



# Dismantling the Federation

Anna Pha

The meeting of Commonwealth of Australian Governments (COAG) last week was characterised by the all too familiar battles over the allocation of money – in this instance the carve up of the GST takings between the states and territories\*. The situation was made even more difficult by the Abbott government's decision to cut funding to hospitals and education by \$80 billion over the coming four-year budgetary cycle. It is also cutting funding to national partnership agreements (specific purpose payments).

The Abbott government then expected cash-strapped states to come to the table begging for an increase in the GST – either its rate or application to presently exempt goods and services. The GST exemptions include fresh food, education, health, childcare, water and sewage.

The government's plans failed dismally. The Labor states – South Australia, Victoria, ACT and Queensland – refused to wear it. After all it would be political suicide.

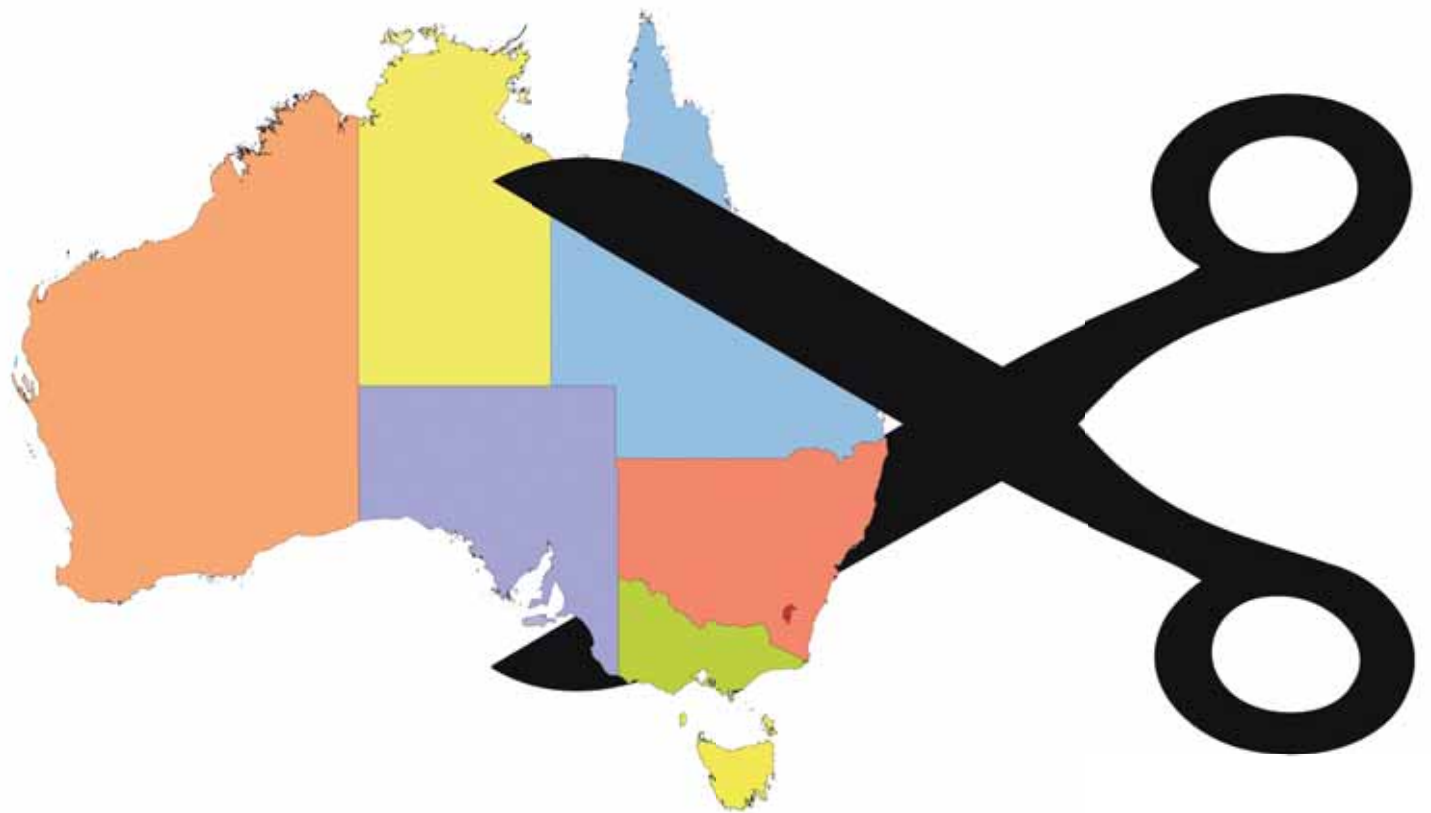
West Australian Coalition Premier Colin Barnett was up in arms over the proposed carve-up of the GST between states. WA is facing a slight reduction in its share to just under 30 cents in the dollar on income collected there. He has no intention of backing down. He is demanding 100 percent.

The share of the GST takings allocated to each state is underpinned by a society-wide equity objective, depending on a state's capacity to raise revenue from its own taxes (mining royalties, land tax, stamp duty, etc) and other factors that might affect equity.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced a "leaders' retreat" with his state and territory counterparts to directly debate long-term structural reform without the "interference" of officials. He is looking for unanimity around plans to revolutionise state-federal relations – their roles, responsibilities and financing. The GST is an integral part of that agenda.

Towards these ends a number of reviews are underway. Issues papers were published late 2014 or earlier this year on a range of issues including industrial relations, taxation and five papers on federalism\*. The aim is for Green papers mid-2015 and final White Papers by the end of 2015.

These papers are all interconnected and run in tandem with each other – who provides what services, how they are funded, etc.



Reform of the Federation Paper 1, *A Federation for Our Future*, is clear as to the government's objectives: "The White Paper will seek to clarify roles and responsibilities to ensure that, as far as possible, the States and Territories are sovereign in their own sphere."

It is not just about clarifying but changing many of the roles and responsibilities of all three levels of government and how they are funded.

The federal government is looking at how to restrict its policies to "core national interest matters", such as defence, intelligence, national security, foreign affairs, international trade, quarantine, financial regulation, currency, immigration and citizenship and possibly other areas listed in Section 51 of the Constitution.

Clearly, it would have to retain responsibility for free trade and investment agreements and adherence to UN Conventions (not that it does now) and other international laws.

### Sovereign states

Abbott hopes to gain agreement from the states and territories "about their distinct

and mutually exclusive responsibilities and subsequent funding sources for associated programs."

As far as possible the government wants to eliminate any involvement by federal and state governments in the same area. The federal government would keep "core national" responsibilities such as those mentioned above. One of the tasks of the White Paper is to determine the role it would play as a government and what responsibilities it would keep.

The states and local government would have complete responsibility for everything else and raise the funding themselves. For example, if the states are responsible for education, they would fund it. They could do as little or much as they like, but without the money from central taxation revenue. The for-profit, private sector could also play a greater role.

There would be a transition period as these changes were phased in.

The \$80 billion in cuts to health and education and the slashing of funding under national partnership agreements are just forerunners of

what is to come as the federal government bows out.

One of the key aims of the federal government is to reduce company tax to zero.

### Targeting the GST

One of issues raised in the Federalism and Taxation papers is how the states and local governments could raise enough revenue to meet their responsibilities. They have enough difficulties already without the loss of federal government revenue.

The GST is the first obvious target. Present sources of other income include land tax, tollways, user pays, council rates (local government), stamp duties, payroll tax, insurance, royalties on resources, gambling and motor registration and licensing.


The Taxation discussion paper, *Re:Think*, examines these and other means of raising additional income for states and local government such as applying land tax to the family home and charging for the use of main roads based on distance travelled.

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## Guardian

Issue 1681

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## On war and peace

“The best war is the one that never has to be fought” – Sun Tzu, Chinese general.

As the 100th anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli approaches the glorification by the government of past conflicts and the preparations for the next continues unabated. Interestingly, certain important aspects of what is promoted as the making of Australia as a nation, remain unarticulated.

In Albury, southern NSW, this writer met a returned soldier who had had two tours in Afghanistan. The father of two small children, he had come home with post-traumatic stress disorder and was seeking support and compensation. But he wasn't dealing with the Defence Department or any government agency; he was having to horse trade with AAMI.

The government has outsourced returned soldiers' compensation claims to the big private insurance companies.

Since January 2000, according to the volunteer group Australian Veterans Suicide Register, 133 former ADF members have taken their own lives. The group says returned personnel now represent almost one in ten of homeless people on Melbourne's streets. Every one of them suffer from mental illness.

Veteran Geoff Evans, who served two tours in Afghanistan, said, “People think things have changed since the Vietnam generation, but they haven't. People have no idea this is going on.” He points out that 40,000 to 50,000 Australian troops have been through Iraq, Afghanistan and other conflict zones. There are an estimated 3,000 veterans living on the street on any given night, which he refers to as the tip of the iceberg.

At Narrabeen, on Sydney's northern beaches, volunteers have converted retirement units into accommodation for former defence personnel and their families.

Mental health, suicide and alcoholism is playing out as it did in the Vietnam generation (1965-1972). Within two years of their returning home from that futile imperialist adventure, 2,000 had committed suicide.

So, the next time Tony Abbott evokes his “brave men and women of the Australian defence force” he should add “but if you come back damaged, we don't want to know you.”

Because the agenda is for war and more war, the word “peace” is nowhere uttered. No one who has access to the loud discourse mentions it in relation to those who fought and died in what was a horror of slaughter at Gallipoli in 1915, part of the Dardanelles campaign which was in fact a world conflict carried out for the redistribution of markets by big capital.

The Turks in any case were not some long-despised enemy. In fact, Turkey posed no threat to Australia and the Australian soldiers returning from the fighting spoke highly of the behaviour of the “enemy”.

Also missing is any mention of the only just war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, WW2, a conflict that had to be fought and won against German fascism and Japanese militarism. One gets the distinct impression that those promoting the planned coming conflagration believe the wrong side won that heroic struggle.

It was the last time the Australian military defended anything Australian in conflict. All the ensuing invasions and occupations – Malay, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq – were in service of big powers courtesy of successive subservient Australian governments.

Such is the class nature of war. The Communist poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht put it this way in “A mother to her son as he prepares to go off to war”:

Now as you go forth  
To do your master's  
Bloody business,  
Ahead of you  
The enemy guns,  
At your back  
The officer's pistol  
Do not forget,  
Their defeat is not yours,  
And neither is their victory.

## PRESS FUND

The chief of Channel Nine recently declared that commercial channels only need to improve their programs for them to survive indefinitely. But their audiences are disappearing fast, as viewers surf I-pads and other devices seeking their favourite programs. The Abbott government has watched in sullen silence as the ABC has continued to develop its digital programming, despite the savage 20 percent cut in its funding allocation in the most recent budget. The ABC is definitely in the government's gun sights, and we'll have to be extremely active to protect it. We'll keep you posted on further developments, but right now we really need your support, so please send us a contribution for the next issue. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

Jim Doyle \$120, John Hale \$50, Brian Lowe \$20, Mark Mannion \$5, “Round Figure” \$24, Sylvia Salisbury \$5

This week's total: \$224 Progressive total \$2,790

## Austerity measures in Australia, Greece

Many countries, including Greece, Cyprus and Australia face serious economic problems. Production of commodities and services is at a low level. Less is being produced than in previous years. Greece has experienced less and less production each year for more than five years. If a country fails to produce or fails to sell what it produces, economic crisis sets in.

