marathon on-line catch-up session. I have since moved away from South Carolina to England, and we treasure our high-tech sister time. While chatting away, my sister looked up to see that a story from not far from our hometown was being featured on the national news broadcast. I watched

as she gasped, put her hand to her mouth, and started screaming "Oh My God!" Her tears were instant. Pure, raw emotion reached across the miles to grip my heart. "It could have been him (her husband)," she repeated over and over in her gut-wrenching mantra of grief.

What she saw was uncut footage of a 50 year old black man being shot eight times in the back as he ran away from a white policeman in North Charleston, South Carolina. Let me repeat. He was running away from the policeman and shot in the back. The victim had been pulled over for a non-working left brake light, and was found to have an outstanding warrant due to unpaid child support.

I could not stop shaking. I felt nauseous. My sister was devastated. She started telling me then how her husband doesn't go out much. How he has to be careful where he goes and worries that he will be targeted simply because he is in the car with a white woman.

In my hometown.

Surely this could not happen where I was brought up. One of the articles I read while talking to my sister mentioned another case being brought to the courts from my own hometown. I simply could not believe it. Apparently on the same day the policeman in North Charleston was arrested and charged with murder, a white public safety officer of the local police department in my hometown was arrested and charged with a felony charge of discharging a firearm into a vehicle, killing the occupant. The occupant was an unarmed 68-year-old black man.

In my hometown.

Until yesterday I dealt with racial comments and slurs on social media by simply un-friending the worst of the culprits and ignoring those I felt were not as offensive. I made sure my news feed was cleared of the worst offenders. I would not engage with those who said offensive comments in my presence choosing to nod and smile and walk away or change the subject. I did not forward posts or "cute" emails showing our President in an obviously negative racial light. I allowed others allowances for age or ignorance or "because it is the South". I put politeness first. I gave everyone the benefit of the doubt. I excused any of my own behaviour that was less than acceptable. I was part of the problem.

Until yesterday.

I bought in to the stories about Martin Luther King not being perfect as if this somehow diminished his remarkable legacy. Those same people who dismissed King for marital infidelity, seemed to

accept Jefferson, Roosevelt and more recently Mark Sanford. I stood by quietly as increasingly policemen are seen as automatic heroes simply because of their occupation. I watched, as increasingly the word of the policeman is law, whether or not they follow the law itself. I didn't question enough. I didn't push back enough. I didn't scream at the top of my lungs that we need to stop this madness.

Until yesterday.

I realised yesterday the rules are different for my brother-in-law and my husband. If my husband decides to go out in public in an undershirt or unshaven, he is allowed his Wall Mart moment of indiscretion. If my brother-in-law goes out in public dressed similarly, he is a thug. If my husband misuses language or makes a grammatical error, we can chalk it up to being cute or funny. If my brother-in-law uses less than perfect English, he is ghetto. If my husband were at a gas station at 3am, no one would give him a second look. My brother-in-law would be observed with suspicion and even fear.

Until yesterday, we didn't give my brother-in-law's work appearance a second thought. After yesterday we realised his hoodie or knit cap worn to keep warm on his job could pose a problem for him as a black man. We worried about him being out at 3am or midnight. He works swing shifts. We wondered what would happen if he had car trouble in the middle of the night. Would he be safe? We forced ourselves to think about what it must be like to walk in his shoes.

Until yesterday I believed the problem was blown out of proportion. I flinched any time the "race card" was being used. I wanted so badly to believe that our country, in the year 2015, had evolved enough that men did not need to fear for their lives simply because of the colour of their skin.

I will not sit idly by anymore. Martin Luther King, Jr had a dream. In his most famous speech he said, "my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character". It is time to stop dreaming and start doing. King asked that we "go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed" He asked that we "not wallow in the valley of despair."

Today it starts.

Information Clearing House ✪



Racial discrimination and profiling are not new. We were aware and watched in horror as the events unfolded in Ferguson and New York.



