



Oppose the witch hunt on unions

The intended outcome of the Abbott government's Royal Commission into trade unions can be expressed in the scenarios of working weekends and night shifts without penalty rates, on a reduced minimum wage; no access to dismissal appeal; your union official with no right of entry; awards abolished; workers on individual contracts competing with unrestricted influx of visa workers on \$3 an hour.

It is toward these ends that the government has commissioned the inquiry – and a witch hunt targeting individuals as well as unions – by the Productivity Commission. All long-held and hard won protections and benefits are now targeted.

The Abbott government came to office with an agenda to reshape Australia's social and economic fabric in the interests of big business. It launched a vicious attack on social security, schools, Medicare, universities and the public sector in last year's budget. Then last December, after consultations with employer bodies, the government set up the Productivity Commission's review into the industrial relations framework.

One of the main areas of focus is the future of awards and their contents.

A Royal Commission is not needed to investigate alleged criminal activities by individuals. It gives the impression that such activity by trade unionists is endemic and systemic and hurts the reputation of the overwhelming majority of highly committed and hard working union officials. It is the job of police to investigate criminal activity and there are already adequate laws to do this.

The government's real aims are political. They include:

- Criminalising legitimate trade union activity – eg legitimate action taken to pressure employers when bargaining is treated as "coercion" or "bullying"
- Destroying the reputation of the trade union movement in the eyes of members and other



- workers and undermining trust between workers and union officials
- Providing a justification for the next round of savage anti-union laws and to strengthen the draconian powers of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) to police and hound workers and trade unions in the industry
- Placing tighter controls on trade union funds such as banning or requiring membership ballots before spending money on donations, political activity, etc.

- Deregistering the Construction division of the CFMEU and seize its assets
- Reducing or removing trade union representation on industry superannuation funds to give absolute control to private financial institutions.

Abbott has committed to taking the policies purporting to arise out of this Royal Commission to the electorate at the next election in 2016. The Coalition must be defeated.

The Royal Commission into trade unions should be shut down and the money redirected

to socially useful purposes. It is important to lobby and convince as many cross-bench Senators and Labor Senators and MPs as possible to oppose Abbott's ABCC legislation and to have the existing legislation repealed.

It requires a strong and militant trade union movement working with the community to defeat the Abbott government's attack on unions and its austerity measures.

Use the insert information sheet and poster in the centre pages of this issue of the *Guardian* as part of building the campaign. ✳

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**HANDS OFF
PENALTY RATES!**
WORKERS' RIGHTS CAMPAIGN
Special centre fold lift-out

Guardian

Issue 1682

April 29, 2015

Capitalism and health –
a conflict of interest

From day one of the Abbott government, senior ministers have warned of swingeing cuts to health spending in order to fix the Commonwealth's "debt crisis". Last year's federal budget contained several stunning "reforms" that would have had a serious, negative impact on the health of Australians, especially the less well off, including the proposal for a \$7 "co-payment" for GP visits. People weren't fooled. They recognised that Medicare and the principles that underpin it were under threat. The protests were so strong that the talk in the corporate media was of a one-term Coalition government.

Abbott and Co started climbing down from their policy positions. The co-payment to be levied was reduced to \$5. Then the whole concept was thrown out in favour of freezing or cutting the rebate paid to the GP for short visits. A \$20 reduction was pulled just before it was due to go into force. Incoming Health Minister Sussan Ley has tried to project a "softer" image in line with the political needs of the day. But the privatising, neo-liberal agenda in health remains.

A less ambitious \$5 rebate reduction for shorter GP visits is due to go into effect in July. Doctors will have the option to bill their patients. The minister has announced a number of reviews she says are intended to find efficiencies and eliminate "waste" in the health budget. The problem is, as she sees it, that Medicare costs have gone from \$8 billion per annum to \$20 billion over the past decade and the Medicare Levy only pulls back \$10 billion of that amount. And, as the now widely-questioned *Intergenerational Report* points out, Australians are going to live longer and their expectations of treatment are going to go up.

Ley has established a Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Taskforce to "consider how services can be aligned with contemporary clinical evidence and improve health outcomes for patients," as the minister puts it. She is also establishing a Primary Health Care Advisory Group to "investigate options to provide: better care for people with complex and chronic illness; innovative care and funding models; better recognition and treatment of mental health conditions; and greater connection between primary health care and hospital care." She wants to "work with clinical leaders, medical organisations and patient representatives to develop clearer Medicare compliance rules and benchmarks." It almost sounds philanthropic.

The minister denies the various reviews are cost-cutting exercises but the preamble to the relevant announcements is all about costs. The corporate media has been helping with tales of over-servicing, over-screening and even "over-detection" in the case of some cancers such as prostate cancer. The ridiculous image of a pampered, unduly health-conscious public is being built up. No doubt over-servicing by professionals keen to recover the cost of expensive machinery does take place. The fees charged by surgeons for some procedures is hard to justify in some instances. But the government's "reforming" zeal isn't directed at those targets.

Neither is it keen to make the most obvious saving in the health area – the Private Health Insurance Rebate with its \$6.6 billion a year price tag. Despite expert advice about this massive waste of public funds, the government is deeply committed to this article of neo-liberal faith and its "self-provisioning" message to the Australian people.

The government is in no mood to tackle the pharmaceutical transnationals, their price-gouging and abuse of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Australians pay \$42 for generic statins versus \$3 in NZ or \$2 in Great Britain, for example. If this type of robbing were fixed, billions could be saved. And if the minister would stop the attacks on GPs and, instead, expand the role of primary health care, fortunes in taxpayer dollars could be saved in the hospital system.

These sorts of necessary changes won't happen as long as governments serve the interests of big business, including pharmaceutical and insurance monopolies. Governments like the present Abbott government are not going to put the health of the people ahead of private profit. The demands of globalised capitalism now clearly stand in the way of a healthy future for Australians.

PRESS FUND

Full marks to scientist Dr Karl Kruszelnicki for publicly expressing regret that he'd helped promote the Abbott government's *Intergenerational Report*. He said he'd only been permitted to see small sections of it beforehand, and later on was appalled to discover its failings. "How can you make a report about the next 40 years without dealing with climate change?" he asked angrily. As the Guardian has already reported, the report is being used to justify forcing people to work until 70, emasculating Medicare and implementing lots of other really nasty initiatives. We intend to continue exposing the government's real agenda. However, we really need your help and right now Press Fund contributions are diminishing, so please send us something for the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15, Billy Wilson \$10

This week's total: \$30 Progressive total: \$2,820

Protest against
Cambodian
offshore processing

Around 200 refugees staged a protest at Ijuw camp on Nauru on Friday 24 April. The refugees called for "Justice," and "Freedom," and "Cambodia – never, ever."

The protest came at the end of a week of frenzied efforts by the Australian immigration department to find refugees and asylum seekers who will agree to go to Cambodia.

"The chartered plane that was meant to take refugees from Nauru to Cambodia seems to have been indefinitely postponed due to lack of interest," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

Despite massive bribes of up to \$15,000 for those who agree to be resettled in Cambodia, the Refugee Action Coalition can only confirm one Iranian asylum seeker and one Rohingya refugee who have so far agreed to go to Cambodia.

The lack of interest is a massive embarrassment for Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton and the Australian government. Refugees on the island have been getting random phone calls from officials trying to sell the deal – so far, to no avail.

Despite the Cambodian agreement supposedly only being available for refugees, the Immigration Department has also approached asylum seekers in the detention centre in an effort to get some interest in being transferred to Cambodia.

"Not only is the government circulating false information about conditions on Cambodia, there is a clear implication that the Australian

government is offering refugee status to asylum seekers who have been waiting 18 months for a refugee determination – as long as they will go to Cambodia. It is exploitation of extremely vulnerable people for their own corrupt political ends," said Rintoul.

Conditions in the main refugee family camp have deteriorated to crisis point. The camp, which has three pregnant women and 13 children, has been without power and water for five days, creating unhygienic and unsanitary conditions.

Meanwhile, Australia's turn back policy may be directly contributing to deaths at sea in Europe," said Ian Rintoul. "The Coalition's 'stop the boats' slogan was just an ultimatum to asylum seekers to 'die somewhere else' backed up by the military – and 'dying somewhere else' may be exactly what's happening."

Up to 900 are feared drowned in the latest asylum seeker boat disaster in Europe.

There are many asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa languishing in Australian detention centres and on Nauru and Manus Island.

"The Coalition has not stopped the boats; the boats have only been intercepted or displaced. At least 17 boats have attempted to get to Australia since Operation Sovereign Borders began. The navy ship that is returning Vietnamese asylum seekers could just as easily have brought them safely to Australia."

By denying safe passage for people to come to Indonesia and

then to Australia, African and Middle Eastern asylum seekers may have no alternative but to try to get to Europe to find safety.

"Abbott thinks he can grandstand and lecture Europe about 'stopping the boats'. But, the Australian government's policy is part of the problem, not part of the solution. Talk of implementing an Australian turn back policy in Europe is folly and would only increase the dangers for asylum seekers.

"Nor is retired Major-General Molan in any position to be lecturing European leaders about saving lives. The tragedy in the Mediterranean is not a people-smuggling disaster; it is a humanitarian disaster."

The increase in deaths at sea in the Mediterranean is directly attributable to European governments ending the funding for Italy's "Mare Nostrum" rescue operation, last year. Until it was wound back, Mare Nostrum had rescued around 130,000 people in 2014 alone.

"Europe needs to urgently reinstate funding for rescue operations in the Mediterranean, and allow safe passage for asylum seekers," said Rintoul. "If the Australian government was seriously interested in saving lives, it would end Operation Sovereign Borders, fund an effective search and rescue program, and guarantee that refugees in Indonesia would be quickly resettled in Australia."

Free West Papua Campaign

Well Known West Papuan Activist Benny Wenda has asked all West Papuan support groups around the world to hold local rallies on this issue.

On April 29, Demonstrations were held in London, New York and many other parts of the world calling for an end to 50 years of isolation and free and open access to Papua. The London protest took place at noon, outside the Indonesian embassy, 38 Grosvenor Square; the New York protest will begin at 6 pm at the Indonesian consulate, 5 E. 68th St. (near 5th Ave.) in Manhattan. Additional protests may

take place elsewhere. Tapol, which initiated the protests, organised the London demonstration. ETAN organised the one in New York.

West Papua is one of the world's most isolated conflict spots. For decades, Indigenous activists campaigning for their rights have been arrested, disappeared, tortured and killed. Local journalists who uncover the truth face lethal risks. Foreign journalists trying to report on Papua have been arrested, deported and even imprisoned.

One by one, international humanitarian organisations have closed their Papua offices. Access

for UN human rights observers has been closed for eight years. Until Indonesia lifts the repressive restrictions on access to Papua, Indonesian security forces and paramilitaries are free to act with total impunity, and Indigenous Papuans will continue to be killed.