The main strategy of governments to raise production levels is to increase the profits of private enterprises, particularly the big monopolies.

The belief that if the monopolies increase their profits, more money will be ploughed into production, the levels of national production will increase and the economy will be stimulated.

To increase monopoly profits, governments are bringing in a range of measures which vary from country to country but generally aim at:

- Facilitate the operations of monopoly enterprises through government grants, tax concessions, provision of infrastructure such as transport facilities and reducing

government regulation of monopoly activities;

- Hand-over of public sector enterprises, government service, government insurance schemes, and other public assets to the private sector, so that monopolies have greater ownership and control over the economy;
- Reduce wages and working conditions of employees;
- Reduce government spending by axing public service jobs, cutting pensions and unemployment benefits and reducing government allocations for health, education and welfare.

That the people suffer under austerity measures is of minor concern as the aim is, first and foremost, to boost the profits of the monopolies. All will be well, so they say, if the monopolies are thriving and the tiny section of the population who run the monopolies get richer and richer.

While the monopolies are given such favourable treatment, the people have no choice but to struggle for whatever can be achieved to improve their quality of life. There is no option but for all the people affected by the crisis – workers and

their families, the unemployed, pensioners, youth and students, women, small scale business owners and farmers, Indigenous, immigrant and community groups – to raise their level of action on the matters that affect them, and unite in saying NO! to the monopolies and the governments that support them.

We invite you to a forum to hear speakers on Austerity Measures, particularly in relation to the situation in Australia and Greece. Come along with family, friends, workmates and members of your community group. As well as analyses of the problems and the way forward, musical items from Greece and Australia will be presented.

**When: Sunday, May 3 – the day International May Day will be celebrated in Sydney**

**Time: 5.00pm**

**Place: Cyprus Community Club, 58 Stanmore Road, Stanmore Presented by Inner West and Beloyannis Branch, Communist Party of Australia, for the Sydney District Committee, with support of Friends of AKEL, Sydney** ☘

## Dismantling the Federation

Continued from page 1

At present states receive 23 percent of their income from the GST and 31 percent from state-levied taxes.

The GST raised just over \$50 billion in 2013-14 as a 10 percent tax, mostly coming out of the pockets of workers, pensioners and unemployed – the corporations do not pay a cent. If this flat, regressive tax was extended to presently exempt goods and services that would reap around an additional \$50 billion – bringing total to \$100 billion.

If it were then increased to 15 percent the total take from people's pockets would be around \$150 billion. As far as Abbott is concerned it would fill some of the hole created by the federal cuts and would more than fund the removal of company taxation – \$78.7 billion in the same year.

This would still not be enough to cover state needs if the federal government withdrew funding from areas which states had responsibility for.

## “Competitive federalism”

An Audit Commission was commissioned by the Abbott government following its election in 2013. The Commission promoted the concept of “competitive federalism” whereby the states could compete with each other to attract investors.

It recommended giving state governments access to personal income tax revenues: the federal government would lower income tax rates and “allow room for the states to levy their own income tax surcharge”.

States would be able to compete by offering different income, payroll and other tax rates or concessions in a deregulated and decentralised environment. The

workplace relations discussion paper sets the scene for states to be able to set their own employment standards (wages, working conditions, etc) in the place of existing awards and so compete for investors in a race to the bottom. It is also proposed that states could set up investment zones.

## Undoing federation

In the name of “federalism” the government is attempting to dismember the federation and turn the clock back to the 19th century after more than a century of gradual centralisation and consolidation as a nation. It is an extremely backward and regressive move, especially for the working class.

The Australian nation as we know it today was not born at Gallipoli but on January 1, 1901, when six self-governing colonies became states in the new Commonwealth of Australia. The process leading to federation was difficult one with states not wanting to relinquish their considerable sovereign powers.

It was an important and progressive step forward and the beginning of a process that involved a number of compromises over the allocation of legislative powers but saw further consolidation and centralisation as a nation over the decades that followed including a uniform taxation system, social reforms and other legislation that provided protection and support for the people. Of course not all government actions were pro-people, far from it.

In the coming years the federal government took responsibility for the development of a welfare system, which applied uniformly across the states and territories. This and many other gains were the result of hard won struggles by the trade union movement and other community forces.

If the federal government dumps responsibility and funding on states for social welfare,

then each state could have its own system, creating gross inequalities and opening the way for the end of “the age of entitlement” as Treasurer Joe Hockey has promised.

People could be left without a proper welfare system, living from hand to mouth, fearing ill health, in a system where user pays applies to everything.

In reality, “competitive federalism” is a proposal to take Australia backwards, to break the nation up into competing “sovereign states” in a race to the bottom wooing global investors at the expense of wages, working conditions, social security, and who knows what else. That is one of the tasks of those drafting the White Paper to determine how much to reveal at this stage of the process.

Defeat of such a backward agenda will depend on how strong a movement can be built against it by trade unions, the broader community and other political parties. It should not be forgotten that there are conservative forces in the states that may well resent the surrender of former sovereign powers in 1901 and be eager to grab back what they can.

There are opportunities for public submissions in response to the issues papers (some have passed that deadline) and the Green papers later this year. Readers are urged to send in their views. It is not necessary to write an academic paper, just type some views on a single sheet if you wish. Details of where to send submissions can be found on the websites below.

\* For the sake of brevity states and territories are referred to as states.

\*\* Discussion papers: [bettertax.gov.au](http://bettertax.gov.au); [federation.dpmmc.gov.au](http://federation.dpmmc.gov.au); [pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/workplace-relations](http://pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/workplace-relations).  
\*\*\* National Commission of Audit report: [ncoa.gov.au](http://ncoa.gov.au) ☘



# Iraq deployment – latest commitment to endless war

Bob Briton

Three hundred Australian troops are now stationed in Iraq. They have joined forces from New Zealand, Canada and, of course, the US. The governments of the countries involved don't like referring to the soldiers as "boots on the ground" and prefer to stress their present training role instead. It sounds familiar. Every modern commitment to long, drawn out and incredibly destructive conflict on the part of imperialist powers has begun with such manipulation of language and soothing of public opinion. Prime Minister Abbott had some additional, suitable cover for the announcement, which came in the lead up to the ultra-hyped ANZAC commemorations.

The PM said the commitment was not "risk free". The security situation at the Taji base north of Baghdad is precarious, as is most of Iraq. The withdrawal of US troops four years ago was supposed to have been made possible by a marked improvement in the fighting capacity of the Iraqi army. US Colonel John Schwemmer has returned for his sixth deployment to Iraq and was shocked at the state of the Iraqi forces. "It's pretty incredible," he said. "I was kind of surprised. What training did they have after we left?"

The state of the military, the

economy, social and other infrastructure in Iraq shouldn't surprise anybody. The movement opposed to the war launched in 2003 rallied unprecedented numbers of people across the globe. Their warnings about the destruction and dismemberment of Iraq, the fanning of sectarian divisions, the growth of terrorism and the loss of a million Iraqi lives were all ignored. And they have all been proven tragically correct. They were mocked at the time.

Abbott will not rule out a support role for forces acting in Syria. Again Australians have been placed at the service of US geopolitical strategists determined to affect regime change in Syria and re-draw the map of the Middle East. ISIL, ISIS, Daesh or Islamic State (whatever the current name) plays an important propaganda role in justifying the latest troop commitments. It is not important enough for Defence Minister Kevin Andrews to recall its leader's name in a recent interview on ABC TV's *7:30 Report*. The threat wasn't considered serious enough for US ally Turkey to prevent large numbers from pouring over its borders to fight the legitimate government of Syria.

Long before the advent of IS, the plans of the US were for a long conflict that would deliver more compliant governments in the region. The plan wasn't for a sovereign Iraq and Syria living in peace. It wasn't for a resolution to the issues still

causing tensions in the region, such as the deliberately forestalled statehood for Palestine. In fact, the US has moved to destroy the strongest advocates of a Palestinian state and the sovereignty of the countries of the Middle East. Plans to neutralise Iran's influence continue despite talk of a diplomatic breakthrough.

The servility of Australia's foreign policy was brought home recently by comments by commanders of US Marines arriving at their new base in Darwin. About 1,500 troops began arriving last week as part of the US' "Pivot" to the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Regions. A confrontation with China is being prepared. The hospitality of the locals was commented on by US top brass. Lieutenant Colonel Eric Dougherty appreciates the hands off approach of Australian authorities, too.

"There's things we can do here we cannot do back in the states," Dougherty said. "[In the US] it's very restricted; you have to worry about safety considerations like not shooting other units as you train. Here you don't have those issues. It's a blank slate." "Blank slate" or "terra nullius", the colonial attitude prevails. The need for an independent foreign policy and peaceful, mutually beneficial relations with our neighbours near and far has never been more clear or more urgent. ☘



## ANZAC Day and workers' rights

Statement from CPA General Secretary Bob Briton

The centenary of the landing of ANZAC forces at Gallipoli is taking place in a troubling social and political context. A hundred years after the calamitous destruction and loss of life during WW1, wars in the interests of big foreign powers and monopoly business interests are still on the federal government's agenda. The benefits that service men and women believed they went to war to defend or secure, including

workers' rights, are under attack. It goes without saying that class struggle will exist as long as there are exploiting and exploited classes but, in Abbott's Australia, the war against the interests of workers has been escalated to a critical degree.

It is not the intention of the Communist Party of Australia to appropriate the traditions of ANZAC Day. That has been done shamelessly by the warmongers and

big business interests and stands condemned by the public, particularly by war veterans. Something must be said, however, about the gross distortion of the history of the wars in which Australians have fought, including WW1. No doubt many did go off to fight for "king and country" and to defeat the "bosch". Those illusions evaporated very quickly.

Australian soldiers grew to hold their (usually aristocratic British)

commanders in the contempt they deserved. Many were radicalised. Fred Paterson, who later became a Communist member of the Queensland parliament, adopted his socialist views as a result of the horrors he saw during the "Great War". Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick, who famously saved many lives with his donkey during the Gallipoli campaign, was a socialist and a militant trade unionist.

Australian workers must pay

attention that this history and its valuable lessons aren't lost in a flood of jingoism and militarism. We must struggle to maintain our authentic traditions and our hard-won rights. In practical terms, workers and their trade unions must regroup urgently for a fight back against the Abbott government's onslaught or face a bleak future without any rights in the workplace. The Communist Party remains committed to this fight. ☘

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



# NT lock-up laws to be challenged

The North Australian Aboriginal Justice NT Agency (NAAJA) has launched a challenge in the High Court to new laws that allow Northern Territory police to lock people up on suspicion of committing minor offences.

