



US war from Australian soil

A US defence department official has made clear that US plans to build up its military presence in the north of Australia, including surveillance bombers and an increasing numbers of Marines and other personnel, is to target China.

US Defence Department assistant secretary for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, David Shear, announced that "we will be placing additional Air Force assets in Australia, including B-1 bombers and surveillance aircraft" to deter Chinese "ambitions" in the South China Sea.

That PM Tony Abbott then issued a denial, saying the official "mis-spoke", serves in fact to confirm not only that the positioning of US forces in the Asia-Pacific is in preparation for aggression against China, but that pre-emptive statement highlights Australia's sovereignty has been usurped in service to big power global strategies. Abbott confirmed as much, saying he had been "assured" by the US on the B-1 bombers.

The development comes as the US substantially increases its military presence in the South China Sea and Japan plans to abandon the self-defence stipulations in its constitution in order to participate in foreign conflicts.

The increased presence of US forces in the South China Sea includes sending warships and aircraft within 22 kilometres of reefs near the Spratly Islands that are claimed by Japan. Chinese spokesman Zhu Haiquan said China had "indisputable sovereignty" over the islands, called in Chinese Nansha Islands.

This move is part of the USA's "pivot to Asia" strategy, which aims to gradually emplace a blockade on China, closing off its trade routes, affecting its ability to import oil from the Middle East or elsewhere by sea.

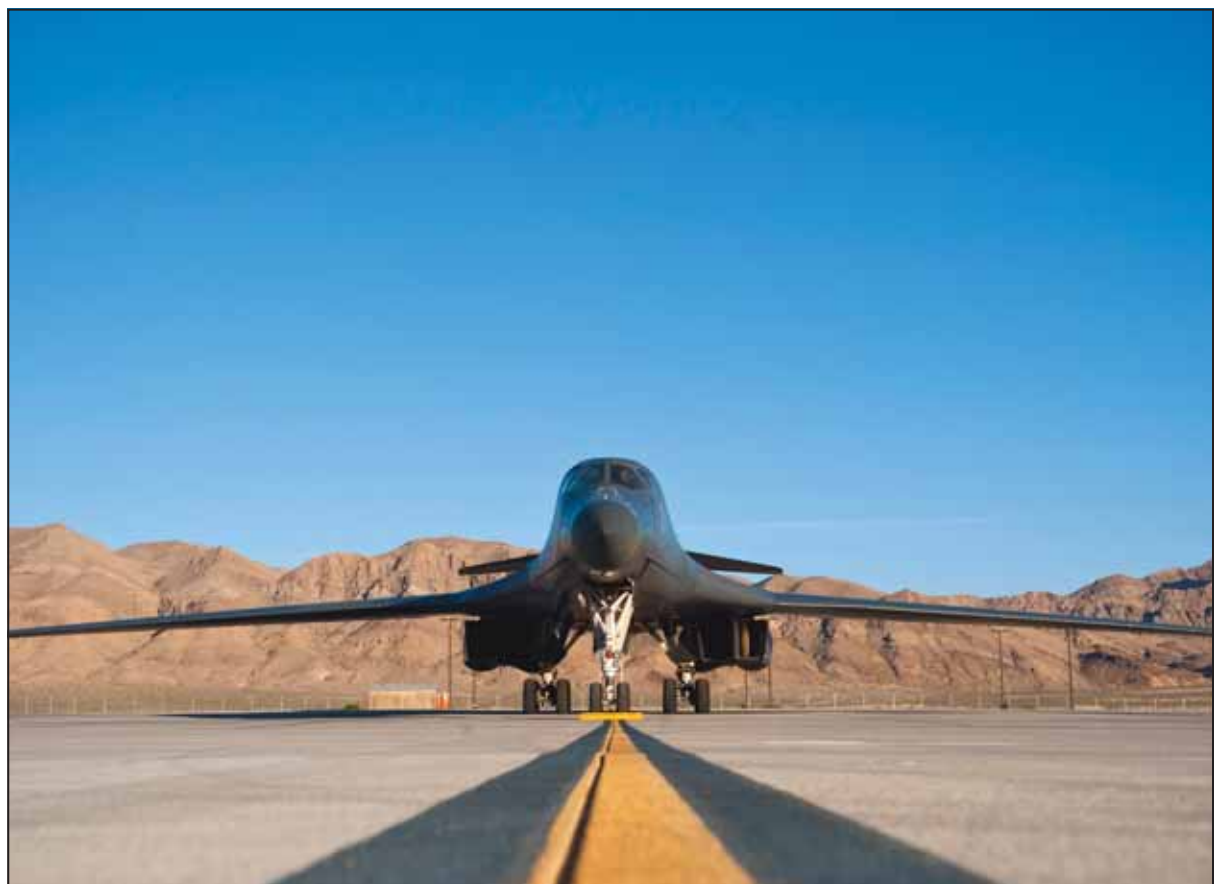
Australia is being upgraded as a US-operated base for this purpose.

Australia has a "force posture agreement" with the US that allows "enhanced aircraft cooperation initiatives." It has already had heavy B-52 bombers deployed in Australia.

The Communist Party of Australia calls for:

- No US troops on Australian soil
- Oppose Australia's role as US deputy in the region
- Independent Australian foreign policy that builds peace and respect for the sovereignty of countries in the region and the wider world

Tom Pearson ✚



A B1 Bomber at the Dyess Air Force Base, Texas.