Demonstrators wore all-black clothing to protest the media black-out in Papua. They carried placards, some of which were "censored", and had their mouths taped shut. This visual protest highlighted the absence of free and open access to Papua for international journalists and human rights observers. ✪

Results

CPA Guessing Competition

A big thankyou to everyone who entered the Guessing Competition which was held on the centenary of the Movement for Peace and Against Imperial War. Congratulations to the following winners:

1. S Manawaring
2. Kim S
3. C Costa
4. R Titelius
5. M F
6. Joy Brown

Sellers' Prize Charly Maarbani



Support
The Guardian
by donating to Press Fund

Mental health crisis

Lack of funding key contributor



Peter Mac

The federal government's review of mental health, the National Mental Health Commission's Review of Mental Health Programs and Services, has revealed a grim picture. Nearly half the population is likely to experience mental health problems during their lifetime. Mental health problems are most evident within rural and regional areas, where services are far less accessible than in the cities.

Unemployed, imprisoned or poorly educated people are more likely than others to be affected, yet less than half are likely to receive treatment. Young people, struggling farmers and their families, and Aboriginal people are worst affected. Only one in ten young persons with mental health problems received professional care last year, and often only after having committed self harm or attempted suicide.

Approximately 65,000 Australians attempt suicide each year, and the review sets a target of halving the nation's current suicide rate of 2,500 per annum. Young people are at greatest risk, with a particularly high rate among Aboriginal youth in country areas.

Mental health now gets about 5 percent of national health funding, even though it accounts for nearly 15 percent of the health care burden.

However, the Abbott government reduced overall health funding by \$3 billion and, according to a Fairfax report of the NSW government's decision to allow local health services to allocate funding, has resulted in health administrators cutting mental health services, rather than closing hospital beds.

In a recent survey of half the state's psychiatrists, 50 percent described resources as inadequate, and a further 33 percent as grossly inadequate. More than half said the problem had become worse in the last year, and a quarter now say they're considering leaving government employment.

Labor health spokesman Walt Secord commented: "They are deeply troubled, as they are powerless to help. Local health districts – particularly rural and regional ones – are [achieving savings] by failing to fill positions, or are replacing mental health workers with less qualified practitioners. ... sadly, mental health services are the easiest to cut."

The review

The federal review expresses deep concern about "vulnerable people left to navigate a complex and fragmented system", with inefficiencies, overlapping government services and lack of service for rural and regional areas.

The Abbott government refused to release the review after it was finalised five months ago, but the summary of its findings was leaked last week. The government has now referred its recommendations to expert committees for further advice.

If implemented, the review's recommendations for better planned and coordinated services, clearly defined roles and targets, early diagnosis and preventative care would undoubtedly assist in reducing the incidence of mental health problems.

But in other respects the review arouses concern, not least because of its recommendation that \$1 billion of mental health acute care funding for state and territory hospitals should be transferred to community care from 2017.

Alarmed health professionals have warned that implementing this recommendation could lead to a repetition of the disastrous "deinstitutionalisation" of earlier decades, under which patients were moved from mental health institutions, supposedly into small community facilities but often into boarding houses without proper care.

Govt reaction and responsibility

Mental Health Australia (MHA), peak body of the mental health sector, wants the government to release the

review and discuss mental health with the states at the next meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), as well as with health professionals and organisations, with a view to complete reform of the nation's mental health system.

The government says it will not cut funding for acute care in hospitals. However, it seems intent on getting the states and territories to raise their own finances for their areas of government services, and funding cuts are exactly what it's looking for. At the COAG meeting it is entirely possible that the government will seek to cut acute care funding, but minimise any increase in funding for community health care.

The incidence of mental health is also affected by policy decisions that increase the economic burden, and thus the stress level, for average Australians.

Examples include the extra tax burden imposed on them by the government's unwillingness to force super rich tax individuals and major corporations to pay tax in proportion to their earnings, as well as its "direct action" policy which requires taxpayers to foot the bill for polluting industries to clean up their act, and the crippling costs involved in putting students through tertiary education.

Other government policies contribute directly to the nation's mental health burden.

Asylum seekers trapped in detention centres in Nauru or Manus Island commit self harm, attempt suicide, or become withdrawn, but receive a level of mental health care far below what is required.

The government's practice of unquestioning military support for the US in its never-ending wars in the Middle East and elsewhere has resulted in often catastrophically damaging post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for military personnel and their families.

Official military estimates say PTSD affects 4 percent of combatants, but this is a gross underestimate (see editorial *Guardian* #1681). Soldiers often cover up the symptoms

rather than risking their careers by seeking treatment. Michael Burge, director of the Australian College of Trauma Treatment, says "Usually with war veterans it's consistently around 30 percent".

Soldiers can wait years for their claims for compensation and treatment to be heard. Yet the government allocated \$325 million for the recent centenary of the Gallipoli invasion, and the bill is likely to reach \$400 million.

Journalist Mike Saunokonoko, who interviewed Burge and many others, believes that because of the cumulative impact of Australia's repeated incursions into the Middle

East the nation is sitting on a mental health time bomb. Burge agrees. He says "The psychosocial and community implications are just horrible".

But the Abbott government's lack of action to date has demonstrated that they're in parliament to look after the big corporations, not the those in need, including the mentally ill. At the coming COAG meeting the government is certain to do its utmost to avoid taking decisive and effective leadership or provide extra funding for mental health.

The most effective action the Australian people can take to improve the situation is to dump the Abbott government as soon as possible. ☘



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

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

May Day Rally

Sunday May 3

Assemble 11am Town Hall

Celebrate the International Workers Day!

Pete's Corner



Burning traditions are being reignited

Jillian Mundy

Tasmanian Aborigines have been starting fires – “cool” fires – for traditional burning, to nurture and manage land, and lessen the threat and intensity of destructive wild fires. Over the past few weeks they have burnt patches of returned Aboriginal land in southern Tasmania, under the guidance of Indigenous fire practitioner Victor Steffensen, a Tagalaka man from north Queensland’s Gulf country.

Mr Steffensen is confident that had traditional burning been allowed to continue after invasion, ferocious wild fires, such as the one that devastated Dunalley in Tasmania in January 2013, would not happen. “People don’t know what fire means in this country. They have one concept of fire – destruction – and they think that is it,” he said. “Traditional burning looks after country and revives country.

“There is only one fire for country, and that’s the right fire, and that’s the fire that belongs to that country. It comes from what the land tells us.”

With climate change, and hotter and later seasons, Mr Steffensen says it is essential to stopping the destruction and immense carbon releases of massive wild fires.

He names bureaucratic red tape, agriculture and single-minded scientific research as the biggest obstacles.

And he’s out to tackle the problem.

Following a traditional burning workshop last year in Queensland, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre

and the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania invited Mr Steffensen to Tasmania to help restart traditional burning.

Unlike fuel reduction burns conducted by government authorities, cool burns are only lit in optimum conditions, targeting specific plants and small areas creating conditions for fire reliant native species to flourish, reducing the fuel load, preserving the habitat for wildlife and enabling easier movement through country.

One of the Tasmanian men involved in the recent burns explained how he watched grass burn around a small tree, preserving it and providing shelter for a spider as it ran up its trunk. He said he would need to “unlearn” what he had been taught by a government agency he had conducted fuel reduction burns for, where everything was “torched”.

While species and landscapes vary across Australia, Mr Steffensen said the same principles – understanding fire, reading the land and knowing it intimately – can be applied everywhere.

“The fire managers in the old ways were very clever people, a very important role, and they knew all the animals, all the different ecosystems on their country, where all the animals bred, when the right time to burn was and to create those mosaic patterns to create different burning styles for different burning types,” he said.

“Fire management in Australia is really fractured. Indigenous burning has been lost in present-day management, but not in the sense of knowledge.”

Mr Steffensen advocates Indigenous people leading the way, implementing community controlled projects and engaging local authorities. “Get out there and start doing it. The more we sit around, the more vulnerable our knowledge, our country and future becomes,” he said.

“We need to exercise our knowledge, otherwise it’s going to get ripped off.”

Mr Steffensen began recording traditional knowledge with Aboriginal Elders when he was an Indigenous ranger in Cape York 20 years ago, much of it concerning traditional burning.

“It is Indigenous knowledge and it should be valued as Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous people should be leading the process,” he said. It annoys Mr Steffensen that scientists write “single-minded papers to big note themselves, running away with Indigenous knowledge and in other cases ignoring it.

“They take away the opportunity for Indigenous people to be counted,” he said. “It’s medicine to heal, old people like to be listened to.”

In the recent years Mr Steffensen has visited at least 50 communities around the country, influencing thousands of people to reignite traditional burning practices.

Like the rest of Australia, traditional burning practices halted in Tasmania when Aborigines were removed from their country. “We didn’t lose it; the practice stopped,” explained Tasmanian Aboriginal Elder Clyde Mansell, who brought together a team dubbed the pakana rangers for the recent burns.



Tasmanian Elder Clyde Mansell (front) with the pakana rangers – Aboriginal land managers and Aboriginal Parks and Wildlife rangers from across Tasmania, and Victor Steffensen (right), get amongst a cool burn at Risdon Cove, near Hobart.

Mr Mansell can recall cool burns that continued long after invasion.

“Particularly on the islands I can remember when the old man used to go mutton birding and burn the mutton bird rookeries in the June-July period,” he said.

“The same window of opportunity that we’re talking about now, and I know they used similar practices of spotting the fires, rather than one big front, and at night they would put out the embers.

“The government, through their legislation, controlled the activity and it couldn’t be done. The mutton bird islands were owned by the government and they made the rules.

“Now the mutton bird islands have been returned and as a follow on from what’s been happening with Victor (Mr Steffensen) this will be reintroduced.

“In the next few years we will start burning the islands in the proper way. It’s all about passing on community knowledge, the people up in Cape York are passing knowledge onto people all around the country.”

Mr Mansell is looking forward to the next big rain to see plant regrowth and gauge the results of the recent burns.

The group was also encouraged by the interest of Tasmania Fire Service officials who visited some of the burning locations upon invitation.

The seventh annual traditional burning workshop will be held in Mary Valley on Kuku-Thaypan country Cape York from June 13 to 17. More information at www.capeyorkfire.com.au

Koori Mail ☪

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

Nurses speak out about violence in the workplace

The ANMF (Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Vic Branch) recently took part in a Monash University study into occupational health and safety in the workplace.

Approximately 5,000 nurses, midwives and carers responded and the results shone a light on the occupational aggression and violence (OVA) that nurses, midwives and carers consistently face at work.

Two of the most alarming statistics found were that 70 percent of nurses, midwives and carers surveyed had experienced violence and aggression at work in the past year and for almost 25 percent it was on a regular basis.

In the past 12 months, nurses, midwives and carers reported experiencing on average at least two instances of the following: physical altercations (such as being hit, kicked, grabbed, bitten etc.), witnessing another person being subjected to a physical altercation and being verbally abused, according to the Monash survey.

OVA incidents on nurses were most commonly perpetrated by patients (40 percent), followed by patient relatives (25 percent), patient visitors (13 percent) and the public (four percent).