Paperless arrests introduced late last year allow police to hold someone for four hours if they suspect they have committed or are about to commit some offences before charging or releasing them, or issuing an infringement notice.

Ruth Barson, a senior lawyer

at the Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC), which is part of the legal team running the case, said that the case is about ensuring people cannot be detained in circumstances which breach well-established legal principles.

"These laws allow police to lock someone up for minor offences like swearing, which would usually only attract a small fine," she said. "The laws allow police to effectively act as prosecutor and judge. The right to liberty is a fundamental human right and should only be restricted by the



courts, save for well-established exceptions."

Ms Barson said the powers were "unprecedented".

"They lack transparency, they're opaque," she said.

"They don't require the involvement of the courts, they don't require police to give someone the opportunity to contact a lawyer, so it's entirely possible these laws are being used routinely without anybody knowing."

The government says paperless arrests cut down on red tape, keeping police on the street rather than filling out paperwork, and will

prevent "troublemakers" escalating situations.

If a person is drunk when locked up, police can hold them until they believe they are no longer intoxicated.

The NT already has an imprisonment and detention crisis, with Aboriginal people making up more than 85 percent of the jail population.

Ms Barson said the government should be addressing Indigenous disadvantage through remote community employment programs and boosting school attendance rather than applying laws that compound the problem.

"These laws are likely to disproportionately impact Aboriginal people and that's certainly a cause for concern," she said.

The High Court will now consider the challenge and determine when the case will be heard – hopefully this year, Ms Barson said.

"It's important the High Court be given an opportunity to assess the legality of such laws that allow police to act as both prosecutor and judge and to sideline and exclude the courts from these police powers," she said.

Koori Mail ✪

# The lives of political asylum seekers in Australia are in danger

Iranian political asylum seekers are victims of economical and political deals. A horrifying felony is in front of us, disguised amid the vociferous propaganda around P5+1 nuclear deal. Following this deal, Julie Bishop, the Australian Foreign Minister, has had a bilateral visit to Iran and soon Iranian intelligence and security authorities are going to be granted direct access to all information about Iranian refugees in Australia.

Should these refugees be deported to Iran, it would be, no doubt, a perilous journey for them. Hundreds of Iranian refugees have passed through the horrendous and squally ocean, just to be trapped in the whirlwind that Australian government has created in Nauru and Manus islands. One of the discussions between the Australian foreign minister and Iranian authorities is anticipated to be about deportation of refugees back to Iran. This point has been acknowledged by authorities and it is also reflected by the international press and media.

Such negotiations, seeking to violate refugee rights and to waive their political protection, could only go on between two states when both are violating human rights. Negotiations of this nature, among two states, the one exporting refugees and the other, ostensibly, accepting refugees, antecedents to the age of slavery and exchange of prisoners of war.

Preparation of this joint operation by Australia and the Islamic Republic is an open and grisly felony, lost amid the tumult of the nuclear deal. We believe the only force that could possibly stop the progress and occurrence of this

mischief, is a vast international protest and pressure from public opinion and human and refugee rights organisations.

Human rights organisations throughout the world noticed the murder of Reza Barati, a 23 years old Iranian asylum seeker. Detention centre operatives had assaulted him with mace and had cracked his head with a stone; these strikes brought him to an agonising death. There are also reports that, according to their lawyers, 45 Iranian asylum seekers, whose refugee applications have been denied, while refusing to go back, all are under permanent detention inside refugee camps.

So is the status of Saeed Hassanlou, who left Iran five years ago; his refugee application has so far been denied a number of times. Following a period of hunger strike, he is hospitalised in Perth and is said to be in a critical condition.

Thus, we political, social, cultural and media activists, whilst condemning these acts, demand instant cessation of these political deals against refugee rights and to treat refugees humanely and to respect their dignity in Australia. An appeal by Gozareshgaran website: For workers' and political rights: gozareshgar1001@yahoo.de

CC to: Australian Foreign Ministry in different countries; Human rights organisations; UN High Commissioner for Refugees; Amnesty International; Refugee rights organisations; International democratic media; Revolutionary, progressive, and Democratic Parties and Organisations. ✪

# Statement on removal of Cuba from US terrorist list

HAVANA: Josefina Vidal, General Director for the United States of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has released a statement relating to the decision by the President of the United States, Barack Obama, to remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

In the afternoon of Tuesday, April 14, 2015, it was learned that the President of the United States, Barack Obama, had submitted the "Certification of Rescission of

Cuba's Designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism".

Through this measure, President Obama has decided to exclude Cuba from the list of state sponsors of international terrorism and report to this effect to the United States Congress, which will have 45 days to make known its decision.

The Cuban government recognises the just decision taken by the President of the United States to eliminate Cuba from a list on which it never should have been included,

especially considering that our country has been the victim of hundreds of acts of terrorism that have cost 3,478 lives and disabled 2,099 Cuban citizens.

As the Cuban government has reiterated on multiple occasions, Cuba rejects and condemns all acts of terrorism in all their forms and manifestations, as well as any action that is intended to instigate, support, finance or conceal terrorist acts.

Havana, April 14, 2015 ✪

# Call for Qld govt to reject coal expansion

The Lock the Gate Alliance says it has obtained legal advice confirming the Palaszczuk government can reject the expansion of the New Acland coal mine and rectify the murky approvals-for-donations scandal that plagued the controversial approvals by the Newman government.

The decision on whether or not to allow the Stage 3 expansion to go ahead is likely to be made in the next two weeks.

Lock the Gate president, Drew Hutton, said the mine is a test of the new government's commitment to accountability and clean politics, and an opportunity to signal a new direction for Queensland where governments keep their promises, and strategic cropping land is safe

from open-cut mining.

"This is a large coal mine on the fertile eastern Darling Downs, on strategic cropping land, in a closely settled area and will heavily impact on surface and underground water," Hutton said.

"The previous government broke its pre-election promise to protect farmland from coal mining and stop the Acland expansion. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in political donations were made by the proponent. The Labor Party said it would look into whether it could undo the Newman government's betrayal and stop the mine. Our advice is that they can, and that's what they need to do."

Lock the Gate has shown the government advice that the

Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) is not bound by the Coordinator General's report on Acland Stage 3 and has the legal authority to refuse or fail to approve the amended environmental authority (EA) under the Environmental Protection Act 1994.

"This mine should never have been approved, and it is a relief for the farming communities around Acland and Oakey to know that the new government has the power to stop it and protect our precious farmland. We're calling on Premier Palaszczuk, Environment Minister Miles and Mines Minister Lynham to keep faith with the people of Queensland, who elected them to clean up this state, by stopping the mine." ✪



# Lessons from Reclaim Australia protests

Peter Mac

**The first lesson provided by the demonstrations organised by anti-Muslim group Reclaim Australia last week is that we should not underestimate the threat posed by organisations committed to racism and extreme bigotry.**

The demonstrations took place in most capital cities. However, the one that grabbed the headlines was in Melbourne, where a counter-demonstration resulted in violence that was only curbed by police intervention.

In Brisbane Scott Moerland, one of Reclaim Australia's organisers, gave a vitriolic speech, calling counter-demonstrators "traitors" and declaring "we're going to give radical Islam the biggest bitch slap it's ever had".

The demonstrations followed incidents involving persecution of Muslims in several cities. A Sydney woman is on trial for having subjected another woman to a brutal verbal assault in public for wearing a hijab headdress, and last week the Rockhampton mosque was set on fire for the second time.

## Background

Reclaim Australia makes a series of phoney and often contradictory assertions. Moerland claims, for example, that he hates Nazis and they form a small minority of the group's supporters, yet Reclaim Australia was formed by Jim Saleam, former leader of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Party.

Moerland even makes the astounding claim that the "comms" are organising the infiltration of Reclaim Australia by neo Nazis!

He maintains that Islam is intent on taking over Australia, and Reclaim Australia's title implies this has happened already – although it also declares it wants to "reclaim Australia from the UN".

Moerland also identifies white Anglo-Saxons along with Aboriginal people as the only authentic Australians. Moreover, he wants to "keep our Australian values, i.e. Christmas,

Easter, Australia Day, Anzac Day and other beliefs a large number of Australians have grown up with", even though these aren't beliefs or values, but public holidays cheerfully enjoyed by everyone regardless of religions convictions.

Reclaim Australia claims certification of Halal meat is a means of laundering terrorist funding, and implies that Sharia Law (a set of rules of behaviour for Muslims, as the Ten Commandments are for Christians) is already overriding Australian civil law.

They also claim to be defending Australia against terrorist attacks by "muslims". But terrorists and racist groups feed off each other's extreme activity and both use religion as a justification for their activities.

Moreover, successive Australian governments have involved the nation in every major US military adventure since WW2, including invasions of several Muslim countries within the last three decades.

This has helped foster not only the rise of terrorist activities but also the persecution of Australian Muslims.

The situation has been exacerbated by ruthless government policies towards asylum seekers. Many of them are Muslims, and the present government describes them as "illegal immigrants" who should be driven from our shores by "border protection" forces.

The Prime Minister called on Muslim leaders to condemn terrorism and "mean it", implying that they actually sympathised with terrorists. His government has been almost totally silent about the rise of Reclaim Australia.

## Right and wrong tactics

The second lesson emanating from the demonstrations by Reclaim Australia is that there are right and wrong ways of dealing with its presence and activities.

It's true that people demonstrating for human rights must defend

themselves from physical attack. But the Reclaim Australia tactic, exemplified by Moerland's Brisbane denunciation of counter-demonstrators as "traitors", is to provoke a violent reaction so that its opponents are seen as the aggressors, or at least equally at fault for the violence.

In the 1960s US civil rights marches led by Martin Luther King, marchers trained themselves to respond to provocation with non-violent action.

Unfortunately, similar tactics were not adopted by some participants during the recent "Reclaim Australia" counter-demonstration in Melbourne. The likelihood of an eruption of violence was boosted by one group's declaration that the Reclaim Australia rally provided a golden opportunity to shut it down, that "the neo-Nazis ... must be swept off the Streets" and its recommendation to "drive the violent white supremacists out of stolen aboriginal land!".

As a result during the Melbourne confrontation Reclaim Australia's chant of Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi" was met with shouts of "Fuck off racists" by some of the counter-demonstrators, accompanied by spitting, punches and bloodshed on both sides.

Some counter-demonstrators also burnt an Australian flag, immediately lending weight to Reclaim Australia's phoney claim to be the nation's defenders.

Not all the counter-demonstrators took the bait, but those who did provided the abiding public image of the day's events in Melbourne.

According to journalist Martin Mackenzie-Murray, "The anti-reclaim protestors organised themselves with guerrilla tactics and spoke in similarly militaristic terms as their opponents. For them, Federation Square was not a place to be symbolically reclaimed, but physically so. Their stated intention was to 'disrupt' the Reclaim march. There were no niceties here."