Region Briefs

A Vietnamese delegation arrived in Beijing on April 7 for a three-day high-level Party to Party visit to China. The delegation was headed by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) General Secretary, Nguyen Phu Trong with one third of the CPV Central Committee members. The delegation received the highest welcoming reception from China, and it had fruitful meetings with the Communist Party of China (CPC) General Secretary, Chinese Premier, National People's Congress Chairman, Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Chairman, representatives from the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, and other Party members and State officials. The two countries issued a joint communiqué, stressing socialist achievements in their countries under the lead of the CPV and the CPC, expressing the necessity of continually promoting a friendly, productive, and stable relationship and maintaining a high-level of close contact between the two parties and two states in all areas.

Vietnam invested more than A\$134,000 to build another 10 houses (60 square metres for each) this month for a youth friendship camp located in the border of Laos and Vietnam. Twenty Vietnamese medical personnel, from central Ha Tinh province, also gave free medical examinations to 300 local villagers and they offered medical trainings to local young people. The construction of the village started in 2012 with the help of a more than A\$1.9 million investment from Vietnam. The village included a community centre, a medical station, accommodation and other facilities. It also offered training courses and long-term settlement for Lao youths.

A Chinese frigate helped evacuate 225 foreign nationals from 10 countries (most from Pakistan) for humanitarian reasons, helping them to flee from Yemen and a civil war. This was the second time that the Chinese navy evacuated civilians since the war had broken out, and evacuees praised China's humanitarian assistance. The Chinese navy started its regular patrol in the Gulf of Aden (Northwest Indian Ocean) in 2008, countering Somali pirates and maintaining regional maritime security. The US has a strong military presence in the area. However, a US State Department spokesman stated that there was no government-sponsored evacuation for its citizens in Yemen.

One Japanese university medical museum recently admitted that evidence had shown that the prestigious Kyushu University had conducted wartime vivisection on eight captured American bomber pilots in May 1945. Thirty Japanese doctors and university staffers were convicted of war crimes (vivisection and cannibalism) by the Allied War Crimes tribunal in 1948. However, they walked free from prison as US General McArthur dropped the charges in 1950, in order to persuade Japan to become the US's military ally against the liberation of Korea and the spread of communism.

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

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Early intervention in youth homelessness

It was Youth Homelessness Matters Day on April 15. It's where we come together and raise awareness for the serious issue of being homeless at a young age. Currently, 44,000 young people are homeless around Australia.

The theme this year for Youth Homelessness Matters Day is early intervention and I believe that a major part of early intervention is education. Recently, I read a study titled "The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia" by the UWA Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University of Technology and

Charles Sturt University, published February 17, 2015.

The study found that young homeless people over the age of 18 had experienced homelessness, or sleeping rough, at a younger age. This has a devastating effect on their future, as they often leave school and drop out of their communities. Not receiving a proper education leads to unemployment and future homelessness. This is why I consider education a form of early intervention.

The mainstream schooling system isn't always the best option for these young people. This is where a flexible learning becomes important.

At the Youth Off The Streets' independent schools we focus on flexible learning and a holistic approach to education to help disadvantaged and homeless young people. Due to their current circumstances, our schools provide them with breakfast, lunch and snacks throughout the day. This ensures that they have had enough food to fuel their learning for the day. For some of the young people, this is the only food they'll get that day.

As well as providing essential nutrition, our schools offer an

environment that caters to the needs of young people. Making sure that homeless young people get the education they need equips them with the tools to live independently. The level of education attained by a young person is a key factor when determining the future employability of the young person. The study notes that over 50 percent of the young homeless people faced difficulty in getting work because they lacked the necessary skills or education.

In 2014, our schools helped 38 young people graduate from year 10, nine young people completed year 11 and six young people completed year 12 and gained their HSC. Youth Off The Streets' schools are a great example of equipping disengaged and disadvantaged young people with the tools they need to secure future employment and break free from the cycle of poverty.

On Youth Homelessness Matters Day, think of the 44,000 young people that are homeless around Australia and support the different events, initiatives and organisations that are working to get young people off the streets.

**Father Chris Riley
CEO and Founder at Youth Off
The Streets**

Act as well as admire

"There comes a time when silence is betrayal." Martin Luther King Jr.