A further 18 percent of incidents were at the hands of colleagues.

ANMF state secretary Lisa Fitzpatrick said that it wasn’t just the frequency of incidents that was alarming. “We have to keep in mind that the severity of attacks is also increasing,” Ms Fitzpatrick said.

“We cannot have nurses going to work, quite rightly, in fear for their lives and being frightened of being strangled, which has happened on a number of occasions already in 2015.

“Tackling OVA is a top priority for the ANMF and for the Victorian health community at large. The results of the Monash OHS survey were indicative of our own anecdotal evidence, as almost every week the ANMF is notified or informed about nurses, midwives and carers being physically or verbally attacked in the workplace.

“We have introduced a confidential reporting system on the ANMF website so nurses, midwives and carers can notify the branch if an OVA event occurs and we can step in to help.”

Premier Daniel Andrews signed the union’s 10-point plan to end violence and aggression before the 2014 state election and the union says they will be working with the state government on an OVA

committee that addresses the problems health professionals face.

Currently, the ANMF is engaged with Monash Health to put in place policies that protect patients and staff. Monash Health is introducing a new mental health bed access policy to improve the safety of so called “pop up” mental health wards in the general acute setting to manage peak demands for beds.

“The pop up wards were putting staff and patients at serious risk and we are pleased with the actions taken by Monash Health to address these issues thus far,” said Ms Fitzpatrick.

Some of the OVA incidents reported from 2015 include:

- A graduate nurse at a major metropolitan hospital was strangled by a patient and became unconscious.
- A patient under the influence of Ice was being moved from an emergency department to a ward at a major metropolitan hospital when he became so violent staff were forced to call police for assistance. Several police officers attended to assist.
- Nurses at a regional aged care facility have made 23 OVA claims to the ANMF since February 10. ☪

Sydney

CPA Port Jackson Branch

invites comrades and friends to join us for our

Port Jackson Discussion Hour

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

Tuesday June 16

The US military pivot revisited

Introduced by Comrade Hannah

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

Enquiries: Hannah 0418 668 098

Pyne's broken promise on disability schools funding

Education Minister Christopher Pyne needs to face up to his government's broken promise on disability funding, and take the lead in addressing the huge levels of unmet need in the education system, the Australian Education Union (AEU) says.

AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe said that rather than denying there is a problem, Minister Pyne should listen to the teachers and parents who are at the frontline of the system every day, and who could tell him of the huge shortfall in resources.

"The AEU's State of Our Schools survey found that 79 percent of principals said they did not have enough funding for students with disability, and 84 percent said they had taken funding from other areas of their school budgets to deal with the needs of students with disability," Ms Haythorpe said.

"A delegation of parents and children with disability visited Canberra and told MPs of the struggles they face finding a school that is properly funded to educate their children."

They spoke of the difficulties they faced in getting support so that their children could be included in class, and begin to reach their potential. Some have moved towns or states to get a better deal for their children at school.

"These parents need 'the fixer' to fix this problem as the Coalition promised to do prior to the 2013 election. The Abbott government has introduced an interim measure to fund disability in schools. This is a stopgap that does not recognise the full unfunded need in the system, which is being measured by the

National Data Collection on disability in schools.

"The Gonski Review recommended a full loading, covering the real need of all students with disability, to be based on this data collection. There are at least 100,000 students with disability whose schools do not receive support."

The Productivity Commission's 2015 Report on Government Services found that 190,887 students are receiving funded support in schools. However other research has found the total number of students with disability in Australia is at least 100,000 higher.

"The 2011 National Data Collection trial report estimated the total number of students with disability at 296,417 or 8.4 percent of school population. ABS data from 2009 showed that there were 292,600 students with disability in Australia, a number which would have increased with population growth," said Ms Haythorpe.

"We are still in the dark about more recent figures from the National Data Collection because the Abbott government has defied an order of the Senate to produce copies of the reports on the data collection in 2013 and 2014."

The ABS research also found that only 54.3 percent of students with disability are receiving any funded support in school. It also found that 28.5 percent of students with disability with a "severe or profound core activity limitation" are not receiving funding support.

"This is a picture of a system that is failing to deliver any support to schools to educate significant

numbers of students with disability. Minister Pyne has never been able to explain why the Coalition has walked away from its pre-election commitment to introduce a full disability loading, as recommended by Gonski and based on the real need identified by National Data Collection.

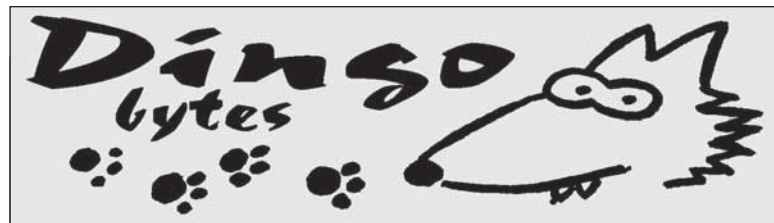
The Coalition said on August 23, 2013 that: "We have long argued that the current funding arrangements for students with disability and learning difficulty are unfair and inequitable. If elected to government the Coalition will continue the data collection work that has commenced, which will be used to deliver more funding for people with disability through the 'disability loading' in 2015."

The Coalition's 2013 education policy stated: "The Coalition will match the Commonwealth funding committed by Labor to extend support for students with disabilities for 12 months, while a new 'loading' formula is developed for these students. We will continue the data collection process that has started with the states and territories so that future funding for students with a disability can be based on each student's level of need. Current funding arrangements for students with a disability and learning difficulty are unfair and inequitable.

"Students with disabilities deserve better support so they can access the schools and education programs that best suit their needs," said Ms Haythorpe. "Schools and children with disability need Minister Pyne to take the lead and implement this promise." ✪



Christopher Pyne.



Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has been compiling data on world military expenditure since 1988 and at present covers 171 countries. World military expenditure in 2014 was an estimated \$1,776 billion. SIPRI includes all types of expenditure on the military, not just arms but administrative costs etc. The total for 2014 was equivalent to 2.3 percent of world GDP. The list of top 15 countries makes an interesting reading. The top military spender is the USA with \$610 billion; No 2 is China with \$216b*; No 3 Russia – \$84.5b*; No 4 Saudi Arabia – \$80.8b; No 5 France – \$62.3b; No 6 UK – \$60.5b; No 7 India – \$50b; No 8 Germany – \$46.5b*; No 9 Japan – \$45.8b; No 10 South Korea – \$36.7b; No 11 Brazil – \$31.7b; No 12 Italy – \$30.9b; No 13 Australia – \$25.4b; No 14 United Arab Emirates – \$22.8b; No 15 Turkey – \$22.6b. (the figures with a * indicate SIPRI's estimate). With the world expenditure of \$1,776 billion, the top 15 countries spent \$1,427 billion last year. The combined expenditure of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, UK, India and Germany equals that of the United States.

According to *Vet Affairs* newspaper (Winter 2015) the word ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) 'was an acronym devised by Major General William Birdwood's staff in Cairo in early 1915. It was used for registering correspondence for the new corps. After the landing in Gallipoli, General Birdwood requested that the position held by the Australians and New Zealanders on the peninsular be called "Anzac" to distinguish it from the British position at Helles. Not surprisingly, the word was soon applied to the men of the corps who became "Anzacs". A hundred years later the word has been used and abused by politicians of all sorts trying to whip up jingoistic sentiments that have nothing to do with paying dignified respect to those who had lost their lives in an imperialist war. Wars bring profits as well – not to those in the trenches but those who get rich on selling arms, ammunition, etc. As we all know the capitalist will sell his/her grandmother and his/her soul if the price is right. So, we have the Woolworths advertising campaign using the ANZAC images and the "fresh in our memories" wording. If you think of their "fresh food people" constant motto it really is not surprising that the public reacted swiftly with complaints about it. As Woolworths says in its other commercial: "it is cheap, cheap, cheap". There are penalties for the misuse of the word "Anzac" – up to \$10,200 for an individual and \$51,000 for a body corporate.

The industry body for commercial free-to-air television, Free TV Australia, is changing advertising rules to allow more alcohol ads in prime time and sports events. It also wants to make it harder for people to complain about ads. The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) condemned the proposals saying hundreds of thousands of children would be put at risk by further exposure to alcohol advertising.

Win railroads Newman's ghost

Queensland Rail workers have had their job security restored after the AMWU (Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union) and other unions convinced the High Court to throw out Newman government legislative changes which removed fundamental industrial rights.

High Court judges decided unanimously that the Newman government's attempt to convert Queensland Rail Corporation into a labour hire firm covered only by the LNP's draconian state industrial laws was invalid.

That transfer to the state system in 2013 threatened forced redundancies of workers and wound back superannuation, union rights to vote on industrial action and officials' access to workplaces.

Five rail unions won a two-year legal battle when the court

found that Queensland Rail is a constitutional corporation under federal law, meaning members have full rights under the Fair Work Act.

AMWU assistant state secretary Terry Bradley said the decision should help clear the way to resume negotiating new collective agreements for our Queensland Rail members.

They have been without a pay rise since their previous agreements lapsed in 2014. But untangling the legal mess left from the incompetent Newman government's moves may take some time yet.

"This decision helps clear the air, it clarifies our members' protection under the Fair Work Act, it means we should be able to negotiate new agreements on fair terms," he said.

"The Newman government were hell bent on stripping away

working conditions but members know their union will fight for their rights through to the highest court in the country."

The court also ordered the Queensland government to pay the majority of the unions' costs.

At least 300 AMWU members in Queensland Rail's rolling stock maintenance facilities at Mayne in Brisbane and across the state are likely to benefit from the decision, including delegate Ivan Reis.

"It's a very good decision that restores our redundancy rights, our union rights built up over many decades," Mr Reis said.

"It would be nice to think that when we do finally gain a new agreement we could get the back pay for the time this High Court decision has taken – but that's some way down the track." ✪

Don't mention the R word

Sisonke Msimang

Is there a place where white people are more committed to faux race blindness than South Africa?

The first thing that strikes you when you arrive in Australia is how racist this place is, and yet how committed many Australians are to not talking about race. As a South African I recognise this purposeful, focussed commitment to faux race blindness. Even as someone slags off Aboriginal people and immigrants, and rants about the need to “reclaim Australia,” many here will insist that they are not racist.

Last week I opened the newspaper and read a story about a white woman who called a family of neighbours who are originally from Sierra Leone “jungle bunnies” and “monkeys”. In the story the word “racist” was in quotes as though she may or may not have been racist, even though her racist rant had been filmed on their phone. I was chagrined, but others I spoke to weren't: They argued that the paper was “just trying to be neutral”.

The levels of racism amongst many white Australians seem to match the levels of denial about their being racist. And there is no doubt that the deepest and most abiding forms of racism are directed against Aboriginal people. It is as though on some psychic level, white Australians are angry with Aboriginal people for still being here, for reminding them of their sins, for refusing to conform to their own ideas about what Australia is or should be. In a country that is so dedicated to the idea of “mateship” that the Prime Minister sits at the front of the car next to the driver rather than in the backseat, the very idea of racism is jarring. Being racist denies people the “fair go”, that so many people say is at the core of this country's identity.