Adelaide pastor Brad Chilcott observed with regard to the public's



impression of events: "Your audience is not the racists you're shouting at, but the people watching at home. ... [But] those watching at home ... couldn't tell the difference between the good guys and the bad. Then politicians have to condemn the violence on both sides, rather than [giving] an undiluted message condemning bigotry."

Federal Labor MP Tim Watts commented: "...the way to convince people at home is not by burning flags, screaming or spitting. It's about minimising and isolating". It's also about persuasion. It would be a grave mistake to assume that Reclaim supporters are incapable of changing their minds.

Events in Adelaide were very different from those in Melbourne. Brad Chilcott had worked out non-violent "subtle and symbolic" strategies in

conjunction with local Muslim leaders, and even though they had to abandon some events (including a mass communal picnic) because of public safety concerns, nevertheless the counter-demonstration there was peaceful.

Demonstrations last weekend in Sydney and elsewhere in support of asylum seekers were also successful, despite Reclaim Australia's attempts at disruption.

We must adopt appropriate tactics to restrict the growth and influence of Reclaim Australia, and we should not underestimate its influence. We should remember that the rise of fascism in Europe was facilitated by economic depression, by its appeals to sections of the working class and by the failure of governments to take action against it. ☘



## Adelaide

### May Day March – Fight For Your Rights

Saturday May 2

10:30am for 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](http://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

## Melbourne

### May Day Solidarity Rally

Friday May 1

5:00pm

State Library Swanston Street Melbourne  
March to 8-hour monument

## 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 [cdelprat@unionsnsw.org.au](mailto:cdelprat@unionsnsw.org.au)

### May Day Rally

Sunday May 3

Assemble 11am Town Hall

Celebrate the International Workers Day!

Sydney

## Invitation

On Sunday May 3

Join us after the May Day March

Come to **Cyprus Community Club** (58 Stanmore Rd, Stanmore) at 5pm

To a forum to hear speakers on Austerity Measures, particularly in relation to the situation in Australia and Greece.

Presented by Inner West Branch and Beloyiannis Branch of the Communist Party of Australia for the Sydney District Committee, with the support of Friends of AKEL, Sydney

## Demonstrations to Call for Open Access to West Papua

Please join us on April 29 for a Global Day of Action for Media Access to West Papua where the Indonesian government still systematically bans foreign journalists from entering.

### Adelaide Event

12 noon Wednesday April 29

Parliament House, North Terrace, Adelaide

Demonstrators are urged to wear all-black clothing to protest the media blackout in Papua. They will be carrying placards, some of which will be "censored", and have their mouths taped shut.



# 50 truths: Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution

Salim Lamrani

**President Hugo Chávez, who died on March 5, 2013 of cancer at age 58, marked forever the history of Venezuela and Latin America.**

1. Never in the history of Latin America, has a political leader had such incontestable democratic legitimacy. Since coming to power in 1999, there were 16 elections in Venezuela. Hugo Chávez won 15, the last on October 7, 2012. He defeated his rivals with a margin of 10-20 percentage points.

2. All international bodies, from the European Union to the Organisation of American States, to the Union of South American Nations and the Carter Centre, were unanimous in recognising the transparency of the vote counts.

3. Jimmy Carter, former US President, declared that Venezuela's electoral system was "the best in the world."

4. Universal access to education introduced in 1998 had exceptional results. About 1.5 million Venezuelans learned to read and write thanks to the literacy campaign called Mission Robinson I.

5. In December 2005, UNESCO said that Venezuela had eradicated illiteracy.

6. The number of children attending school increased from 6 million in 1998 to 13 million in 2011 and the enrolment rate is now 93.2%.

7. Mission Robinson II was launched to bring the entire population up to secondary level. Thus, the rate of secondary school enrolment rose from 53.6% in 2000 to 73.3% in 2011.

8. Missions Ribas and Sucre allowed tens of thousands of young adults to undertake university studies. Thus, the number of tertiary students increased from 895,000 in 2000 to 2.3 million in 2011, assisted by the creation of new universities.

9. With regard to health, they created the National Public System to ensure free access to health care for all Venezuelans. Between 2005 and 2012, 7,873 new medical centres were created in Venezuela.

10. The number of doctors increased from 20 per 100,000 population in 1999 to 80 per 100,000 in 2010, or an increase of 400%.

11. Mission Barrio Adentro I provided 534 million medical consultations. About 17 million people were attended, while in 1998 less than 3 million people had regular access to health. 1.7 million lives were saved, between 2003 and 2011.

12. The infant mortality rate fell from 19.1 per thousand in 1999 to 10 per thousand in 2012, a reduction of 49%.

13. Average life expectancy increased from 72.2 years in 1999 to 74.3 years in 2011.

14. Thanks to Operation Miracle, launched in 2004, 1.5 million Venezuelans who were

victims of cataracts or other eye diseases, regained their sight.

15. From 1999 to 2011, the poverty rate decreased from 42.8% to 26.5% and the rate of extreme poverty fell from 16.6% in 1999 to 7% in 2011.

16. In the rankings of the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Program for Development (UNDP), Venezuela jumped from 83 in 2000 (0.656) to position 73 in 2011 (0.735), and entered into the category Nations with "High HDI".

17. The GINI coefficient, which allows calculation of inequality in a country, fell from 0.46 in 1999 to 0.39 in 2011.

18. According to the UNDP, Venezuela holds the lowest recorded Gini coefficient in Latin America, that is, Venezuela is the country in the region with the least inequality.

19. Child malnutrition has been reduced by 40% since 1999.

20. In 1999, 82% of the population had access to safe drinking water. Now it is 95%.

21. Under President Chávez, social expenditures increased by 60.6%.

22. Before 1999, only 387,000 elderly people received a pension. Now the figure is 2.1 million.

23. Since 1999, 700,000 homes have been built in Venezuela.

24. Since 1999, the government has provided/returned more than one million hectares of land to Aboriginal people.

25. Land reform enabled tens of thousands of farmers to own their land. In total, Venezuela distributed more than 3 million hectares.

26. In 1999, Venezuela was producing 51% of food consumed. In 2012, production was 71%, while food consumption increased by 81% since 1999. If consumption of 2012 was similar to that of 1999, Venezuela produced 140% of the food it consumed.

27. Since 1999, the average calories consumed by Venezuelans increased by 50% thanks to the Food Mission that created a chain of 22,000 food stores (MERCAL, Houses Food, Red PDVAL), where products are subsidised up to 30%. Meat consumption increased by 75% since 1999.

28. Five million children now receive free meals through the School Feeding Program. The figure was 250,000 in 1999.

29. The malnutrition rate fell from 21% in 1998 to less than 3% in 2012.

30. According to the FAO, Venezuela is the most advanced country in Latin America and the Caribbean in the eradication of hunger.

31. The nationalisation of the oil company PDVSA in 2003 allowed Venezuela to regain its energy sovereignty.

32. The nationalisation of the electrical and telecommunications sectors (CANTV and



Hugo Chávez.

Electricidad de Caracas) allowed the end of private monopolies and guaranteed universal access to these services.

33. Since 1999, more than 50,000 cooperatives have been created in all sectors of the economy.

34. The unemployment rate fell from 15.2% in 1998 to 6.4% in 2012, with the creation of more than 4 million jobs.

35. The minimum wage increased from 100 bolivars (\$16) in 1998 to 247.52 bolivars (\$330) in 2012, i.e. an increase of over 2,000%. This is the highest minimum wage in Latin America.

36. In 1999, 65% of the workforce earned the minimum wage. In 2012 only 21.1% of workers have only this level of pay.

37. Adults at a certain age who have never worked still get an income equivalent to 60% of the minimum wage.

38. Women without income and disabled people receive a pension equivalent to 80% of the minimum wage.

39. Working hours were reduced to 6 hours a day and 36 hours per week, without loss of pay.

40. Public debt fell from 45% of GDP in 1998 to 20% in 2011. Venezuela withdrew

from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, after early repayment of all its debts.

41. In 2012, the growth rate was 5.5% in Venezuela, one of the highest in the world.

42. GDP per capita rose from \$4,100 in 1999 to \$10,810 in 2011.

43. According to the annual World Happiness 2012, Venezuela is the second happiest country in Latin America, behind Costa Rica, and the 19th worldwide, ahead of Germany and Spain.

44. Venezuela offers more direct support to the American continent than the United States. In 2007, Chávez spent more than \$8,800 million in grants, loans and energy aid as against \$3,000 million from the Bush administration.

45. For the first time in its history, Venezuela has its own satellites (Bolivar and Miranda) and is now sovereign in the field of space technology. The entire country has internet and telecommunications coverage.

46. The creation of Petrocaribe in 2005 allows 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, or 90 million people, secure energy supply, by oil subsidies of between 40% to 60%.

## Endangered wild animals- Some good news

Steven Katsinseris

**With lots of bad news regarding so many species of threatened wildlife that are in danger of extinction, it is very encouraging to read some good reports about endangered wild animals. Recently, there was really wonderful news about one of the world's most iconic animals, the Giant Panda. The Giant Panda population has risen by 268 individuals over the last decade, increasing to a total of 1,864 animals, according to the latest Chinese survey. This represents a total rise of 16.8 percent.**

Found only in China, Giant Pandas are listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. The only surviving member of its genus, the giant panda lives almost solely on bamboo. It's currently threatened by habitat loss and land degradation.

In addition to a rising population the

survey found that Giant Pandas are also expanding their range. The species now covers 2.57 million hectares, an expansion of 11.8 percent since 2003 with about a third of the animals inhabiting range outside of protected areas.

"A lot of good work is being done around wild Giant Panda conservation and the government has done well to integrate these efforts and partner with conservation organisations including WWF," said Xiaohai Liu, the World Wildlife Fund China's executive director of programs.

There has also been cheery news regarding Indian Rhino conservation. Even as poaching increases in India, there is also cause for optimism. A paper published this month by Assam's environmental ministry reveals that the population of Indian One-horned Rhinos in the state has grown by 27 percent since 2006, hitting a high of 2,544

animals. This puts the population well on track toward the Indian government's goal of 3,000 rhinos by 2020. Smaller Indian Rhino populations live in neighbouring Nepal.

That represents a tremendous success for conservation, said Barney Long of the World Wildlife Fund, pointing out that there were only about 200 Indian Rhinos in the early 1900s. "I think this is a lovely story of conservation success, despite the hideous poaching crisis that we're in," he said.

"We know how to save rhinos," he added. "You have to protect their habitat and you have to protect the animals themselves." A third element involves moving the animals into new, safe habitats as their populations increase. "When rhinos get too dense of a population, they decrease their breeding rate," Long said.

And there was further splendid news from

India, this time about Bengal Tigers. India's tiger population has increased by nearly 30 percent over the last four years! A recent census showed numbers of these forest-dwelling big cats reached 2,226 last year. While poaching remains the greatest threat to tigers in the wild today, the latest count released by the government of India proves that this tiger species can recover and thrive.