My son and I recently went to see the movie *Selma*; it's about Martin Luther King Jr and the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. It was an exceptionally moving film, very sad but also incredibly uplifting. At the end of the movie everyone there was so touched that the whole audience clapped enthusiastically. Most people stood up still clapping and many of us were in tears. I've met and read of lots of people over the years who express such deep admiration for such outstanding heroes like Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and others who have fought repression, inhumanity, and prejudice and sacrificed so much to make the world a better place.

Yet, I find it surprising and perplexing that many of these same people say and do nothing or very little, even in the most minor of ways to combat and challenge the many gross human rights abuses, inequality and cruelty that exist around us in our community, our society and in the world. I consider that a lot of these injustices continue to persist

primarily because most people turn a blind eye to them, just ignoring and neglecting them and don't take a stand, even in instances of small abuses, let alone glaring cases of obvious mistreatment, brutality and oppression.

The Australian government's treatment of the marginalised and disadvantaged, its First Peoples, refugees, the poor, homeless and unemployed is appalling and unfair. These people need our empathy and solidarity. We need to help them and transform the way the authorities act towards them.

Just talking to friends and work-mates, adding your voices to radio and social media sites, writing to newspapers, magazines and politicians can bring significant pressure and have a very beneficial effect in exposing and resolving world conflicts. Take a stand for civil, human and animal rights, freedom, democracy, equality and justice. Together we can make a difference. So let's do at least our bit to change the world.

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
– Martin Luther King Jr.

**Steven Katsineris
Vic**

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

To the scapheap with it!

If there's one thing the recent elections in Queensland and NSW showed very clearly it was how little difference the outcome made to the well-being of the mass of the people. Whether the government is drawn from Labor or Liberal, these days they pursue very similar policies with almost identical objectives.

In fact, so thoroughly has Labor adopted the pro-business policies of the ruling class that differences between the two main parties have virtually disappeared. This has made it very difficult for Labor to campaign effectively, since its leaders actually agree with the policies of both federal and state Liberal Party governments.

But how could it be otherwise? Both the Labor and Liberal parties (and that rural variant of the Liberals, the Nationals) are committed to supporting the capitalist system. And since it is the capitalist system that is the cause of all the major problems confronting the people of the world, those parties are by definition unable to solve those problems.

Only by getting rid of capitalism itself can we hope to significantly improve the lives of working people, but no capitalist party is going to do that! No matter how much some capitalist parties flirt with aspects of socialism or even try to reform some of the worst features of capitalism, they are never going to be the means of getting rid of capitalism itself.

People who think that the solution to the problems confronting the working class lies in electing a Labor government and then

somehow pushing it to the Left are deluding themselves.

The Labor Party was originally created to represent the trade union movement in Parliament. The ruling class, however, very quickly realised how valuable a pro-capitalist "working class" party could be to the preservation of capitalism itself. So it set out to seduce and subvert the Labor Party away from its original pro-socialist position to the stance it takes today, an alternative, 100 percent capitalist party, ready and willing to administer the country or the state on behalf of big business.

The blatantly anti-working class policies of capitalist governments naturally tended to make working class people decidedly browned-off with the leaders of capitalism, so the bourgeoisie provided them with a harmless alternative: a "working class" party that posed no threat to capitalism. Clever, eh?

The move to remove the last vestiges of working class ideology from the Labor Party, to make it effectively a clone of the Liberal Party, reached its apogee with the accession to its leadership of the US-trained Bob Hawke and his championing of the "Accord", and its contention that workers and bosses had shared interests. Class collaboration became official policy.

But, as the English left-wing journal *Lalkar* commented when discussing a 2014 Bristol University report on poverty in Britain, "to promote the Labor Party as an 'answer' for workers is nothing other than participation in the massive hoax that is played on the working class every election day".



The policies of the Hawke Labor government in Australia, like those of all "democratic" capitalist governments before and since, attacked the poor under the guise of helping them. That process has continued and intensified. Aged pensions are already pitifully low, condemning our elderly people to live in dire poverty. And yet governments – both Labor and Liberal – claim they cannot afford to continue to pay even these miserable pensions. The effect of these policies on the people of Australia, the so-called "lucky country", will be to do to us what has been done to the people of Britain, once the richest country in the world.