Yet, white Australia's history of dealings with the Indigenous people of this continent are as ugly as you'll find anywhere in the world. It

is a history of trickery, dispossession and violence, all of it premised on rock solid racism. Today, Aboriginal people in Australia represent less than three percent of the national population. Within this small population there is huge diversity in language, cultural practices, connection to land and urban spaces, educational levels, and so on. Yet, because racism follows the same script wherever you find it, Aboriginal people are over-represented in the criminal justice system, and have health and educational outcomes that – if they were taken alone – would make Australia look like a developing country.

So it came as no surprise to many Aboriginal activists here when the federal government informed Australians that it would be cutting off federal funding for “remote” communities effective June this year. This means that the responsibility for refuse collection, water and lights and so on, will soon be the responsibility of state governments. Many (though not all) of the people who live in these communities are Aboriginal people, and most of them have very small populations – less than 100 people in some instances. Despite this for some Aboriginal people life in remote areas is premised on their connection to country; to the land of their ancestors.

Based on the decision by the federal government, the conservative government of Colin Barnett in Western Australia (WA) immediately announced that it does not have the money to take on this responsibility after the once-off payment the federal government has given it runs out. The state government has indicated that it will consult with the affected communities in the next few months, and it has tried to allay fears saying that people will not be forcibly removed from their homes, but it is likely that their plans to stop services – effectively closing communities – will have that effect.

While other Australians will be affected,

the primary target for the actions are understood to be Indigenous people. This was made clear when the Prime Minister Tony Abbott defended the decision that would see up to 150 communities in Western Australia closed. His words were instructive. He was quoted as saying, “What we can't do is endlessly subsidise lifestyle choices if those lifestyle choices are not conducive to the kind of full participation in Australian society that everyone should have.”

Abbott's statement caused uproar because it reflects the attitude that successive Australian governments have taken to Aboriginal people. The summary of this attitude across time is essentially this: “If only they could just change how they live, they wouldn't be such a menace to all of us.” Implicit in the statement is this idea that Aboriginal people are holding the nation back. Never mind that it makes sweeping generalisations about a series of communities and people that are diverse in multiple ways.

Because of the blowback, and the government's own lack of proper planning, it is unclear how many communities will close at the moment. The Western Australia state government is backpedalling in the face of widespread opposition from Aboriginal organisations and their allies. Yet the fact that such plans could even be contemplated, speaks to a far larger problem in this country.

Abbott's words are the latest in a long line of insults hurled at the people who are the original inhabitants of this continent and the rightful caretakers of this land. They also echo comments that could have been made two hundred years ago when thousands of Aboriginal people were exposed to the diseases of the colonising settlers and many others were massacred in events that were often deliberately erased from the history books.

Late last year, as if anticipating Abbott's words, Pat Dodson, a well-known Aboriginal



Illustration Robin Cowcher.

public intellectual from the Kimberley noted, “There's some kind of assumption that by a process of osmosis, people will be absorbed into the mainstream of Western-life ways and be successful. We're talking about human beings who have come from a different culture, butting up a mainstream monoculturalist perspective on how you should live and making very little concession to the diversity and the distinction of other cultures in the main.”

In the 20th century, the degrading treatment of Aboriginal people was codified into a series of laws and policies that supposedly sought to “assimilate” Aboriginal people so that they might become more “civilised”. Using this logic, systematic attempts were made to destroy many of the key tenets in Aboriginal people's cultures and languages. The most notorious of these were the Aboriginal Act of 1905 in Western Australia (which has startling and not accidental similarities with South African laws) and the policy of separating children from their parents, which was implemented across the country.

In WA, the Act worked hand in glove with the nation-wide practice of stealing children from their communities. While many Aboriginal children were snatched from their parents, children who were deemed to be “half-breeds” (therefore of both Aboriginal and European parentage) were strongly targeted. They were placed in large dormitories so that they could be taught the ways of white society. “For their

There is no doubt that the deepest and most abiding forms of racism are directed against Aboriginal people.

UN: Ban killer robots

Governments must ban any further development of killer robots whose insidious creep into policing would put lives at risk and pose a serious threat to human rights, Amnesty International said as it launched a new briefing in Geneva.

Speaking at a meeting of the UN's Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), the organisation is calling for a pre-emptive ban on the development, stockpiling, transfer, deployment and use of fully autonomous weapons systems (AWS or killer robots).

Precursors to fully autonomous weapons – including drones and other unmanned weapons systems which are currently operated by humans – already are used to commit violations and present serious challenges to ensuring accountability.

But rapid advances in technology could mean the next generation of robotic weapons would be able to select and attack targets, potentially killing or injuring people, without effective human control – a chilling prospect which carries a new set of concerns.

“The second round of talks in Geneva this week are a clear sign that governments are waking up to the wide range of serious concerns posed by killer robots, whose

development and deployment in the near future seem all but inevitable if we don't act now,” said Rasha Abdul Rahim, Campaigner on Arms Control, Security Trade & Human Rights at Amnesty International, who is currently at the CCW talks in Geneva.

“The legal, ethical, and moral quandaries of using these systems in warfare are rightly beginning to receive the attention they deserve. But what's still being widely overlooked is the likelihood that they will also be used in police operations, and it is urgent that this is addressed now.

“Relying solely on machines to maintain law and order is not just a hypothetical scenario explored in countless sci-fi films. It is a chilling idea which may actually be realised if current developments are left unchecked. Now is the time for states to ban killer robots both on the battlefield and in policing, before we reach the point of no return.”

Human rights concerns

Amnesty International's new briefing, “Autonomous Weapons Systems: Five key human rights issues for consideration”, focuses on the implications of police use of killer robots in law enforcement.

It argues that police use of robotic

weapons would be fundamentally incompatible with international human rights law, resulting in unlawful killings, excessive use of force causing injuries, and undermining the right to human dignity.

Unlike highly trained law enforcement personnel, robots could not by themselves peacefully diffuse confrontations, distinguish between lawful and unlawful orders, make decisions about graduated response with a view to minimising harm, or be held accountable for mistakes or malfunctions that result in death or serious injuries.

Killer robots on the horizon

Fully autonomous weapons without some level of human oversight have not yet been deployed, but rapid advances in technology are bringing them closer to reality.

In fact, there is just a small leap from products that are already on the market to fully fledged killer robots. Companies in the USA, UK, Jordan, Israel, Spain and elsewhere are already developing “less lethal” robotic weapons for policing that are remotely operated or which fire automatically when touched.

These include unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) and ground vehicles that can

apparently shoot electric-shock darts, tear gas and other less-lethal projectiles, resulting in the risk of death or serious injuries.

One example is the ShadowHawk drone being developed by US-based Vanguard Defence Industries. The ShadowHawk is designed to carry out operations similar to those of a surveillance helicopter, but it can also be weaponised.

A media report hailed these capabilities when a Texas Sheriff's office purchased one in 2011: “Although its initial role will be limited to surveillance, the ShadowHawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, previously used against suspected terrorists in Afghanistan and East Africa, has the ability to tase suspects from above as well as carrying 12-gauge shotguns and grenade launchers”.

Amnesty International believes that in policing operations, autonomous weapons systems wouldn't be able to properly assess complex policing situations and comply with relevant standards.

“Under international standards, police may use force only when strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of their duty. They prohibit the use of firearms except in defence against an imminent threat of death or serious injury. It's

COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

HANDS OFF PENALTY

RATES!



✘ **WORKERS' RIGHTS CAMPAIGN** ✘

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ORGANISE – AGITATE – EDUCATE

PM Tony Abbott and his union-bashing team have promised their employer mates a life without unions in deregulated workplaces where they can drive down wages and conditions to levels found in low income countries. Towards these ends Treasurer Joe Hockey has commissioned a review of the Fair Work Act by the Productivity Commission, a body notorious for its pro-corporate, neo-liberal policies. The following are some of the measures the Commission* is considering:

1. Abolish penalty rates

Employers are lobbying hard for penalty rates on weekend and night work, long hours of overtime and other unsocial or dangerous working conditions to be removed. For some workers, such as those on low incomes in retail, restaurants and hotels, penalty rates can constitute up to 30 per cent of their total, still very low wage. Without these penalty rates these workers could not meet their commitments. Penalty rates are compensation for the negative social, health and other impacts these conditions have on workers. They are designed to discourage employers from unnecessary night and weekend work.

One of the options being considered by the Commission is to deregulate penalty rates and leave it to employees and employers to determine. No mention of union involvement!

The CPA strongly opposes any deregulation or reduction in penalty rates. In particular, it opposes the sale of penalty rates for a general wage rise as recently occurred in the retail sector in South Australia. The wage rise will be completely eroded by inflation in the following years and workers will have lost their penalty rates and be at the mercy of their bosses to work all hours, all conditions, with no compensation.

2. Reduce the minimum wage

The Commission queries the concept of a national minimum wage and how it is determined, and opposes any increase because “it may also raise

wages that are already above the minimum wage”! It is looking for a model that allows for variations, possibly on the basis of different states or regions. It even raises the question of its effectiveness and the need for it. It asks whether setting of a minimum wage targets poverty and inequality or increases them by lowering employment in low income households!

The CPA totally rejects any reduction in the minimum wage and calls for an immediate increase.

3. National Employment Standards (NES)

The NES are a set of minimum standards under the Fair Work Act, which include leave provisions, maximum hours of work and termination and redundancy pay. They set a floor for terms in awards and enterprise agreements. The Commission has indicated it will retain a set of NES, but examine its contents. If awards are abolished it may pick up some of their provisions.

The CPA strongly rejects any reduction in or loss of existing entitlements and supports the setting of national standards based on workers’ rights and an adequate living wage.

4. Gut awards

The Commission points out that modern awards (already gutted under the Howard government) “still” spell out minimum wages and conditions for a wide range of industries, occupations and skill levels which underpin enterprise bargaining as a minimum standard. It raises the question of further restricting their contents or completely abolishing them and relying on the NES and the minimum wage.

The CPA strongly opposes the gutting or abolition of awards and decentralisation of determination of wages and working conditions. It supports the restoration of awards as a centralised and comprehensive system of minimum wages and conditions that apply across an industry or occupation.

5. Individual contracts

Apart from reducing the minimum wages and conditions that underpin enterprise bargaining, the Commission is looking for greater “flexibility” in wages and working conditions through the use of individual “flexibility” clauses. It is looking at removing present limits in the trading-off of award and NES provisions in individual flexibility clauses. This opens up the opportunity for an employer to virtually ignore an enterprise agreement and dictate to new employees their wages and conditions. Individual flexibility opens the way to become a means for returning to individual contracts by another name.

The Commission talks in terms of employers and their employees crafting arrangements “without third party involvement” – “third party” is a reference to trade unions. It is considering greater reliance on common law contracts as against statutory contracts under industrial relations legislation.