India is unique in having a significant number of tigers in the wild, in spite of growing population and resource extraction pressures on their habitat. The latest estimate of tigers in various landscapes published by the Ministry of Environment and Forests claims an appreciable rise in numbers of the big cat, up from 1,706 four years ago, to 2,226 in 2014 in India's various nature reserves, ranging from the hills in the Northeast to central Indian forests and the Western Ghats, to the mangrove-rich Sundarbans delta. India's great



# Matargarup, home to the homeless

Gerry Georgatos

**Homelessness is on the increase. Children – babies and toddlers – sleeping on Australia's streets, in cars, in condemned squats and traps, in alleyways, in tents in bush outskirts off city highways or in caravan parks minus the caravan. Australia's cities are harsh on the homeless; they have no homeless-friendly precincts. Take one of Australia's wealthiest cities – Perth – it is extraordinarily harsh on its poorest – the homeless. But in Perth, for 40 days now, a safe space for the poorest, a friendly precinct has been manufactured – Matargarup refugee camp.**

The camp has reached up to 51 tents and 150 people at any one time – the majority who are homeless. It is a much needed and long overdue safe space for the chronically homeless. There would be many more at the homeless camp but far too many of those who would wish to be within its safety have been scared back into the dangerous alleyways, squats and traps by three police-led City of Perth Council raids. Their tents, swags, belongings taken and still in the possession of a ruthless City of Perth Council worried more about “wider public interest issues” than the physical safety and mental, emotional well-being of the homeless.

But the Council has been hit with a letter of warning from a kind-hearted lawyer, Stephen Walker – who is acting pro bono – for the Matargarup homeless. Mr Walker has stated that he believes the homeless have a right to camp on the island and that it was illegal for the Council to steal their tents. I suggest the word steal because this is what I believe in effect they have done. They have taken from the homeless their protection from the elements, their dignity of a little space for themselves in this world, where they could lay their bones to rest, and locate their few possessions.

Matargarup camp is a place of camaraderie, psychosocial health, social and emotional well-being. It is a place the wider community is aware of and where health workers voluntarily visit to do medical checks on its “residents”, where ordinary citizens in droves drop off food parcels, essentials and spend some time yarn-ing with the locals. It is a place where song, dance are present, a place of solidarity unlike the despicable life threatening loneliness of city alleyways where the sleepers are vulnerable to sexual attacks, violence, being rolled.

Have you any idea how many have died on our streets? But they get no mention in the media. On whose hands is their blood?

Perth City Council has the glorious opportunity to respond to those who have coalesced at Matargarup (Heirissou Island). They have the opportunity to assist the homeless instead of doing what Councils in predominately developed nations only do, and that is screw over the homeless, gather and shuffle them off, out of sight.

Perth City Council is a wealthy one. Perth is a wealthy city. Western Australia is the richest jurisdiction in the second wealthiest nation on earth per capita, in the world's 12th largest economy. Perth City Council can lead the way forward or it can do as it has done so far and smash any last hope of a way forward for the homeless.

There are nearly 20,000 children under the age of 12 years homeless in Australia.

Perth City Council can be either visionaries or profoundly cruel.

There are nine councillors on the Perth City Council. It is up to them to decide the fate of the homeless of Matargarup. They cannot pass the buck to their executive. No deal here, whatever Perth Council does, those ultimately responsible are its councillors. It is up to them to decide whether Perth city should have a homeless-friendly precinct. In my view there should be a homeless-friendly precinct in every major hub in Perth, in every hub of every major city in Australia, in all the world's cities, that is as long as governments continue to refuse to address homelessness.



*At this time,  
the councillors represent  
and endorse a Council  
that raids the homeless,  
steals their tents and  
belongings, that moves  
on the homeless, that  
destroys their vestiges  
of dignity.*

Matargarup is special, because it is led by our First Peoples – by those who have suffered most at the hands of horrific social policies, eugenics and other criminality for nearly two centuries in Western Australia.

I know just about every councillor on the Perth City Council. I hope that they have the visionary decency, the striving for the common good to do for our homeless what no others before them ever have. One of the councillors was one of my Guild Presidents at a university Guild where I was its General Manager. True, I was more political and radical than the students but he also volunteered with a group – Swags for the Homeless.

## Stealing dignity

He needs to stand up and be counted – he cannot deliver himself on the back of raising funds to buy swags for the homeless and then be part of a council that steals the tents, steals the dignity from the homeless. A few other councillors I know to be good souls but the actions of the council they are part of tarnishes their reputations – the reputation that matters – you know the one about where deeds speak volumes. At this time, the councillors represent and endorse a Council that raids the homeless, steals their tents and belongings, that moves on the homeless, that destroys their vestiges of dignity.

In the end, you are what you do. What you

have to say does not mean anything as much as what you do or what you are part of. You cannot argue that you are “an internal voice” or the “conscience”, that just doesn't wash when you remain part of the wrongdoing.

As I have the inside word that another raid, once again police escorted, is on the table for next week, I will just state it as it is: if the Council shuts down once again Matargarup on the simple basis that it is a public park thoroughfare, excusing itself with by-law issues, then this council and its councillors are uncaring, mean spirited, lazy bureaucrats, cowards and ruthless.

So very few others use Matargarup, in general it is barely used by the wider public.

How many dead bodies have to be collected from the streets for someone in any form of government, local, state, federal, to say “no more”?

But if the councillors rise to the occasion and welcome the Matargarup homeless and assist them at every turn then I and many others will applaud their humanity, one that will be there for all to see.

Example is our only immortality.

There is no greater legacy that one can have in any form of government office than to have improved the lot of the most vulnerable, to have saved lives.

The Stringer ✪



47. Venezuela also provides assistance to disadvantaged communities in the United States by providing fuel at subsidised rates.

48. The creation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) in 2004 between Cuba and Venezuela laid the foundations of an inclusive alliance based on cooperation and reciprocity. It now comprises eight member countries which places the human being in the centre of the social project, with the aim of combating poverty and social exclusion.

49. Hugo Chávez was at the heart of the creation in 2011 of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) which brings together for the first time the 33 nations of the region, emancipated from the tutelage of the United States and Canada.

50. Hugo Chávez played a key role in the peace process in Colombia. According to President Juan Manuel Santos, “if we go into a solid peace project, with clear and concrete progress, progress achieved” ever before with the FARC, “is also due to the dedication and commitment of Chávez and the government of Venezuela.”

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efforts give it a special standing in the global conservation field.

Some Indian states deserve credit for strengthening the protection of wild tigers. This shows the need to improve those aspects that lead to a rise in tiger numbers, voluntary relocation of forest-dwellers from core forests, a severe crackdown on the hunting of prey animals, improved patrols against poaching, safeguards against harmful land-use changes and constant monitoring. Conserving Bengal Tigers is increasingly focussed on saving ‘source populations’ of these big cats.

More inspiring news too is that the Amur Leopard population has also increased.

The population of one of the world's rarest leopards has doubled in the past eight years, showing that recent conservation efforts are beginning to bear fruit. At least 57 Amur Leopards now exist in Russia's National park “Land of the Leopard”. ✪



# Palestinian suffering forgotten

Michael Leshner

What, exactly, was remembered during Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day this week? Not the victims of Israel's latest slaughter in Gaza, where more than 2,200 civilians were killed less than a year ago. In the propagandistic world of "Holocaust memory" only Jews can be victims, so mainstream media marginalise the hundreds of Jewish Holocaust survivors and their descendants who publicly condemned "the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza" (their words). Instead, a leading Israeli newspaper informed us this week that "adult children of Holocaust survivors in Israel tend to be more anxious than their peers ... about the Iranian nuclear threat" – even though Iran has no nuclear weapons and has never attacked Israel.

The erasure of Palestinian suffering from public memory is a particularly ironic aspect of "Holocaust remembrance." Amid pleas for the preservation of Holocaust history, mainstream media still avoid any reference to the public comments of a senior Israeli officer who, during the second intifada, urged the Israeli military to analyse and internalise the lessons of how the German army fought in the Warsaw Ghetto.

A similarly selective silence surrounds the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Several governments represented at an Auschwitz commemoration in January sent troops into that slaughter, so eerily reminiscent of Germany's criminal invasion of Poland in 1939. "People forget what Auschwitz was," said Halina Birenbaum, who was in the notorious death camp as a child, "and that terrifies me, because I know to what kind of hell it leads."

We should be doubly terrified, it seems to me, when such an event is used to promote precisely that kind of forgetfulness, at least where Arab deaths are concerned.

The Israeli writer Boaz Evron warned years ago that "Holocaust awareness" is now "an official, propagandistic indoctrination ... the real aim of which is not at all an understanding of the past, but a manipulation of the present." Anyone doubting these words need only listen as world "leaders" emphasise the sort of wrongs whose memories they want to preserve – while noting the atrocities they ignore.

## Resolve to fight prejudice?

The UK Prime Minister David Cameron, for instance, recently intoned that all of "us," "whatever our faith, whatever our creed, whatever our politics ... stand united in our resolve to fight prejudice and discrimination in all its forms."

But Cameron hasn't fought Israel's apartheid regime in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip; in fact, he refused to halt Britain's arms sales to Israel even as Israel used its arsenal in repeated attacks on Gaza's hospitals (killing more than a dozen health care workers) and the bombardment of residential neighbourhoods, where the death toll included more than 500 children, destroying 22 schools and levelling more than 10,000 homes.



Holocaust survivor Avraham Har Shalom, right, lights a torch with his granddaughter at the opening ceremony of the Remembrance Day at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial, in Jerusalem on April 15, 2015. (Photo: Abir Sultan, EPA)

Apart from dividing worthy victims from unworthy ones, Holocaust "memorials" adopt the priorities of Western power politics. That's why the president of the country that bore the brunt of defeating Hitler, and actually liberated the Eastern European death camps, did not even attend the memorial for the 70th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation. President Vladimir Putin was "absent," as the Associated Press' Vanessa Gera delicately put it, as a "result of the deep chill between the West and Russia over Ukraine."

In plain English, Putin was in the doghouse for opposing the US-backed coup that put Nazi sympathizers into power in Kiev (where their predecessors assisted in the slaughter of some 30,000 Jews in 1941), so naturally he didn't belong at a Holocaust commemoration. On the other hand, none of the event's organisers seemed to object to the representation of countries that supported the empowerment of neo-Nazis in Ukraine, whose capital (as everyone present certainly knew) was less than 600 miles from the site of the ceremony.

## Exploitation of history

World Jewish Congress President Ronald Lauder used the ceremony to decry complaints about last summer's massacre in Gaza as "vilification of Israel." Hollywood's Steven Spielberg echoed that message, blaming the "perennial demons of intolerance" on "anti-Semites, radical extremists, and religious fanatics" and warning of "a growing effort to banish Jews from Europe." (He presented no evidence of this "growing effort"; as far as I know, the only prominent politician who has been calling for the removal of Jews from Europe is Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.)