The report from Bristol University referred to above revealed that whereas in 1983, 14% of workers in the UK were living below the poverty line, by 2014 that figure had jumped to 33%! Almost 18 million people in the UK cannot afford adequate housing conditions. More than half a million British children live in families that cannot afford to feed them properly. Despite Britain's wretched climate, where thousands of people – mainly old and poor – die every winter of hypothermia, the report found that 1.5 million children live in households that cannot afford to heat the home.

These are not lazy unemployed who "don't want to work", as bourgeois politicians are fond of claiming. In fact, the report notes that "the majority of children living below the breadline have at least one parent in work". The phenomenon of the working poor has grown substantially, in Australia as in Britain,

as real wages have fallen and the social wage has been cut to the bone.

And yet, while poverty has increased in the last 30 years, the wealth of the tiny percentage in the "ultra-rich" category has simultaneously increased. As a small group of capitalists increase their accumulation of wealth – the result of the labour of working people, let us never forget – the great mass of the people are actually getting poorer.

That the system is in crisis has become glaringly obvious, not just to working people but to the leaders of capitalism itself. The reaction of the two groups is very different however. Workers look at ways of changing the system in their favour, a process that leads to supporting socialism. Capitalists, on the other hand, look at ways to safeguard and prolong capitalism and their privileged position in that system.

However, they cannot go on trampling on the poor, appropriating the product of the labour of the working class as their "right" and squeezing every last drop from the natural resources of the Earth, without an eventual reckoning. As the breadth of the "Occupy" movement and other spontaneous manifestations of popular anger show, the mass of the people is awakening. They will not be fobbed off with this lying, rotten system forever.

The day is approaching, and approaching rapidly, when the wrath of the people will spill over, and with Communists leading the way, will sweep the decaying carcass of capitalism onto the scapheap of history where its arrival is long overdue. ✪



Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sunday April 19 –
Saturday April 25

Australia's role in WWI was essentially supplementary, to provide Britain with additional soldiers. We joined Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, India and other parts of the "British Empire" in providing this service to "the Mother Country". In the course of the war thousands from each British colonial possession died for "King and Country". However, despite our basically peripheral role, over the next four years we'll spend over \$300 million to remember the First World War – more than any other nation.

The ruling class in Australia is determined to make the centenary of the carnage that was the Great War into an opportunity for "celebrating" war and militarism. To aid in this obscene endeavour, they have launched a propaganda blitz, which the ABC has embraced enthusiastically.

Over 130,000 Australian horses, popularly known as "Walers", served in the Great War of 1914-18. None of them came home – it was judged too expensive. The soldiers' mounts were shot and the parts (skin, horse-hair) salvaged for sale.

Australia's Great War Horse (ABC Sunday April 19 at 7.40pm) is the story of the role of these horses in the desert campaign in the Middle East. The program is marked by extravagant claims about the prowess of the Australian Light Horse, a mounted infantry force presented here as near legendary cavalry, carrying out the world's "last great cavalry charge". The program conveniently ignores the much greater role of cavalry on the Russian front, particularly the role of Budyon's cavalry army in the Russian Civil War. Even a history program about horses is not immune to Cold War bias!

In **Lest We Forget What?** (ABC2 Sunday April 19 at 8.40pm, repeated ABC Wednesday April 22 at 9.30pm) Major General (Ret) Jim Molan makes the point that "the real failure of any military is to believe your own myths and legends".

In **Lest We Forget What?**, 27-year-old journalist Kate Aubusson does a surprisingly perceptive investigation of what it is that we are meant not to forget. It is a bit

muddled, but she does manage to separate the stage-managed jingoism of the Dawn Service at Gallipoli from the reality of the actual carnage.

The British drama-documentary **Our World War** is being screened over three nights (ABC2 Sunday April 19, 20, 21 at 9.40pm).

The film graphically recreates personal accounts of soldiers in the War, to tell three stories: of a single company of riflemen and machine gunners in the Battle of Mons in August 1914, a young office-worker volunteer in the summer of 1916 who finds himself fighting two enemies – the Germans and a system that requires him to kill a friend accused of desertion, and a tank commander and crew in the Battle of Amiens, August 1918.