6. Outlaw industrial action

Without the ability to organise and take united industrial action workers are powerless in the face of employers’ demands. Hence the attention given by the Commission to severely curb trade union rights to organise, struggle and defend workers’ interests.

Legal industrial action is presently limited to the bargaining period for a new enterprise agreement and even then there are severe restrictions on it. Industrial action is at historically low levels, yet the employers are not satisfied and are seeking even further restrictions and higher fines and penalties. It is looking at what measures might “practically avoid industrial disputes”.

7. Application of competition law

Sections 45D & E Competition and Consumer Act (CCA) already outlaw secondary boycotts. The Commission asks if there are grounds to widen the capacity of the CCA to “address concerns about misuse of market power exerted through collective

bargaining by employees and employer groups.” Workers uniting in a union to bargain would be equated with corporations (eg banks) operating as a cartel to fix prices. In the case of workers it would be “colluding” to determine the price of labour! If such changes were made to the CCA workers and unions could face millions of dollars in fines for collective bargaining, pattern bargaining across workplaces and an industry.

Allan Fels, former head of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, is quoted as saying: “Competition policy and industrial relations policies have headed in opposite directions for over 100 years. Competition policy has sought to strike down anticompetitive arrangements in product markets. Industrial relations policy has encouraged collective bargaining and union monopoly.”

8. Life without unions

One of the main themes is to prevent trade unions from playing any role; to exclude them from workplaces by such means as denying right of entry, non-union agreements and individual contracts. Of course the attacks will not stop there. Abbott has plans to far outdo the Howard government’s Work Choices. The Business Council of Australia, the big financial institutions and mining corporations are in the driving seat.

The Commission is due to report in early July with its recommendations. Readers are encouraged to respond to it. The government is planning to implement its legislative changes after the federal elections in 2016. It is imperative that it be defeated along with the above employer agenda. The CPA has made worker’s rights its top campaign priority for 2015.

* The Commission issued five issues papers in January 2015, on which the above is based. See www.pc.gov.au

For more information see *Guardian* articles on “Anti-union wave coming” in issues #1670 (28-01-2015); #1671 (04-02-15); and #1672 (11-02-2015) at www.cpa.org.au

www.cpa.org.au



Britain, the paragon of hypocrisy

Felicity Arbouthnot

England's Easter was the culmination of recent events which have brought the would-be great and good to their knees – and knee deep in hypocrisy.

Prime Minister David Cameron, after attending an Easter service near his rural Oxfordshire home said it was “shocking” that people abroad were still being “threatened, tortured – even killed” because of their faith.

There was no mention of Britain's hand in this result of the ongoing “Crusade” to which Tony Blair committed Britain's forces in 2003 and which generated the horrors. Cameron is on record as calling Blair his mentor – moreover, when Blair was Prime Minister, Cameron aspired to be “heir to Blair.”

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg tweeted of the: “cruel and barbaric killings that took place in Kenya.” Indeed, but it was Christian students – nearly 150 of them – mercilessly singled out and slaughtered. Was the massacre another misconceived response to the “Crusade” – an expression which reverberated around a horrified Muslim world. The word and our deeds has resulted in violence engulfing the Middle East and North Africa with ever increasing ferocity – and ever spreading 12 decimating years on.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, referred to the Coptic Christians killed in Libya last month – a country subject of another illegal Western overthrow, assassination of the Head of State, resulting in a now ruined, failed nation.

Western duplicity

However those who are dying are of all faiths and none, in numbers unimaginable. Tortured, crucified, beheaded, dismembered, incinerated, bombed. Their homes, countries, histories looted, destroyed, erased in unending pogroms (dictionary definition: “to destroy, wreak havoc, demolish violently”) by land, sea and air.

The Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu opined that Christians were at greater risk in many parts of the world because: “they follow Jesus Christ.” He ignored the reality that until the “Crusade's” unleashing, believers of all religions had, broadly, co-existed in the affected regions for centuries. Being from Uganda he should also know a fair amount about Western duplicity.

Ignored in all statements were the Muslims, Yazidis, Mandeans, Sabateans, Druze, Zoastrians, Shabaks and others of faith, dead and dying in this very democratic (i.e. no one excluded) slaughter which has engulfed from Baghdad to Bengazi, Aleppo to Aden, Kabul to Kerbala, Helmand to Homs.

Justin Welby, in his Easter address referred to murdered Christians being: “witness, unwillingly, unjustly, wickedly ... martyrs in both senses of the word.”

Criminal policy

The sense of the loss of every single precious human life was starkly missing in the mayhem created by the most criminal of actions – wars against the peace, wars of aggression – unleashing individual tragedies on a cataclysmic scale.

Perhaps the Archbishop's mind was still on a service he had conducted on Friday March 13 – in Western superstition an unlucky day when the 13th day of the month in the Gregorian calendar falls on a Friday, states Wiki, succinctly. He will certainly also have been aware of the Easter connection, a belief springing from the 13 guests at the Last Supper on the 13th of Nisan, the night before Christ's death on Good Friday.

In London's great St Paul's Cathedral a ceremony of thanks to the 220,000 British troops who had served in Afghanistan was held, a commemoration of the 453 who died and a tribute to an estimated 75,000 wounded, disabled, sick or psychologically damaged. The last troops left Afghanistan in October 2014

own good”, they were subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment, including being punished for speaking their own languages.

Girls were trained to be domestic workers and boys were raised to be stockmen. Now referred to as the Stolen Generations, thousands of these Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families. They were raised in group homes and by foster parents, and then released into white society once they turned 18. The practice lasted for over a century – beginning in 1878 and officially ending only in 1978.

White Australia has never fully reckoned with this, nor has it fully addressed its violent birth. While Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, finally said “sorry” to Indigenous Australians in 2008, as Robert Manne has pointed out, the apology “did not transcend the confusion that had developed between the general historical apology to the Indigenous people and the historically specific one owed to the victims of Aboriginal child removal.”

Many Aboriginal people I have spoken to are done with waiting around for apologies. Some suggest that although the historical attitude of white Australia towards them has been one of “assimilation” this latest move has all the hallmarks of an attempt at eradication. This time, they are ready. Aboriginal action groups are prepared for yet another arduous battle for political and physical space in a place that was once theirs.

africaisacountry ☘

very difficult to imagine a machine substituting for human judgement, which is critically important to decisions on the use of potentially lethal force,” said Rasha Abdul Rahim.

Recommendations

Amnesty International and its partners on the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots are calling for a global pre-emptive ban on the development, transfer, deployment and use of autonomous weapons systems, for either armed conflict or law enforcement.

In the absence of such a prohibition, states must publicly support and implement a call by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to impose a moratorium on the development, transfer, deployment and use of such systems.

In the meantime, it is imperative that due consideration be given to the human rights implications of autonomous weapons systems. These must be effectively and actively addressed as soon as possible by relevant UN and other relevant fora and mechanisms, including continuing consideration within the CCW and the Human Rights Council.

Amnesty International ☘

Prime Minister Cameron – with Britain on a permanent state of high alert – said the country was safer because of the efforts of the troops.



– almost 13 years to the day since they first deployed.

To an onlooker, it seemed less tribute and more triumphalism. The royal family attended in force, all the men dressed in military uniform, laden with orders, decorations and medals, adorned with golden braid, tassels and chains to dazzle.

The Lord Mayor of London wore a long black velvet frock, a crimson velvet cape, trimmed with another ermine one, silk stockings, patent court shoes with steel buckles and a tricorne hat. Tradition.

Blair, the unwanted guest

No Event would be complete without an unwanted guest and Tony Blair, who as Prime Minister obeyed his Master, George W Bush's voice and sent troops to die and be maimed in a country posing no threat to anywhere, duly turned up. Having suffered a backlash from relatives of those who have fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, he was faced with them asking why on earth he had been invited.

Bob Wright, whose son Corporal Mark Wright was killed in a minefield in 2006 spoke for many, telling the *Daily Express* that Blair was: “the last person I would want to see”, calling it “cheek” he added: “He took the country to war, cost all those lives and he's got blood on his hands.”

Gordon Brown, Blair's Chancellor of the Exchequer, thus wrote the cheques for the carnage for six years, was also there. As Prime Minister after Blair's resignation in 2007 he did not change policy. Afghans continued to be murdered in the guise of being “freed” and British coffins and medevacs continued to be flown home.

The service included the Archbishop of Canterbury's public thanks to those who had served. Prime Minister Cameron – with Britain on a permanent state of high alert – said the country was safer because of the efforts of the troops.

Cameron in cloud cuckoo land

Cameron also talked of the scale of achievements in vanquishing Al-Qaida. Where has he been? As *USA Today* noted, multiple insurgencies across multiple lands have taken up its cause. It has simply morphed into new movements. (*USA Today*, September 10, 2010.) And apart from the trumped up 9/11 reason, were we not told that the Taliban were the reason for going to Afghanistan?

Perhaps the real reason lay in Afghanistan's untapped trillion dollar bonanza of “mineral wealth and energy resources (including natural gas)” which have been known of since the 1970s. In the light of which one homily at the service was particularly ironic:

Lord we pray with one accord,
For a just and equal sharing
Of the things that earth affords
It ends: “All that kills abundant living, Let it from the earth be banned.”

A bit late for that, after the firing by the UK of 46 million bullets. Further, in just one instance, according to the Ministry of Defence, at least 80,000 105mm shells (costing £100 million) were fired within five seconds of support being called in.

Which brings us to the most bizarre part of the service. A cross made from used shell casings, mounted on a 105mm shell case base, bearing the names of the British dead, was borne through the Cathedral by representatives of the Army, Navy and Air Force and presented at the Altar for the Archbishop's blessing and dedication. Formerly hung in the HQ at Camp Bastion, it is now to hang at the National Memorial Arboretum, in Staffordshire in the north of England.

The cross, made from shells which had ended lives, mired in flesh and blood was dedicated:

To the greater glory of God
And in thanksgiving for lives well lived
And good examples set ...

Tell that to the grieving, bereaved, orphaned, homeless of Afghanistan. Not so much swords to ploughshares, but killer casings for Crusaders. It also has to be wondered whether it is a radioactive cross. The British certainly used depleted uranium in shells in the first Gulf war, whether they still are is not certain, but to have abandoned its use would have been a major change of policy unlikely to be missed.

Onward Christian soldiers

The commemoration ended with a triumphal military parade and fly past, which included a Chinook helicopter and Apache attack helicopter, presumably to remind of the “special relationship” which had brought about the whole bloody mess. At least “Onward Christian soldiers” was not on the hymn sheet.

In an interview with Forces TV, Tony Blair said he had not foreseen just how long the troops would remain in Afghanistan. Clearly history is not his strong subject. In this “graveyard of empires” Britain was roundly defeated in 1812 and 1842. In 1919 in a territorial spat with Russia they decided not to return.

In a blistering assessment Will Hutton views the last 12 years as little better, writing: “The Ministry of Defence and the military establishment are revealed as over-optimistic boneheads. Everything militated against success. The amount of money that was squandered beggars belief ... Too much of what was planned was driven not by military need or political calculation – but by trying to impress the US.”