Claims of rising European anti-Semitism represent yet another exploitation of Jewish history for the benefit of Israeli propaganda. "The

question of whether Jews have a future in Europe is an, unfortunately, timely one," Johns Hopkins University Professor Dorothea Wolfson wrote recently, following a conference at which Benjamin Ginsberg, another Johns Hopkins professor, ominously claimed that it is now "harder for Jews to be openly Jewish in Europe without being harassed."

Apologists for Israel have an obvious motive for spreading such a message, but the facts tell a different tale. In France and Germany, the countries most often complained about in recent fearmongering, Jews received overwhelmingly favourable marks in a 2008 Pew Research Centre poll on views of religious groups – and this despite growing public anger over Israel's brutal occupation of Palestinian land and the ostentatious support of that occupation by most of the world's Jewish leadership.

A recent survey taken by France's National Human Rights Consultative Committee actually concludes that "Jews are by far the best accepted minority in France today" – much better accepted than Blacks and immigrants of North African origin, and far and away more accepted than Muslims. Yet the propaganda churned out by Jewish groups and their apologists would have us believe that Jews, and only Jews, are in Europe's crosshairs.

Apart from being untrue, the hype about a "new anti-Semitism" is cynical. Deborah Lipstadt's typical column in *The New York Times* last August – perfectly timed to deflect attention from the Israeli massacre in Gaza – contained predictable hand-wringing about the growing threat to Jews in Western Europe. "This is not another Holocaust," she wrote, "but it's bad enough."

The better to serve the Israeli cause, Lipstadt also took a sideswipe at the Hamas charter as a fount of resurgent Jew-hatred. But nowhere in her column did Lipstadt even mention Ukraine, the one country

in Europe – probably in the world – where a political movement linked to genocidal anti-Semitism really has made a comeback.

If anti-Semitism had been her real subject, Lipstadt could hardly have missed a target so obvious. But the neo-Nazis in Ukraine are supported by the United States and haven't been condemned by Israel, so – well, enough said.

## Moral imperative

All that is bad enough, but the worst thing about the propaganda, it seems to me, is that it manipulates Holocaust memory to obscure what should be its most important teachings. There is a dangerous wave of bigotry sweeping much of the world today, but it is aimed predominantly at Muslims, not Jews.

According to the Pew Research Centre's figures, unfavourable attitudes toward Muslims exceed favourable ones in an astonishing number of countries: the list includes France, Germany, Spain, Poland, India, South Korea, Japan, China, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and South Africa. This is particularly troubling when we remember that since 2001, attacks by Western forces have killed (at least) hundreds of thousands of people in predominantly Muslim countries including Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan.

Under these circumstances, the sensible thing for Jews to do is to make common cause with Muslims in opposition to religious intolerance, and to campaign against the imperialist wars that have devastated so much of the Muslim world – the all too obvious global consequences of which include anger, sometimes violent, over Israel's role in many of those wars.

Writing as a Jew myself, and specifically in light of Holocaust history, I find such a response more than political common sense; for me, it is a moral imperative. And for the same reason I cannot remain silent while

Jewish elites turn the lessons of the Nazi genocide upside down – incidentally using the very methods the Nazis used to convert Germany into a killing machine.

"The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders," Hermann Goering, a leading Nazi, told an Allied-appointed psychologist while on trial at Nuremberg. "All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger."

Even as the corpses piled up in the rubble of Gaza last summer, overloading some morgues so badly that the bodies of children had to be housed in ice cream freezers, many Jewish leaders were following Goering's line, with one writer from my own Orthodox circles musing about "the courage, motivation and faith" of the Israeli killers, sneering at Jews who speak of "the evils of modern Israel" and condemning the defenders of Gaza, who allegedly "primed teenagers with suicide bomber belts." No evidence, of course, was given for this claim.

The worship of power and military force, the usurpation of religion to cloak conquest in sanctimonious rhetoric, the demonisation of those people unlucky enough to stand in the way of the dominant race's appetites – all this, unfortunately, has clearly survived the fall of the Third Reich.

That it has infected so much contemporary Jewish discourse only proves that Israel's memorials of the Nazi genocide serve no decent purpose. Until we are prepared to turn its lessons inward – where all moral lessons belong first and foremost – it would be far more respectful to the victims if we could simply resolve, in the words of Norman Finkelstein, "to preserve their memory, learn from their suffering and let them, finally, rest in peace."

*The Electronic Intifada* ☪



# Demonstrations for \$15

Marilyn Bechtel

**Berkeley, California, April 15 – Low wage workers – fast food, child and home care, security and more – were joined by dozens of area unions and community organisations in a massive demonstration for \$15 and a union. The action began with a rally at historic Sproul Plaza on the University of California, Berkeley campus, site of the famed Free Speech Movement in the mid-1960s.**

Participants came from actions all over the San Francisco Bay area earlier in the day, including San Jose and surrounding South Bay communities, San Francisco, and Marin County. Many of those actions targeted McDonald's outlets.

Mayor Ruth Atkins of neighbouring Emeryville drew cheers from the rally crowd as she announced that on July 1, the city's minimum wage would rise to \$14.42 an hour. Other area communities including Oakland, San Francisco and Berkeley, have raised or are in process to increase their minimum wages, while State Democrat Senator Mark Leno has introduced a bill to raise the state's minimum.

Speaking in English and Spanish, Mary Kay Henry, president of the Service Employees International Union, called the Berkeley action

“the exclamation point” in the Fight for \$15 and said her union was participating in over 200 cities around the country.

Along with statements of support, including Alameda Labour Council Executive Director Josie Camacho's pledge that the county's 100,000 union members stand solidly with the campaign, came calls to bring struggles together across traditional organising lines.

Sheila Tully, president of the California Faculty Association at San Francisco State University, drew attention to a low-wage constituency not always recognised: part-time, adjunct college and university lecturers, many of whom she said earn less than \$15 an hour.

“I earned my Masters and my PhD at UC Berkeley,” Tully said, “and I can barely make a living in San Francisco.” Her union stands in solidarity with fast food and retail workers, and with all faculty members, she said. “We know when we stand together, fight together, we win.”

A related message was brought by Devonte Jackson of the Black Lives Matter movement. “We're seeing that not only are black people being murdered by police on the street, but we're seeing state-sanctioned violence in the gentrification and displacement of our communities, in income inequality, inadequate public schools, and a less than three

percent black student population on this campus.”

Jackson urged “organising at the intersections ... it's not enough to have a black lives matter movement separate from the economic justice movement, the Fight for \$15 separate from the migrants movement and the environmental justice movement.”

Immigration activist Maria Echaveste added: “You also need to know that this battle is across countries,” noting that farm workers in the US and in Mexico are oppressed by the same corporations.

Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune enlarged the circle further, pointing out that those worst hurt by corporate actions underlying climate change are those with the least resources. “One third of Americans live in places where it is unhealthy to breathe, every day,” he said. “And the people who live in these places invariably are people being paid starvation wages. That's why the Sierra Club is part of the Fight for \$15.”

After the rally, over 1,000 protesters marched peacefully and energetically through downtown Berkeley, stopping at a downtown McDonald's, and temporarily snarling traffic.

A new study by the UC Berkeley Labour Centre, The High Public Cost of Low Wages, points out that low wages are costing US taxpayers



Protesters gather at Sproul Plaza in Berkeley, April 15.

nearly \$153 billion annually in public support for working families.

Speaking on radio station KPFA's UpFront program on April 15, lead author Ken Jacobs, the centre's chair, said higher wages would mean the funds “could be used in a more targeted manner.” He also noted that “some large companies, like McDonald's and Wal-Mart, are effectively using these programs as a subsidy.”

Jacobs said over half of fast food workers across the country are getting public assistance, as are nearly

half of child care and home care workers, and even a quarter of part-time college faculty. Modest wage increases would cause a small rise in costs of goods and services, amounting to half of 1 percent overall, and less than 5 percent for restaurant meals, he said.

Specifically in California, Jacobs said, working families are receiving some \$3.7 billion in public assistance, amounting to about half of total public assistance funds.

People's World ☘

## Ukraine: Silence broken on assassinations

Daniele Pozzati

**Italy's second largest newspaper *La Repubblica* has broken the western media's silence over the latest wave of political murders in Ukraine.**

In an unusual for mainstream western media frank assessment of Kiev's post-Maidan regime, *La Repubblica* has denounced “a ruthless sweeping away of every form of political opposition taking place in Kiev”. The paper was reacting to yet another assassination in Ukraine – this time of a popular journalist, Oles Buzina.

Not shy of calling a spade a spade, the article leaves no doubts as to what has happened, and is happening in Ukraine, right from the headline: “Pro-Russian journalist murdered in Kiev. It is the third political homicide in 24 hours.”

The captions describe Oles Buzina as a “journalist and writer very well known in the Ukrainian capital” and his murder as an “execution on his door step”.

“Somebody is systematically killing all those opposed to the Ukrainian government borne from last year's ‘revolution’.”

Noteworthy here are the inverted commas into which the Italian newspaper puts the word “revolution”, thereby putting in doubt the democratic nature of the regime change in Kiev.

The article then quotes President Putin as saying that this is “one of the many crimes of the new Ukraine”. One would be hard

pressed to find, anywhere in western mainstream media, other articles like this, which report Putin's statements without the slightest attempt of casting his words in a somewhat negative or misleading way.

Coverage of the Ukraine crisis by *La Repubblica* has been so far little better than those of its British and American counterparts. The editorial line was usually biased against Russia.

In a departure from this bias the article says that murders in Ukraine are taking place “within the silence of many western media”.

More importantly, Buzina's assassination is set in a context of a series of political homicides with the assassins described as “organised commandos” and “professional hit men” – implying an instigator.

The motives behind the assassinations are clearly explained:

“Yesterday evening [Wednesday], again in the Ukrainian capital, a commando killed Sergey Sukhobok, owner of an internet site and of a small newspaper which contests government policy and puts forward the reasons of the people in rebel Donbass.

“Earlier still, in the afternoon, other hit men had carried on an identical mission near the home of Oleg Kalashnikov, former MP of the pro-Russian Party of the Regions, and considered a great opponent to the movements that protested last year in Kiev's Maidan and that now run the country.”

Giving readers a taste of Ukraine's new political climate, the

article says that “several oligarchs, politicians and celebrities made creepy statements filled with ‘at last’, ‘he deserved it’, ‘an enemy gone’,” upon hearing news of Kalashnikov's murder.

The Ukrainian ministry of Interior itself is quoted describing the slain Buzina as “the notorious journalist”.

“Neo-Nazi ‘Pravy Sector’ [Right Sector] movement is probably behind these murders, at least as far as their material execution is concerned,” says the article, again leaving open the possibility of there being an instigator behind such “systematic killings”.

But after a year of seeing the “Pravy Sector” movement dismissed by western media to the tune of “oh, you've got some Nazi lunatics everywhere, not just in Ukraine,” it is refreshing to read *La Repubblica's* article pointing out that:

“Pravy Sector heavily influences the choices of both government and president Poroshenko, boycotting every attempt to search for a peaceful solution and sending punitive expeditions against anyone who dares to dissent from the new hyper nationalistic and patriotic line”.