Based on the first episode, this is not romanticised propaganda, but a commendable attempt at gritty realism.

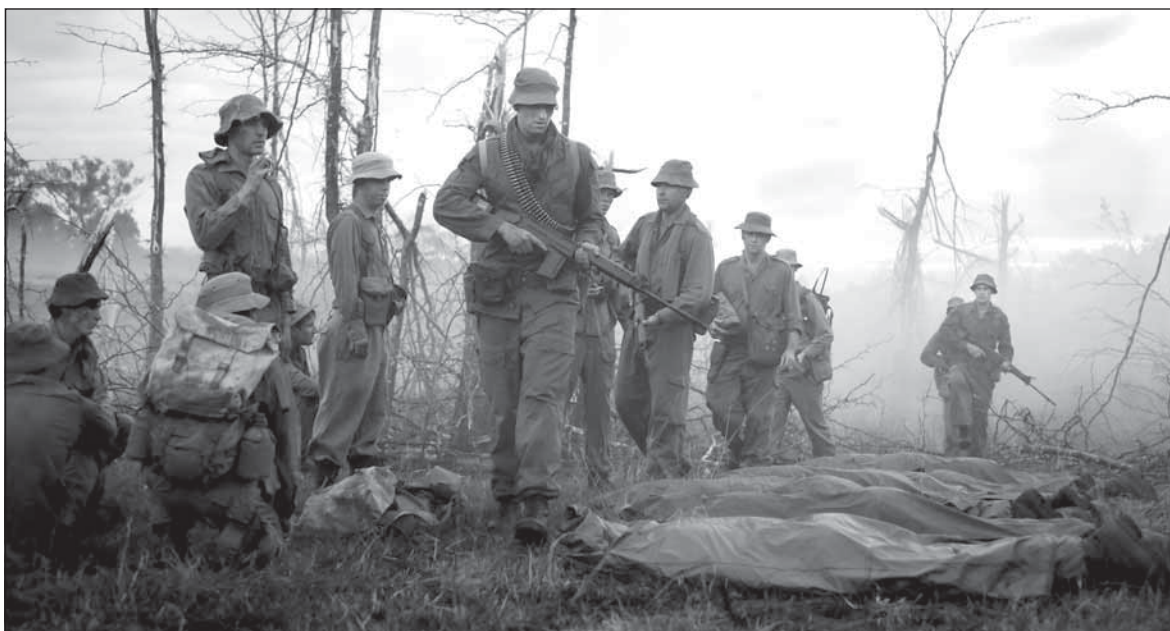
In **Why ANZAC With Sam Neill** (ABC Tuesday April 21, 8.30pm), actor Sam Neill goes from the Gallipoli Peninsula back to the Otago Peninsula, New Zealand, where he grew up; across the Tasman to Australia where he has lived for 35 years; and over to the killing fields of Belgium, France, Crete and Italy. On the centenary of the disastrous Gallipoli landing, Neill looks for answers as to why that particular event "has become symbolic and is remembered more than any other in the two nations' shared history". That the ruling class might have a vested interest in promoting it does not get a look in, however.

Five hundred young Australians died during the Vietnam War from 1965 to 1972. Within two years of being home, over 2,000 Australian Vietnam vets had committed suicide.

The story of the making of **The Crater: A Vietnam War Story** (ABC TV Thursday April 23 at 9.30pm) began when Vietnam veteran Brian Cleaver wandered off the street into a masterclass in Perth given by director David Bradbury. Brian asked David if he would make a film about his search for the bodies of 42 missing North Vietnamese soldiers he helped kill in the 1968 battles of Coral and Balmoral.

Their bodies were tossed into a huge bomb crater, one of many acts that helped traumatise Brian. For the last ten years he has sought to deal with his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by making frequent trips to Vietnam to work with their Missing In Action team to try to locate the bomb-crater grave so that the bodies of the 42 missing men can be returned to their families and "their spirits find rest".