The ceremony's venue was another irony. St Paul's was the greatest of the creations of Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723) whose passion for Islamic architecture is mirrored in his buildings. It is witnessed in the structure of the domes in the aisles and the vast one atop the Cathedral. Were it gold, one would surely be looking at a mosque.

Archbishop Welby, with Archbishop Sentamu had another military related occasion in the last weeks. They signed a “corporate covenant” with the armed forces in an “expression of moral obligation that the government and the nation owe the Armed Forces Community.”

We have come a long way from “Thou shalt not kill”, “love thy neighbour” and “do unto others as you would have them do to you.” But perhaps as a former oil man, the Archbishop has a different perspective. His son, Peter, incidentally, works for Tony Blair.

Pravda.ru ☘

Again, death at hands of police

Margaret Baldrige

BALTIMORE: Another death at the hands of the police. While the cellphone video evidence of police killings moves from Ferguson to New York to Cleveland to South Carolina and beyond ... and now to Baltimore City, no city, town or hamlet can any longer feel immune from the devastating news that, once again, a Black man's life has been taken by the police.

Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old African American, described by friends as "a well-liked jokester," was stopped by police on April 12 because he "fled unprovoked upon noticing police presence," according to police records. After being stopped by the police, citizen video shows Gray being dragged to a police van, crying out in pain.

Once in the van, police report that he repeatedly asked for medical help, but that they did not call for paramedics until he was unresponsive at the end of the ride. One week later after being in a coma, Gray was pronounced dead – having suffered three fractured neck vertebrae. An investigation has been launched.

Public protest in the streets of Baltimore is ongoing.

Gray's death comes as the Baltimore City Police Department is under investigation by the US Department of Justice on charges of systemic abuse of power by the police. A city-wide public forum, conducted

The people of Baltimore do not want a cover-up.



by a Chicago-based consulting firm, Hillard Heintze, was held on April 16 for citizen comment on the extent of the abuse.

Department of Justice officials and the crowd of 300 heard testimony after testimony of harassment, beatings and even death brought about by officers of a Baltimore City police force which lacks adequate control on its force. The mood of the angry and incensed citizenry at the forum was that the people of Baltimore do not want a cover-up by the Department's Collaborative Reform Initiative which is conducting the investigation.

Some called for a wider-range Civil Rights investigation by the Department of Justice which would have binding recommendations.

The death of Michael Brown last August in Ferguson, Missouri contributed to heightened attention to police accountability issues throughout the country. Baltimore was no exception. Ferguson coincided with the results of an intensive probe by the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper that Baltimore City had paid out close to US\$6 million in damages since 2011 to victims of police brutality.

Following these revelations,

citizen advocacy groups introduced 14 bills into the just-ended Maryland General Assembly in Annapolis on curbing police misconduct. One bill which received much publicity, and which will receive further attention in next year's legislature, concerns the Law Enforcement Bill of Rights (LEBOR), a policy within the police department which prevents transparency from occurring when a police crime is committed.

Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle (LBS), a self-described "grass-roots think-tank," organised busloads of citizens to lobby in Annapolis against LEBOR, for a civilian review

board with teeth and other legislation involving the police. LBS will be holding a public forum, "Moving from Protests to Policy-2015 Legislative Wrap Up" on April 28 at the University of Baltimore. The banner headline of the *Baltimore Sun* over a photo of Freddie Gray, reads: "Injuries in van ride focus of city probe." Inside the paper, a popular *Sun* columnist, Dan Rodricks, wrote in his column, "There's no way to close your eyes to this."

People's World ✪

HSBC's "political blackmail"

Lamiat Sabin

BRITAIN: Scandal-hit HSBC was accused of pre-election blackmail after threatening to relocate its headquarters abroad if Britain considers pulling out of the European Union.

The banking giant is considering escaping regulation after being hit by levies that cost the group a combined £860 million in the past two years after crackdowns of money laundering and foreign exchange rigging.

Chairman Douglas Flint told the HSBC group's annual general meeting last week that the potential move is in response to "regulatory and structural reforms" in the wake of the financial crisis that first erupted in 2008.

The threat to move to a more accommodating country comes after the Tory manifesto recently stipulated that a referendum into the

country's EU membership would be held.

Two campaigners protested outside the HSBC meeting dressed as bankers holding swag bags and champagne bottles next to an Only Fools and Horses-style Robin Reliant carrying the words: "Tax dodgers, crooked traders, HSBC."

One investor, Michael Mason-Mahon, asked in the meeting: "Which country are you likely to go to? How many countries have you not committed illegal and criminal behaviour in?"

Mr Flint, who had apologised for "unacceptable" activities, replied that it was "essential that we position HSBC in the best way to support the markets and customer bases critical to our future success."

Secretary of the Scottish Campaign Against Euro Federalism John Foster said that Britain's membership of the EU only benefits banking fat cats and not workers.

"HSBC wants the City of London to remain a lightly regulated base from which to control financial services in the EU. It was precisely this type of relationship that precipitated the financial crisis," he said.

"It continues to suck savings out of the real economy and subordinate Britain to neo-liberal EU regulations. Working people would be better off outside the EU and with banking under public control."

And the threat seems to have worked in putting fear into Tory Chancellor George Osborne, who said: "If we proceed in this country with an anti-business set of policies we are going to drive companies abroad, we are going to see jobs lost."

HSBC, which originated in Hong Kong, took over Midland Bank in Britain in 1992 and shifted its headquarters to London. *Morning Star* ✪

Rana disaster issues ignored

Lamiat Sabin

BRITAIN: Urgent action is needed to tackle widespread violence against garment workers in Bangladesh, the Trade Union Congress says. Workers in newly registered unions have been attacked by bullying bosses for speaking out about safety and pay in more than 45 factories, according to the International Trade Union Confederation.

More than 1,100 workers died when the Rana Plaza building housing five factories collapsed in the Savar district of Dhaka two years ago.

Amirul Haque Amin, president of the National Garment Workers Federation in Bangladesh spoke at a sit-in demonstration in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka to mark the second anniversary last week. He called for "the worst industrial disaster of 21st century in the world" to be the last.

Hundreds of children lost a parent or even both in the collapse and remain in desperate poverty. Those who died were mainly young women. Many of the garments they made were destined for Western high-street stores, including H&M, Gap and Benetton.

In the aftermath of the disaster, pledges were made, but about £4 million is still needed to plug the

gap for £20 million in compensation payments. As of this month, the amount received by the Rana Plaza Donors Trust Fund totals just £8.5 million.

Written pledges for funds that have yet to be received come to £1.5 million, including more than £700,000 promised by Benetton, according to ITUC.

Bangladesh's government has also failed to reform labour laws, according to the TUC, which has donated £16,000 to the Rana Plaza Fund. TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "Two years after 1,129 workers died in the Rana Plaza factory collapse, not enough has been done to make sure that such terrible events never happen again."

"Workers must be able to join a union without fear of attack, and companies must accept their moral duty to provide compensation to all workers harmed in their global supply chains."

GMB international officer Bert Schouwenburg endorsed a call made by Mr Amin that companies yet to pay in to the compensation fund must do so without delay.

He said that labour standards should be improved, trade union rights be given, oppression stop and a living wage be paid to workers.

Morning Star ✪



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Ukraine

Communists persecuted, US "trainers" on way

Emile Schepers

Some 300 US military personnel are carrying out a training program for the Ukrainian National Guard near the city of Lviv, in the far west of the country.

The US troops are veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and hope to transfer some of the skills gained in those conflicts to about 900 Ukrainian guardsmen.

The units to be trained include former private militias whom the government of Ukraine earlier had absorbed into the National Guard. Included, according to the Ukrainian government, is the Azov Battalion, whose ranks include many neo-Nazi, fascist, and ultra-nationalist elements. However, US officials say Azov will not be included.

If Azov is included, it will constitute a major scandal and provocation, especially in the eyes of Russia which already feels threatened by NATO being right up against its borders.

The Western governments and the corporate press say that the characterization of the neo-Nazis as fascists is just Russian "propaganda". There is, however, plenty of independent evidence to the contrary – accepted even by commentators who are not admirers of Russia's President Vladimir Putin.

The independent battalions came into being a year ago when, following the overthrow of President Victor Yanukovich, the industrial Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine rebelled against the new right-wing government in Kiev. The local forces that took power in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts

(provinces) managed to defeat, disarm or win over many Ukrainian soldiers, and the armed effort of Kiev authorities to bring the region back under control seemed to be faltering.

So the government agreed to give the right wing militias their head, while at the same time refusing to negotiate with the eastern dissidents they call the "separatists".

Many people in Eastern Ukraine are predominantly Russian speaking and have close economic and cultural ties to Russia. They were alarmed when the Ukrainian Parliament, the Rada, voted to withdraw recognition of the Russian language as co-official with Ukrainian, even though the acting president at the time vetoed the bill. The alarm increased when neo-Nazis allied with Kiev committed acts of extreme violence, including a brutal massacre in Odessa last May.

The ultra-right Svoboda and Pravy Sektor (Right Sector) political organisations indeed have historical links to Ukrainian fascism, which thrived in the period from the 1930s to the 1950s. Fascist organisations of that time massacred thousands of Jews as well as ethnic Poles and Hungarians.

During the Second World War, the main fascist organisation, headed by Stepan Bandera, offered to collaborate with the German Nazis. Initially the Nazis did not accept this and arrested the Ukrainian nationalists, whom they considered to be "Untermenschen." But later in the war, there was active collaboration.

On April 9, the Ukrainian Rada passed legislation abolishing communist ideology and forbidding both

Nazi and communist symbolism, portraits, statues etc. Denial that the Soviet regime was a criminal entity would be a crime also.

The law is waiting for President Petro Poroshenko's signature, but ultra-nationalist crowds have already begun tearing down statues of Lenin and other Soviet-era leaders. The Communist Party of Ukraine is under persecution, and its Secretary General, Petro Symonenko, has been told that he is a target for criminal prosecution. On January 10, Ukraine's prime minister, Arkady Yatsenyuk, shocked many by describing World War II as the time when "Russia invaded Germany and Ukraine."

The context for the arrival of the US troops is important. On the one hand, there is a shaky cease fire between the Donetsk and Luhansk autonomist militias and the Ukrainian government. This cease fire was negotiated in Minsk, Belarus, among Russia, Ukraine, France, Germany and the Ukraine, after it became clear that the Ukrainian military was not going to be able to recapture the Donbas and might lose more territory. The initial elements of the cease fire granted provisional autonomy to Luhansk and Donetsk within Ukraine, among other things.

But this cease fire is only reluctantly accepted by President Poroshenko, and the ultra-right militias are against it.