Having quoted President Putin's firm assurances that “there will never be an open war between Russia and Ukraine,” the article concludes that in Ukraine itself “the beginning of a new wave of uncontrollable terror does not bode well”.

globalresearch.ca ☘



## Region Briefs

The state owned enterprise, Vietnam Railways (VNR), recently helped farmers to transport onions for free from the south to the north. The VNR General Director, Vu Ta Tung, ordered the Saigon and Hanoi Railways to carry out that plan, as the onion price in the south dropped, and it created financial difficulties for local farmers. This action has shown that state owned enterprises cared and better served the interest of the people, compared to most private companies that only intended to pursue their economic interest.

On April 14, Vietnam Deputy Prime Minister, Vu Duc Dam, attended a conference in Ho Chi Minh City to honour people who had contributed to the 1975 Ho Chi Minh military campaign that liberated the south and unified the whole country. Vu said that the Party, state and people were grateful to the heroes who sacrificed their lives and youth for the revolutionary cause, and he called for the youth to learn this revolutionary spirit and to bring peace and prosperity to the country. About 8.8 million people (10 percent of the population) in the country are war veterans, heroic mothers and relatives of martyrs, and they are benefiting from the government's preferential policies in education, housing and healthcare.

An elected seven-member Presidium hosted the 21st Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) on April 15. Drafts on the political tactical line were presented to the congress, covering the history and achievements of the political tactical lines in the past 25 years. During the congress, 29 amendments were passed and two resolutions were adopted.

China's Ministry of Environmental Protection ordered Hebei province to stop pollution in Baiyangdian wetland (150 kilometres from Beijing), punishing environmental violations in the area, as reports showed that the wetland was polluted and damaged by unauthorised development. No industrial waste should be dumped in the water and residential sewage pipes should be properly handled. Illegal aquaculture and tourist projects would be cancelled or removed. The wetland is the largest freshwater wetland in northern China. Moreover, the province is known for its air pollution in China, but recently it vowed to clean up smog by reducing coal-related pollution. The province's Vice Governor, Zhang Jiehui, said that the province would cut by half emissions from coal-fired power stations.



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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

## AGL flags end to coal power

It's great to see AGL finally listening to the 9 out of 10 Australians who want renewable energy and making a commitment to leave dirty coal fired power. It's just a shame the company will keep pumping carbon into the atmosphere until 2050. We need action on global warming right now, not 35 years down the line when most

of their dirty power plants would be expected to have shut anyway.

The announcement had nothing new to say about AGL's failure to support the existing Renewable Energy Target, and was silent on AGL's continued investment in coal seam gas.

This announcement comes hot on the heels of AGL's Macquarie Generation purchase, which instantly doubled their carbon pollution from about 19 million tonnes to over 40 million tonnes, making AGL the biggest carbon polluter in Australia.

This announcement follows GetUp's Dirty Power report, which showed AGL, EnergyAustralia and Origin were among the worst polluting operators in the country.

- AGL's total carbon emissions in 2013-14 were in excess of 40,000,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> e;
- 7.5% of Australia's total carbon emissions
- 81% of the electricity produced

by AGL owned generators comes from coal

- 7% gas and a declining 11% renewables
- Toxic emissions (i.e. not carbon, stuff like fine particulate pollution) from AGL's dirty power stations are now more than 20 times higher than five years ago.

Hopefully we'll be hearing from Origin and EnergyAustralia on their plans to start wiping out their carbon emissions too.

James Grugeon  
GetUp

## Sovereignty was never ceded

Given that sovereignty and what it stands for will be the flavour of the decade, it is only proper for me to retrace a timeline for our people to see how the issue of sovereignty

Something to say?  
Write to the Editor!

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

has evolved to this day.

We can say that Aboriginal people throwing spears at the first white man was an act of sovereign Peoples in defence of their lands, territories and dominions. If we are to examine the political legal action by the people and their spear throwing, it was a military exercise authorised by their law and customs which, in total, represented an Act of State on behalf of the People.

They were exercising their sovereign right to defend what was theirs.

The mass destruction of our people through the foreign diseases

imported to this land by the illegal British boat people was tantamount to germ warfare. The fact that the invaders were massacring hundreds and thousands of people with impunity, through private militia groups and the British Redcoats, was one of the earliest forms of genocide that equated with any of the British crusades of the earlier centuries.

Ghillar, Michael Anderson,

Convener of  
the Sovereign Union,  
Co-founder of the 1972  
Aboriginal Embassy

# Culture & Life

by  
Rob Gowland

## "No to War!" and "Hands Off Russia!"

The centenary of the futile but costly ANZAC landing is almost upon us, and the propaganda mills of capitalism are working at full bore. "War, glorious war", they shout, oblivious to the death, destruction and misery that accompanies it.

In their usual way, they are busy recasting the First World War as some sort of noble struggle for truth and justice, for the defence of small countries against wicked invaders. Much the way they do with the wars imperialism is fighting today, really, whether in Syria, Yemen or already (covertly) in Venezuela.

But now, as then, imperialism's expressed war aims are a travesty of the facts. The First World War was sold to the public in Britain and France, and their various allies, as a war to defend the peace of the world from barbarous German and Turkish invaders. It was far from the truth, of course.

The Great War was in fact a war between two groups of empires (British, French and Russian on one side, German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish on the other) for nothing more noble than control of trade and colonies.

In November 1917, Red revolution in Russia overthrew the pro-war government of Kerensky and took Russia out of the War. Lenin and the Bolsheviks called for all the combatants in the Great War to stop waging war. It was a popular call.

Revolution broke out in Germany and Hungary; there were mutinies among French and British troops on the Western front. While the leaders of British, French and US imperialism schemed to eliminate the Bolshevik menace before it could grow any stronger, they soon realised that continuing the War was not feasible.

By late 1918, with empires collapsing around them, they had to bring the War to an abrupt close. "The fact that England was still at war with Germany was a mistake. There must be an immediate cessation of hostilities on the Western Front and a coalition against Bolshevism.

"Cried [British secret agent] Captain Sidney George Reilly: 'Peace, peace on any terms – and then a united front against the true enemies of mankind!'" (Sayers and Kahn: *The Great Conspiracy*).

The anti-Soviet character of the Armistice between the Allies and the Central Powers in November 1918 is revealed in a little-known clause that stipulated that German troops should remain for as long as the Allies considered it expedient in whatever Russian territory they then occupied.

However, months before the Armistice, British, French, US and Japanese troops had been landed in Russia, to deal with the Bolshevik problem. The Japanese High Command provided the thousands of Japanese troops in Siberia with little Russian dictionaries in which the word "Bolshevik" was defined as "wild beast" and followed by the notation: "To be exterminated".

By mid 1919, the territory of Russia had been invaded by the armed forces of no less than 14 states, namely Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, USA, Czechoslovakia, Serbia, China, Finland, Greece, Poland, Romania, and Turkey. None of them declared war on Russia. After four years of the World War, going to war with revolutionary Russia would not have been a popular move. So they pretended they were not at war with Russia.

Winston Churchill supervised the allied

campaign against the Bolshevik menace, but wrote ironically of the Intervention in his book *The World Crisis: the Aftermath*: "Were they [the Allies] at war with Russia? Certainly not; but they shot Soviet Russians at sight.

"They stood as invaders on Russian soil. They armed the enemies of the Soviet Government. They blockaded the ports and sank its battleships. They earnestly desired and schemed its downfall.

"But war – shocking! Interference – shame! It was, they repeated, a matter of indifference to them how Russians settled their own affairs. They were impartial – bang!"

Australian Communist leader Edgar Ross wrote in his excellent 1972 publication *The Russian Revolution – Its Impact on Australia*: "Australians learned [in late 1918 and early 1919] with a sense of great shame and rising anger that their own government was actively taking part in these measures.

"News penetrated through the [war] censorship that not only were Australian officers attached to the forces fighting the Bolsheviks but the Australian warship *Swan* had been sent with a French vessel to the Sea of Azov." The *Swan* was there to support the counter-revolutionary forces armed and supplied by France and Britain.

All over the world, people were demanding to know why their menfolk were fighting in Russia when the War was supposed to be over? The US Expeditionary Force, in Siberia, was seething with discontent, appalled by the barbarity of the White Guard armies they had been ordered to support.

As discontent and mutinous behaviour spread among the Intervention troops,



Cartoon, Prelude to Power, "The Common Enemy".

British and US military leaders resorted to anti-Semitism to explain their actions in Russia.

"A proclamation from British General Headquarters in Northern Russia, which was read to British and American troops, [explained]: 'We are up against Bolshevism, which means anarchy pure and simple.

"Look at Russia at the present moment. The power is in the hands of a few men, mostly Jews ..."

The Russian Revolution represented the hope of workers everywhere. In Britain and Australia and many other countries, the union movement rallied around the slogan "Hands Off Russia!"

Manifestoes and Resolutions from Labour Councils and even the ALP Federal Conference demanded an end to intervention and the cessation of hostilities, proclaiming the right of the Russian people to work out their own destiny.

Our heroes were not the misled youngsters sent to fight in a war on the Gallipoli peninsula in an attempt to gain control over Russia's oil and coal and steel, or those that were subsequently sent to fight and die in the hell of the Western Front.

Nor was it those who, when the War was supposedly over, were sent to fight against Revolutionary Russian workers and peasants. No, our heroes were the men and women who demonstrated and defied the police to oppose all conscription for imperialist wars and when the Conscription referenda were defeated and the War reputedly over, came out again to demand the withdrawal of all Intervention troops from Russia, and to defend the world's first successful socialist revolution. ✪





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

Sunday April 26 –  
Saturday May 2

Just one program in this week's column, because I think it is far and away the most interesting of the week.

"The 21st century will be the most unequal in human history," says one of the experts in *The Super Rich And Us* (ABC from Tuesday April 30 at 9:30pm). "There will always be the haves and the have-nots," says another, "but today you have the haves, the have-nots and the have yachts." Presenter Jacques Peretti examines this situation as it manifests itself in Britain: "Never before," he says, "has money been so polarised. In Britain, the richest 85 people now own more than half of the world's population. Since the '08 crash, there has been £80 billion of austerity cuts, the same amount bankers will have been given in bonuses."

Watching the super-rich at play, buying vintage cars and other pursuits, he comments that "The biggest recession since the War affected the super-rich profoundly: they made lots of money from it."

Directed by Mike Radford, who made *The Men Who Made Us Spend*, this two-part series contains a wealth of fascinating statistics. For example: for ten years the average weekly income of a British family stayed the same: £429. In the same period, the richest thousand people in Britain saw their wealth more than double, from £200 billion to £500 billion. Last year alone the top thousand saw their wealth rise by £70 billion, making their wealth equal to the combined annual earnings of Britain's entire full-time workforce.