The Crater uses a mixture of contemporary interviews with both Australian and Vietnamese war veterans, vérité material, archival footage and dramatisation to connect modern viewers with the reality of battle and the historical narrative of



Australian soldiers survey body bags after Battle of Coral – **The Crater: A Vietnam War Story** (ABC TV Thursday April 23 at 9.30pm)

the men behind it. It shines a light on the psychological effects the Vietnam War had on veterans right up until the present day. Bradbury has also captured interviews with North Vietnamese veterans who fought in the battle and the families of the martyrs whose "souls are still wandering".

Agatha Raisin And The Quiche Of Death (ABC Saturday April 25 at 8.00pm) seems an odd choice for Anzac Day. It is presumably meant to be a bit of light relief. And that is clearly the tone the film-makers were after. As far as I am concerned, however, they missed their target.

The story of a high-flying London PR woman who decides she's had enough of the cutthroat world of public relations, and opts for early retirement in the picturesque Cotswolds, only to be caught up in the murder of the judge of a village quiche-making competition (as one invariably is in this kind of program), this program needed humour and especially charm. I found little of either (although the love-struck Asian policeman Bill Wong is played rather endearingly by Matt McCooy).

The program is based on the crime novel **The Quiche of Death** by MC Beaton.

A War Of Hope (NITV Saturday April 25 at 8.30pm) tells the story of 235 Guugu Yimithirr people of North Queensland who, in 1942, in the midst of World War Two, were forcibly removed 1,500 kilometres from their land by the Australian army.

Treated as prisoners of war, they witnessed a third of their people die to disease, exposure to cold weather and malnutrition, only returning home to Hopevale after seven years in exile.

Through the eyes of Roy McIver, seven at the time, now an artist and story-teller, this documentary tells of their strength to return home to rebuild their families, their community and their culture. ☺

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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;

April 30

AMERICAN BASES IN AUSTRALIA: TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT – MORE OF THEM, MORE IMPORTANT, BINDING US MORE TIGHTLY – STILL A TARGET

Dennis Doherty, Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition;

Richard Tanter, Professor, Senior Research Associate, Nautilus Institute, & Professor, School of Political & Social Studies, University of Melbourne;

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A criminal calamity in Iraq



Hans von Sponeck

The books of the UN contain no reference to “regime change”, nor is it in the law books. Regime change is a term coined by western governments, especially the US, to describe a policy that has no basis in international law.

Externally induced regime change has never solved international conflicts. On the contrary, it has intensified them wherever they have been attempted. Innocent civilians are invariably the victims. There are many examples, with Iraq being the most prominent.

Following years of clandestine co-operation between US spies and Iraqi opposition groups, the US Congress came out into the open by approving the Iraq Liberation Act, which stated that US policy should seek to “support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein”.

The act was signed by Bill Clinton on October 31, 1998. Five years

later, in March 2003, Clinton’s presidential successor, George W Bush, sent in the troops.

The US legitimised this invasion by insisting that Saddam’s Iraq harboured weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and cooperated with terrorism networks, including Al-Qaeda.

The politics of fear

US think-tanks promoted fear. Statements released to the public included:

“Because of the limited capability of Iraqi conventional military forces, its WMD programs loom even larger,” and “there is ... a general suspicion that Iraq is working on a variety of terrorist contingency plans in case Saddam finds it necessary to strike the United States.”

The Bush administration welcomed wholeheartedly such insinuations advanced by alleged scholars including Kenneth Pollack, a fellow for the US Council on Foreign Relations, who is identified on the cover

of his 2002 book, *The Threatening Storm*, as “one of the world’s leading experts on Iraq”.

It is now a fact of history that Iraq had no WMD, as Iraq’s deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, told various UN chief arms inspectors including Richard Butler and Hans Blix, the former a henchman for US interests. Some UN arms inspectors had indeed confirmed that since 1995 Iraq was not a threat.

Links with terrorist groups also went unproven, and many knew the claims to be false even before the invasion. Iraq, a secular republic, had no interest in allying with fundamentalist groups like Al-Qaeda.

Facts are stubborn things. Thirteen years of sanctions had kept the government of Saddam firmly in place, the UN “oil-for-food program” had become a political tool and the people of Iraq were being exposed to “unavoidable collateral damage”. Without these WMD and terrorist fabrications, there would not have been any basis for US authorities to argue that Iraq posed “a threat to many of its neighbours in the absence of US forces”.