Another piece of the context is that Ukraine is broke and desperately trying to get a bailout loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In exchange, the IMF is demanding economic concessions. These include new austerity measures in Ukraine, already the poorest country



The US paratroopers arriving in Lviv. (Photo: US Army)

in Europe. The deal would be based on "free" trade principles that will do great harm to the Ukrainian economy and increase unemployment. The Ukrainian government wants eventual integration into the European Union's structures, even though the country was offered a better deal by Russia in 2013.

The trade-off for the bailout also includes clipping the wings of the freewheeling Ukrainian "oligarchs". Whether a government dominated by oligarchs like President Poroshenko who is known as the "chocolate king" because of his control of the candy

industry, can actually do this is as big a question.

Ukraine's creditors are taking a tough stand against the country's call for a debt restructuring. For the moment the Ukrainian government is continuing to demand this.

The United States and the European Union have imposed sanctions on Moscow to pressure it to cease providing aid to the Donbas autonomists. However, Europe has doubts about this, because sanctions on Russia will harm European trade with Russia, which is considerable.

People's World ☘



Region Briefs

On April 22, delegates from the Party Committee of Vietnam, the People's Council, the Vietnam Fatherland Front's Central Committee and the People's Committee of Hanoi paid a visit to Vladimir Lenin's statue in Chi Lang Park. The delegates showed deep gratitude to the great revolutionary leader and teacher, celebrating Lenin's 145th birthday and commemorating his achievement of leading revolutionary activities.

Vietnam's Chamber of Commerce and Industry recently held a workshop in Hanoi, discussing investment opportunities in Cuba. The workshop recalled cooperation between the two countries for the past 55 years, and the two governments agreed to foster comprehensive relations in economic development, biotechnology, agriculture, transport, construction, education and much more. Trade between the two countries reached more than A\$210 million in 2014, a 45 percent increase compared to 2013.

The Japanese Defence Ministry has been discussing a plan providing financial support for countries that preferentially buy Japanese-made weapons as the government had removed an arms-export ban in April last year. The Minister admitted that the government had received pleas from countries inquiring about possible financial support for purchasing Japanese-made weapons. The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) member of the upper house, Inoue Satoshi, opposed the plan, demanding the government not provide financial support for arms sales. He added that "using military aid as a diplomatic bargaining chip could fuel international disputes". Moreover, the JCP recently secured 111 seats in the first half of the years' prefectural assembly elections, a 41 seat increase. The JCP also achieved 136 seats in 17 major city assembly elections. The JCP believes that its policies reflect public demand.

According to China's Ministry of Environmental Protection's monthly report, the number of air pollution days in March dropped in 74 Chinese cities, from 37.7 percent last year to 28.9 percent this year. Beijing and its surrounding cities are still facing more pollution than the rest. Beijing's neighbouring province, Hebei, for example, has already starting to tighten up environmental protection control, hoping to cut by half coal-related emissions within this year.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un said that a revolutionary spirit was far more powerful than nuclear weapons. He added that the Workers' Party of Korea defended revolutionary traditions. South Korea and the US recently reached an agreement on nuclear energy cooperation. There are currently 23 nuclear power plants operating in South Korea.

WFTU statement on deaths of refugees in the Mediterranean

Murderers and hypocrites

The World Federation of Trade Unions representing 90 million workers in 126 countries of the world expresses its grief and frustration for the tragedy that took place in the Mediterranean resulting to the death of hundreds of immigrants and refugees on April 19, 2015.

The deaths of hundreds of people in the Mediterranean and particularly South of Italy are added to the long list of immigrants finding their death looking for a better livelihood while being exploited by smugglers.

However, these are not accidents, they are crimes. Immigrants and refugees were forced to this position by the imperialist policy of NATO, of the USA and of the European Union, by their aggressiveness and intervention in Libya, in Syria, in Iraq, in Mali, in Yemen, by the policies of the multinationals and the plundering of the natural

resources of the people in Africa and the Middle East, by the destruction and manipulation of the countries' economies and finally by the inhumane policy of the European Union and its governments against the migrant workers.

With anger and frustration we listen to the heads of the governments in Italy, in France, in Greece and other EU countries expressing their sorrow for the incident and repeating generic phrasing for a "new policy" while their countries governments have fully supported the imperialist wars actively and while they have co-signed and fully implemented the policy of the European Union against the immigrants and refugees.

That makes them both murderers and hypocrites!

The World Federation of Trade Unions with its anti-imperialist and internationalist position and action denounces the murderous and

hypocritical policy of the European Union and its governments and struggles for the elimination of the aggressiveness against the people of North Africa and the Middle East, for the dissolution of NATO and for the utilisation of the natural resources by the people for their own interests and for the popular development that will bring the reconstruction and the prosperity of the people.

We demand the immediate end of all imperialist interventions. We ask from the International Organisations to support the countries of origin of economic immigrants and of the political refugees.

The phenomena of racism, neo-fascism and xenophobia must be fully confronted.

We express our condolences to the families of the victims who lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea.

The Secretariat, WFTU ☘

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
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Oxfam condemns aid warehouse bombing in Yemen

Oxfam has vehemently condemned the Coalition airstrike on an Oxfam warehouse in Saada Governorate in northern Yemen.

Violence has escalated in Yemen in recent weeks, with a coalition of countries led by Saudi Arabia commencing airstrikes against Houthi rebels on March 25 and hundreds of civilians have been caught in the crossfire

This is an absolute outrage particularly when one considers that we have shared detailed information with the Coalition on the locations of our offices and storage facilities. The contents of the warehouse had

no military value. It only contained humanitarian supplies associated with our previous work in Saada, bringing clean water to thousands of households.

Thankfully, no one was killed in this particular airstrike although conservative estimates put the death toll in the country as a whole, since the conflict began, at around 760 – the majority of which are civilians.

Oxfam has been working in the northern governorate of Saada for several years, building water networks to bring clean water to 70,000 people in rural communities. Before the escalation in violence, 10 million people were without access to clean water across the country. Last week's events demonstrate again that all parties to this conflict are adding to an increasingly dire humanitarian situation on the ground. All parties must now find a negotiated peace and allow for humanitarian access.

Grace Omme
Country Director, Yemen

Mining versus life

OceanaGold is dead set on making El Salvador pay for not granting it permission to open a gold mine.

Ninety percent of El Salvador's water is contaminated, and the proposed mine would contaminate the last remaining clean water sources in the entire country.

Salvadorans have advocated hard to protect their last bit of clean water. Since 2008, the government has not issued any mining permits in an effort to protect the country's clean water.

OceanaGold's mine didn't only threaten vital resources but it failed to even meet basic national mining regulations. Regardless, it is still shamelessly suing the entire country before a World Bank tribunal for not making a quick buck!

Members of the anti-mining national coalition, La Mesa, are campaigning to make sure El Salvador doesn't pay a cent to OceanaGold. As La Mesa's Vidalina Morales states: "We are not willing to let the Salvadoran government pay one single dollar. It is the mining company who should pay El Salvador for the violation of environmental and human rights."

If the World Bank sides with OceanaGold, El Salvador will be forced to pay more than \$300 million to the company. As one of the poorest countries in Central America, this is essential money that could be

spent alleviating poverty, building and strengthening public services, and creating a sustainable economy for all.

Hundreds and thousands of us have stood with El Salvador in the past, asking OceanaGold to drop this ludicrous lawsuit. We delivered almost 200,000 signatures to the World Bank and the company itself with our amazing partners. Now that the World Bank is making its decision, we have momentum to come together one more time and make sure it sides with El Salvador, water and the right to choose our future.

Ledys Sanjuan
SumOfUs.org

Climate and privatisation

Nothing is more welcoming or reassuring as the coming of an emergency team in times of trouble. The recent destructive storms in Sydney, the Illawarra, the Central coast and Newcastle left more than 200,000 people without electricity. Even while the storm was raging, emergency workers were already dealing with the destruction being caused by it. We are all

very thankful for their work, often dangerous, always difficult.

So let us not forget to support THEM when they are fighting for their jobs. According to ETU organiser Mark Buttigieg "If the Baird government presses ahead with cuts or move more than 4,000 electricity workers – including frontline emergency response crews – the public can expect to wait much longer to be reconnected following future storm events like the one we have experienced.

"While these workers were out in force last night, the NSW government is continuing to refuse to sign a new workplace agreement that would provide reasonable job protections for them by ruling out forced redundancies at network businesses Ausgrid and Endeavour Energy," Mr Buttigieg said.

It is a safe bet that cataclysmic weather events are going not only to continue but increase in frequency. It is also a safe bet that only a professional and reliable workforce is capable of dealing with the aftermath of those events. How it will be with electricity privatisation is another worry.

Mati English
Sydney

Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

Privatisation, demons and profiling

All over the world, but particularly in developed countries, capitalists are pushing hard for the privatisation of every government service and every publicly-owned enterprise, regardless of how much money it generates for the government's coffers. At the same time, capitalist governments of all political shades have yielded to the demands of big business and cut corporate tax rates to the bone.

Reduced government income is the inevitable result, with consequent cries of alarm to the effect that "we are living beyond our means" and that governments can no longer afford such "luxuries" as a pension people can live on (if they are particularly frugal, of course). Capitalism, however, is not concerned about the privations of the poor and the under-privileged. It is only interested in finding new sources of profit – and they are becoming harder to find.

Desperate, big business is seeking to take over the provision of all government services, from running prisons to mending roads. As private security firms proliferate, even the provision of police services is being surreptitiously handed over to "cops for hire". Maintaining order at rock concerts and sporting events is farmed out to the private sector, or if police actually provide the service, they charge for it.

In London, staff of the National Gallery responsible for the security of the paintings and the public (there are millions of visitors every year) have taken strike action against plans to hand their jobs over to a private operator. Giving the contract to whomsoever offers to do it for the least amount of money is not the way to get an efficient, well-run operation. But it is capitalism's preferred method. Go figure.

Another looming strike in the UK is among workers employed by the Royal Family at Windsor Castle, no less. Three years of pay restraint on the part of the workers (the Royals, needless to say, are not troubled by calls for "restraint") has left the Royals' employees being paid below the widely-recognised living wage. Doesn't stop the Royals from insisting that the workers carry out extra unpaid duties, however, like giving tours of the castle.

Leaving Royalty for the world of business, a French TV interviewer caught out a Monsanto lobbyist in a blatant lie on air, which brought the interview to a stormy close. Lobbyist Dr Patrick Moore claimed that Monsanto's notorious weedkiller Roundup, linked to rising cancer rates in Argentina and doubtless elsewhere, was not just safe for humans, but you could drink a whole quart (almost a litre) of it with no ill effects. However, when the interviewer produced a glass of Roundup and challenged the good doctor to drink it, Dr Moore refused, saying "I'm not stupid" (debatable, given his earlier claims). He then argued with the interviewer before leaving in a huff. It sounds delightful. I wish I'd seen it.

We all know about the fundamentalist religious preachers who assailed the *Harry Potter* books for encouraging children to treat witches and wizards as fictional (when it seems there *not*), thereby apparently leaving themselves open to possession by these malevolent forces. Now a right-wing Catholic web site, *Frondu.pl*, has attacked the new "demonic" range of *Cheetos* crisps, claiming

that consuming the crisps shaped like monster faces and with pictures of vampires and demons on the packet is "dabbling in the dangerous world of demons".