How did this change come about? In the 1960s, with its empire largely gone, the City of London sought to reinvent itself as a tax haven. Under Margaret Thatcher's leadership (and under the influence of economic advisers to Ronald Reagan – originators of the notorious "Reaganomics")

tax rates for the rich (and their companies) were drastically reduced – from 83% to 60%, a huge give-away to the very rich. The British government exploited a hangover from its colonial past – the "non domicile rule" – to allow foreign magnates to live in Britain tax-free. The rule had originally been introduced to encourage rich colonials to come "home" to spend their money, but now it was used to allow any rich person to avoid tax if they could show that they had a connection to a foreign country.

This, it was claimed, would encourage them to develop their riches and the money they spent would build the national economy. This was the so-called "trickle down" or "trickle through" effect, but it is bogus because the super rich spend their money on trophy objects that don't create jobs or income for the mass of the people at all. The money stays pretty much in the world of the super-rich themselves.

As the top one percent got richer, the rest stagnated. In real terms, since prices rose all the time, especially for things like houses or rent, the mass of the people actually got poorer. The OECD now says the British economy would have been 20% bigger had British governments not tried to woo the super-rich.

When Britain finally imposed a "wealth tax" it was a flat £30,000 a year. But, as one British financial adviser says, that was hardly an imposition on the super-rich: "It's the sort of money they would spend on a birthday party for one of their kids."

Former tax inspector Richard Brooks explains the cosy relationship that tax inspectors (and the taxation department – the Inland Revenue) developed with companies where if the inspectors vigorously pursued tax from a company it would count against that inspector's career prospects.

Cambridge academic (and "one of the world's leading economists") Dr Ha-Joon Chang points out that in countries like the UK and the US, that have pursued the "trickle-down" effect for 30 years, it is obviously not working. "Investment as a share of national income has fallen, economic growth has fallen. ... The argument was that if you gave these rich people more money they would create more jobs, more income, [but] they haven't done anything."

They may not have created jobs or done anything else to boost people's incomes, but they doubled their own share of income since the 1980s. In the US, billionaire Nick Hanauer believes the growing inequality threatens the future of capitalism itself. He speaks colourfully



Jacques Peretti on the runway with private jet – *The Super Rich And Us* (ABC from Tuesday April 30 at 9:30pm).

of hearing the pitchforks coming. His concern, and that of others like him, is the impoverishment of the middle class (not so much the working class), because their concept of a healthy capitalist economy is dependent on a flourishing middle class ("consumers").

An unblushing Hanauer tells Peretti that he earns a thousand times the median wage in the US. "But I don't buy a thousand times as much stuff. No matter how much money I have, I cannot sustain a great national economy. Only a robust middle class can do that."

Professor Thomas Piketty, author of *Capital in the 21st Century*, is a French academic who has "revised" Marx to bring him "up to date". His work is extremely popular among bourgeois economists at present. Peretti calls him "the world's most influential economist". Piketty says "The middle class is very important for the economy, because this is what allows us to develop mass consumption, and to develop mass investment in construction, and it has started to shrink to some extent in the past 20 to 30 years, and I think it will be a major threat to our democracies if it was to continue shrinking in the coming decades."

Jacques Peretti is no Marxist, but merely a concerned bourgeois democrat, disturbed at the way his country has been polarised and rendered more unequal by the ruthless pursuit of outrageous wealth by a small minority and the governments they control.

Well worth watching, if only for the statistics. ★

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## POLITICS IN THE PUB

April 23

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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;

May 7

### LESSONS FROM SPAIN: GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY AND THE MOVEMENTS AGAINST CAPITALISM

Simon Tormey, Professor, School of Social and Political Sciences, Sydney University;

Dick Nichols, Europe correspondent for *Green Left Weekly*;

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# Just like Mariam

A stunning speech from Lydia Shelly, delivered to the NSW Greens International Women's Day Breakfast in Sydney.

**I wish I was not standing here, before you today on International Women's Day. Instead, I wish I was sitting where you are and listening to Mariam Veiszadeh speaking.**

Mariam is a well-known advocate for community rights, refugees and civil liberties. She is an asset to not only the Australian Muslim community, but to the rights discourse in Australia. She is an advocate for peace, justice, engagement and inclusion.

She is also my best friend, my confidante, my supporter. We have cried together at the scene of the Martin Place Tragedy and united with other Australian women in our grief. We have prayed together. Mariam came to our country as a refugee after her family fled Afghanistan in literally a life or death situation. I, on the other hand, am a convert to Islam, the daughter of publicans from rural New South Wales.

But she is still my sister.

Mariam and I started the Islamophobia register last year as a response to escalating physical attacks, verbal abuse and harassment and intimidation against Muslim women in public spaces.

Mariam cannot be here today because a right wing "hate" organisation have published her residential address, her telephone number, her email, her twitter account and her personal details online. She has received death threats, verbal abuse, intimidation and harassment from those opposed to everything she represents. Equality. Justice. Diversity. Inclusion. Peace. Tolerance.

This has impacted on her health, her work, her personal relationships, her ability to facilitate social change. She told me she felt humiliated when she had to inform her employer that her work address had been posted online. The agonising hours spent wondering if she had "brought this on herself" for reporting criminal conduct targeting her. The telephone conversations discussing recipes for homemade mace made from wasabi paste and water that we could carry in our handbags.

You can imagine how deeply wounding it was to have the leader of our country televise his frustration that "he often heard western leaders call Islam a religion of peace and that he wished Muslim leaders meant it when they said it".

As female Muslim advocates, when we denounce terrorism, violence and campaign for tolerance, inclusion and engagement, when we expose racism, sexism and Islamophobia in order to challenge stakeholders, to insist on transparency and accountability, it comes at a very high personal cost. This is the first time I have really spoken in detail about the cost of trying to be an advocate for social justice when you're a Muslim Woman.

We pay our pound of flesh in death threats, online abuse, offensive pornography sent to our work addresses, the smear campaigns, the destruction of our property, the time away from our families, missing tucking our children into bed, the fights with our partners who see how tired we are, how thin we are stretched – but who know that we cannot stop in our advocacy.

## Consequences

Because we know the consequences if we stop being the "change makers". We know the role women play in combating hate and racism, in addressing extremism, in promoting political participation, inclusion and engagement. We know that women are the cornerstones and pillars of our communities. We are the mothers, the daughters, the sisters, the aunts, the grandmothers. We are women in our own right.

So yes, for the record Mr Prime Minister: We do mean it when we say it. And we say it knowing that it has real life consequences. We say it without the flags behind us, without the com cars, without the security, without the salary, without the advisors. We say it because we are committed to social cohesion, to civic values and to Australia's short and long-term interests.

We say it with conviction. With knowledge. With commitment. Because we will still be at the heart of our communities long after you, Mr Prime Minister, have gone.

Australian Muslim women have, and continue to contribute to Australia's prosperity; we are not a new addition to the multicultural fabric of our country. However, the existence of Muslim women in this country has become heavily politicised. What we choose to wear became a national topic for debate and derision.

For a short time we were segregated in our most democratic building – the heart of democracy – in our country. The morning after the burka ban was announced, eight individual cases of Muslim Women either wearing the hijab or niqaab experience physical or verbal abuse, harassment and intimidation in public spaces were reported to the Islamophobia Register. Most with children present.

Political rhetoric and how we engage with each other has real life consequences for ordinary Australians.

We have seen the conflation of two arguments regarding section 18c of the Racial Discrimination Act and "freedom of speech" which is not only mischievous, but socially irresponsible.

Section 18c does not protect me, or Mariam, or any other Australian Muslim from discrimination on religious grounds. The existence of section 18c is not an obstacle in criticising Muslims or Islam. But we stand against any attempts to water down the Racial Discrimination Act as we are aware that it would expose Australian citizens, who, for example, are targeted because of their racial or ethnic identity.

It is the same situation where we advocate for further resources to be allocated to the Bias Crimes Unit in New South Wales Police – it's



Mariam Veiszadeh. (Photo: Katherine Griffiths)

because we appreciate that not only is it a disservice to residents in New South Wales, but that perhaps only having one bias crimes coordinator and one intelligence officer allocated is inappropriate when New South Wales has residents who are diverse in their age, disability status, sexual orientation, homeless status, racial or ethnic background and religious beliefs.

## Bearing the brunt

The very idea that a handful of privileged people, mainly men, can debate whether the term "Islamophobia" even exists, or by calling it an "imaginary backlash", or even whether racial minorities deserve any protection under the Racial Discrimination Act, is telling of where we are as a country.

We are experts at denying, silencing and erasing alternative discourses. And women bear the brunt when racism, sexism and Islamophobia is denied or silenced.

We do not wear the badge of "victimhood" and those who believe that Muslim women, when they draw attention to racism, sexism or Islamophobia are "playing the victim card" are confused.

This belief is built on the foundations of bigotry, where you only see Muslims on one side of the Gun. Australian Muslims do not deserve "collective punishment" for criminal acts they did not commit.

As an Australian Muslim there is an expectation that we denounce terrorism and violence, where the assumption for Australians who are not of the Muslim faith is that of course they denounce terrorism and violence.

We are not afforded the same assumption. Australian Muslim women are constantly being viewed through the distorted prism of violence and radicalisation, as conduits for extremism.

Exacerbating our heartbreak is the fact that other women are complicit in the politicisation of Muslim women. We have become the latest political football.

The obsession regarding Muslim women

has never been about rights or gender equality, it has been about alienating others to distract people from unpopular and unsustainable leadership and policies, justifying humanitarian missions with military elements, for manufacturing fear.

We are in deep, deep trouble if Miranda Divine is seen as a beacon of knowledge on Muslim women, Islam or feminism. Or even Australian politics.

How effective can women be in addressing social justice issues and challenging gender inequality when we cannot move past superficial understandings and inauthentic constructs of Muslim women? How can we embrace Virginia Wolf's belief that "as a woman I have no country, as a woman my country is the whole world"?

We cannot advance gender equality if our own individual equality is built on the backs of other women. There cannot be a monopoly on liberation, freedom and feminism.

When we are complicit in the politicisation, alienation, marginalisation and demonisation of other women, we are laying the bricks of patriarchy. We are doing the dirty work.

And whilst we are busy building walls to keep other women out, or in, we cannot address the layers of gender inequality – domestic and family violence, reproductive and sexual health rights, freedom of movement, access to education, to justice, economic empowerment and political participation.

2014 was the year we saw women leading the way for social change. We saw women engage in dialogue with other women from a diversity of backgrounds to offer their support and we saw the transformation of hash tag politics into real action. #willridewithyou. #standwithmariam.

Australian women showed the country what true leadership looked like in the face of ugliness and hate.

There was a disconnect in the way Australian women addressed issues of racism, sexism and Islamophobia and the political rhetoric that sought to divide, inflame and distract.

As women, in 2015, we cannot wait for government policy or organisations to address gender inequality.

We have the capacity to empower each other and stand with women not only within the borders of Australia, but on the international stage against racism, sexism and religious vilification, to foster resilience, speak justly and to be advocates for peace in the face of adversity.

Just like Mariam.

New Matilda ★

**We are experts at denying, silencing and erasing alternative discourses. And women bear the brunt when racism, sexism and Islamophobia is denied or silenced.**



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