John Negroponte, the US ambassador, did not hesitate to confirm this to the US Senate in April 2004: “Although the flow of humanitarian and civilian goods to Iraq was a matter of strong interest to the US government, it should be emphasised that an even greater pre-occupation throughout the period of sanctions was to ensure that no items be permitted for import which could ... contribute to Iraq’s WMD program.”

Following the 2003 invasion and the lifting of sanctions, the full scale of human misery became known. In 2002, 132 of every 1,000 Iraqi babies died before the age of five, according to UNICEF – second only to Afghanistan.

Relief goods imported to Iraq in the oil-for-food program, which ran from 1996 to 2003, amounted to a mere US\$185 per person a year.

The UN estimated at the time that about 60-75 percent of the population had been dependent on UN support.

Warnings ignored

The tragedy for the Iraqi people, international law and the standing of the UN is that the voices from within the UN secretariat in both Baghdad

and New York, as well as some members of the UN Security Council, had been warning of the consequences of such policies.

They were drowned out by Washington and London in favour of an uncompromising bilateral regime change dictated by pure self-interest.

To ensure as tight a cover-up as possible, no means were spared:

- The falsification of facts was encouraged, a severe hindrance for the UN in Iraq;
- Political support was often bought with bribes;
- Obtaining supplies was turned into a tortuous bureaucratic process to ensure long delays;
- Ordered goods were often blocked on spurious grounds;
- Agents were sent to infiltrate the UN Iraq operations;
- UN staff who opposed US/UK policies were threatened.

Brazil’s courageous ambassador to the UN in New York, Celso Amorim, used Brazil’s presidency of the Security Council to review the human conditions in Iraq.

He convened in 1999 an Iraq panel on the adequacy of the oil-for-food program.

Following the release of the panel report, the permanent representative of Malaysia to the UN, Dato Agam Hasmy, addressed the Security Council in a speech that will remain forever an honourable and powerful testimony of courage:

“How ironic is it that the same policy that is supposed to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction has itself become a weapon of mass destruction.”

In 2003 the government of Saddam had been eliminated and Iraq had been “liberated”. According to US authorities, Iraq was finally eligible for democracy. In 2015, 12 years after the invasion and four years since the end of occupation, Iraq is facing myriad difficulties at national, regional, local and personal levels.

While the Islamic State group is featured as “the” issue in Iraq, there are other serious problems. Wars, sectarianism, civil conflict and crime are shaking the country’s foundations.

Those responsible have refused to accept responsibility. They have become either mute or insist that the

infamous “bigger picture” justified the means. Many children are not in school, the education system is permeated by religious divisions, Iraqi academics have been subjected to abductions, extortions and random killings. Iraq has become one of the transit points for opium and cannabis, millions of Iraqi children are orphans and there are an estimated one million female-headed households.

They absolve themselves of today’s conditions in Iraq. They ignore their part in the destruction of Iraq’s physical and social infrastructures, for the use of proscribed munitions such as depleted uranium and white phosphorous, for brutality and horrific torture during eight years of occupation.

Torture and lies

No one can forget the photographs of Satar Jabar, the “hooded man of Abu Ghraib”.

The US Senate assessment of CIA torture released in December 2014 by US senator Diane Feinstein – a brave act of necessity – confirms in intricate detail that so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques” were widely used.

The report corroborated that deliberate misrepresentation of facts and events by US authorities, especially the CIA, intensified after 9/11.

The torture report points out that much of the so-called US “war on terrorism” was justified and legitimised by entirely false claims.

The release of the torture report has encouraged the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Commission to submit two volumes of torture evidence to the recently appointed new chief prosecutor of the ICC in The Hague.

This information has been collected from prisoners who were tortured in Abu Ghraib, Bagram and Guantánamo.

With reports like these laying bare the crimes committed in the name of “regime change” and the “war on terrorism”, now is the time for political accountability.

Thirteen years after the invasion there has been a shift from US unilateralism to multi-polar international decision-making. This provides important new perspectives for the end of impunity.

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