A spokesperson for *Frondu.pl* said: "We view these crisps as dangerous as by eating them, children will be nourished by demons." For heaven's sake!

Kam Brock, a Black business-woman from New York, was forcibly drugged and locked in a mental hospital for eight days because first White cops and then White doctors would not believe that her high-powered career was real. Her ordeal began when the former Citigroup banker drove her BMW through Harlem. White cops pulled her over – a Black driving a BMW has to be up to no good. It's called racial profiling and it's a key part of New York police training.

When she objected, the cops accused her of being high on marijuana (no weed was found in her vehicle, but that didn't phase the cops) and they impounded her car. The next day, when she went to collect her car, she confronted police about her treatment. Instead of an apology, she was forcibly sedated, handcuffed and sent to Harlem Hospital. There, she was locked up in the psychiatric ward as an "emotionally disturbed" person.

During her week confined in the mental facility she was given forced injections of powerful sedatives. On her release they handed her a bill for \$13,000 for medication! She is now suing them.

She would be only too aware that it would not have happened if she'd been White. A

White woman driving a BMW would not have been pulled over in the first place. Isn't America wonderful?

Russia's President Vladimir Putin was attacked by Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal at the Arab summit in Cairo for supplying arms to the Syrian government. In a letter to the summit, Putin had said, "We support the Arabs' aspirations for a prosperous future and for the resolution of all the problems the Arab world faces through peaceful means, without any external interference."

US client Saudi Arabia, is the main backer – supplying money, arms and "volunteers" – for imperialism's insurgency campaign against the Assad government. In a spectacular case of wilful self-delusion, the Saudi foreign minister accused Russia of being responsible for "the tragedies befalling the Syrian people". Actually, the Saudis know that it is Russia's support for the Assad government that has thwarted Saudi plans to replace the Assad government with a compliant pro-Saudi, pro-imperialist regime.

Did you see where Cuba wants to "take economic and academic relations with Russia to the levels that existed during the Soviet era"? And during a recent visit to Cuba, the President of the International Relations Committee of the Russian Senate, Igor Kosachov, indicated that Russia is keen to see Cuban students once again studying at Russian universities, in post-graduate courses or for masters degrees. ☘



Protests in Manchester.

Film Review by Joseph Zimmermann

White Tiger: A movie you may have missed

Every war produces myths and legends, and WW2 is no exception. The 2012 film *White Tiger* examines just such a wartime legend. This is a Russian action film directed by Karen Shakhnazarov. The film was selected as the Russian entry for the Best Foreign Language Oscar at the 85th Academy Awards, but it did not make the final shortlist. It is based on the novella *Tankist, ili "Belyy tig"* ("The Tankman", or "the White Tiger") by Russian writer Ilya Boyashov.

The film opens with Soviet infantry advancing without opposition across the remnants of a grim battlefield. As other soldiers work to clear the debris of war, both human and material, they find a sergeant still gripping the controls of his tank, and burned over 90 percent of his body, yet still alive. Three weeks later, when the bandages are removed, he is discovered to have made a miraculous recovery, and that is only the first mystery that confronts and confounds the Red Army officers who come in contact with this peculiar combatant.

The soldier was wounded in an attack by a Nazi armoured vehicle known at the front as "the white tiger." At first it would appear to be a fairly typical tiger tank, a fearsome enough weapon of war on its own. But this one seems indestructible, inflicting heavy losses before disappearing almost into thin air and traversing what would appear to

be impassable terrain, only to once again appear behind the lines and surprise the Soviet forces.

To solve this mystery, the Soviets question every German prisoner of war they can get their hands on, but they prove to be just as confused, and provide just as conflicting reports, as their own comrades give. The theories include a ghost vehicle, a tank manned by a crew of zombies, or a tank that requires no crew at all.

The command dismisses the more mystical notions and determines that the tank must be a one-of-a-kind manufacture, specially fitted with a high horsepower engine and heavy armour. The Soviets then set out to create a super tank of their own and staff it with an exceptional crew, which will include the aforementioned survivor of a white tiger attack.

Actor Vitaliy Kishchenko is excellent as a strong and determined major of the Soviet counter-intelligence corps who has been tasked with the mission to destroy the white tiger, while at the same time keeping an eye on the spooky tankman. Kishchenko fills out the character nicely, carrying a captured German MP-40 submachine gun as his personal weapon throughout the film, and demonstrating the personality of a man with steady nerves and considerable combat experience.

As the story unfolds, the major begins to go against his own sound instincts, finding something compelling about the curious tankman who,



when battles are over, communes with the burned-out hulks of once mighty armour and, like a forensic pathologist, determines how and why the destroyed tanks died in battle. Another good character is a captain who provides the counterbalance, stoutly believing that the tankman has simply gone off his head in the heat of battle, and who slightly riles the major with his cynicism.

The heroism of the Soviet people in response to fascist aggression is undeniable and well documented. As to the reality and fate of the fabled "white tiger," for that you will have to see the movie.

People's World
Due to technical difficulties there will be no Worth Watching this week. ☼

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POLITICS IN THE PUB

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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Thailand's midnight flower sellers

Alexia Kalaitza

Working until late at night to sell flower garlands to tourists in the streets is the everyday routine for many Indigenous children in Chiang Mai, the second-largest city in northern Thailand. For most of them, this is the only way to financially support their families, which have moved from mountainous villages to the big city.

"Most of the flower-sellers in the traffic-light areas in Chiang Mai are Lahu people," says Saemni Sakda, director of the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT) and himself a member of the Lisu hill tribe.

The Lahu are one of the hill tribes in Thailand. They have been living in the mountainous areas of the country and cultivating the land since pre-colonial times – so how have their children ended up working on the streets of a big city?

According to research, Indigenous people – especially women and children – are more vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation and child labour.

Phensiri Pansiri, manager and program coordinator of Focus, a well-known foundation combating child trafficking, explains:

"There are many factors and reasons why Indigenous children are vulnerable to child trafficking and exploitation. The first one is poverty. Many Indigenous families remain poor and they need money to get a better life. Secondly, some of them don't have a Thai nationality and ID cards and consequently [don't have] access to many state services."

The forms of exploitation and trafficking vary, especially for children. Some of them have been forced to work in factories, others to beg in the streets; then there are the children who have been sent to work in massage parlours, where they may also be sexually exploited.

"Children should be at home doing their homework or sleeping. Still, some of the parents ask their kids to go out and sell flowers or fruits at night, although they know that children might have an accident. Some also think tourists are more likely to buy when they see a

child," said Pansiri, adding that some families do not have any other choice.

In many cases, Indigenous people have been the victims of the Thai government's forestry policies: large areas in the north have been named as protected zones, which has led to the resettlement or eviction of Indigenous communities from different national parks. Their access to farming land has also been limited, as they have been accused of destroying the rainforest with their traditional shifting cultivation practice.

Along with the land problems, 20 percent of the Indigenous people in the north have had their Thai citizenship denied. Although they have lived there for years, almost 20,000 people do not have ID cards and struggle with state bureaucracy and corrupted government officials.

Research by UNESCO has identified the lack of legal status as the single greatest risk factor for young hill tribe people in northern Thailand, making them more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Warisara Lorthawornchaisakul, a Lahu activist working for IMPECT, comes from a near-empty village, whose residents have come to Chiang Mai during the last decade to work in the construction industry. Warisara believes that this has been the result of the new land regulations and the religious conflicts stirred among the leaders of the communities.

On top of that, communities there have problems accessing education for their children. The teachers responsible for the remote areas, including Indigenous villages, can only deliver classes two or three days per week, so the children can't follow a continuous educational process.

All these difficulties have made many Lahu communities leave the mountains and move to the suburbs of Chiang Mai.

Marting Chaisuriya, director of the Lahu Christian Community, has a dormitory on the outskirts of Chiang Mai, where he hosts young Lahu people who used to live in the mountainous villages and who want to become religious leaders.

Mew is one of the Lahu who came to the city 10 years ago. He is now 22 years old and



A flower seller preparing her bundles of flowers on the streets of Chiang Mai.

studies International Business Management in Chiang Mai. He lives in the city, but often goes to see his parents in the community in which they have resettled, half an hour away from Chiang Mai.

"It is better in the city," he says, "because we have jobs and we can study. In the mountains, we didn't have a high school. When we came here [Chiang Mai], children were used to selling flowers." Mostly, parents do not want their kids to work any more, but "it might happen in other Lahu villages."

Almost all the 30 families living in this new community, in traditional bamboo huts, earn their living by selling flowers, fruits or nuts. Close to Mew's family house, a man was cutting fruit into slices to sell.

Nearby, an old lady was making a handcraft which she hopes she can sell to the Queen of Thailand. Her son, on school holidays, was sitting inside the hut, watching TV.

"He is too young to work. He is only 13 years old. After 15, he might work," his mother says.

In many cases, according to Warisara, parents prepare the flower garlands and the fruit during daytime, and in the evening, after school, they send their children to sell them in restaurants, clubs or around the traffic lights.

"But it always depends on the family. There are families which do not send their children to work any more," Saemni Sakda says. "It is also a cultural thing here in Asia, part of the tradition: children should do something for their parents in return," Pansiri adds.

For the Lahu, life in the city is more expensive and many of them live in poor conditions. In Mew's village, it's only recently that the residents have acquired access to electricity.

"It is complicated," Warisara admits. "When they move from the community to the city, they have to rent the land to build some small huts. They pay a monthly rent, but they are also burdened by the costs of building their houses."

The monthly rent for some land in Mew's village is around 3,000 Thai baht (\$92), which is 10 times the daily minimum wage. In another Lahu village, two women were making flower garlands in the shadows, outside their houses. They buy the flowers from the daily market, make the garlands and afterwards sell them at the night market. If they sell all the garlands, they earn 300 Thai baht (\$9) per day.

Jitra, 31, a mother of two, says she likes this work because she is independent. She's had a bad experience at her previous job, working in a noodle shop, where the employer didn't pay her. Her children's dream is to join the police force.

While walking around the village, Mew says only a few young Lahu can attend university, as the tuition fees for one semester can range from 7,000 to 10,000 Thai baht (\$215-\$307).

Phensiri Pansiri advises flexibility when it comes to child labour and its possible solutions. According to her, if the children want to help their parents by selling flowers, they can do it, but there should be some rules.

First of all, both parents and children have to be informed about the consequences of such a decision.

"For example, the children should not work after 8pm. They should go back home to study or to sleep. It is very dangerous for them to walk in the streets at night," she said. Car accidents or gang violence are some of the dangers that young Lahu can face every night at work.

"If I had a job there [in the mountain village], I would prefer to go back to the mountains," a Lahu woman says. This is a widely shared opinion among the Lahu who have moved to Chiang Mai. For the majority, it's their first time living in the city and working as employees, seeking ways to build a better life for themselves and their families.

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