Budget 2015-16

Election/Recession Budget

Anna Pha

If the 2014-15 budget was a wolf in wolf's clothing then the 2015-16 budget could be described as the same wolf in sheep's clothing. Gone are references to a "budget crisis" and the former Labor government's "tsunami of government spending" which needed "repairing". Instead, Treasurer Joe Hockey attempts to create an air of optimism, that "Australia is getting better" and

that the budget is about "fairness".

The language is mostly softer and the impression is given that the harsh austerity measures have been replaced by positive measures such as childcare. The government is now on the way to "restoring Australia to a sustainable fiscal position" (read "budget surplus"). "This budget is focused on building jobs, growth and opportunity," Treasurer Joe Hockey claims.

The government emphasises how "fair" the


budget is. For example, the cruel and electorally unpopular six-month wait for jobseekers under 30 to get the dole has gone. The wait without income will now be four weeks and apply to under 25s!


The last thing the government wants is a repeat of the large, national anti-budget protest actions that took place following the 2014-15 budget. Hence, this is a budget in preparation for the next election and the looming recession.

Agenda not changed

The spin-doctors have been hard at work. References to "leaners" (people on the dole, single parents on benefits, etc) and "heavy lifters" have been replaced by such terms as "strengthen the integrity of welfare payments" and "improve the integrity of social security income test arrangements." Integrity being spin for "cut as many people off as possible".

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Issue 1685

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Waterboarding minors?

It is no coincidence that the ramping up of fear over terrorism is happening at the same time that the US military is building up its forces in the north of the country in preparations for war against China. A climate of fear at home is essential in plans to take the country into conflict.

Authorities here and their counterparts in Britain are now arresting children caught up in the terrorism dragnet. The stench of fear is being used to increase surveillance on everyone and has seen \$450 million being allocated in this month's Budget to what is now the standard official and media term "homegrown terrorism".

Mass surveillance does not reduce the threat of terrorism, but it does threaten our civil and political rights.

Where are all the terrorists? Man Haron Monis and the Martin Place siege? Haron Monis had a high profile, not only to authorities, but to the public at large. He fitted a type; a history of mental illness, a criminal record. The authorities took him off a watch list. He obtained a weapon and laid siege, in this case to a café. The incident was labelled by authorities as terrorism, a claim inflated by the media.

The outcome was the tragic death of two innocent people in the café; one by Haron Monis and one by the police. But if this was an act of terrorism then what took place in Port Arthur, Tasmania in 1996 was the biggest act of terrorism in the history of modern Australia: 35 killed, 23 wounded. The question of the shooter Martin Bryant's values and religious beliefs were not a focus; the state of his mental health was.

Terrorism is real. It is a tactic as old as politics itself. So the Australian government and its industrialised western conspirators would have us believe they are waging a war against a tactic.

The conflicts cutting a swathe through the Middle East are not part of a war against terrorism. In fact they are assaults on the nation states of Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, driven by proxy forces funded by the US and its allies. In turn, Islamic State is not a state but a ragtag band of fanatics, mercenaries and out and out criminal elements.

At the same time, after more than 13 years of engaging in occupation and conflict, why would anyone think that won't visit home in some form?

The spin is not new of course. During the original cold war years the bogey was terrorism linked to Communism. One example among many serves to reveal its current use is in keeping with the historical use by imperialism.

In January 1981, in his first news conference as US Secretary of State, Alexander Haig charged that the Soviet Union, as a "conscious policy" engaged in "training, funding and equipping" international terrorists. Following close on the heels of that statement a book, by one Claire Sterling, was published. *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism*, was riddled with portentous but meaningless statements.

The reader was told that in 1964 or 1966 or 1968 the Soviet Union decided that terrorism was a cheaper and more effective way to conquer the West. It went on to claim that the Kremlin determined to use their Cuban and Palestinian "puppets" to take over terrorist movements and mobilise them in a coordinated attack on Western civilisation.

The author included in this vast conspiracy the Provisional IRA, kidnappings by then Red Brigades in Italy, the ETA in Spain and every other terrorist act to that time.

This propaganda tune with variations (the pretence now is that China and Russia are not targets) is still being played today.

There are reasons the ideas of extremism gain traction with youth, but at bottom what is driving those who feel marginalised in some way are the politics of racial and religious hate and division fomented by governments toward those ends.

The Abbott government is a leading proponent of the duplicitous and insidious, at one and the same time denying the agenda is about race and religion while by implication laying blame.

Now we have reached the point where children are being arrested and detained under secretive national security laws. What next, waterboarding minors?

PRESS FUND

Tony Abbott once remarked: "...we can't sacrifice the forestry industry on the altar of the environment." And now coal companies Adani, GVK and Waratah Coal, who want to build massive new mines in Queensland, ship coal through the Great Barrier Reef, are being offered federal government loans. Investors are deserting the industry because of the threat of climate change and the rise of renewable energy. However, the government wants to ensure these mines proceed, and that's where they want your tax payments to go! But now to the Press Fund, which, alas, is also currently suffering a lack of investment. We really need contributions to the Fund, which helps us cover our operating costs, so please send us something for the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

NH \$50, Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$10

This week's total: \$65 Progressive total \$3,385

Budget 2015-16

Election/Recession Budget

Continued from page 1

The Treasurer's statement and the media kit focus on new items in this year's budget. The savage cuts in last year's budget such as the \$80 billion to education and public hospitals over the next ten years are buried in the hundreds of pages of budget documents. The deregulation of university fees and the increase in payments for medications under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) are amongst other items still blocked by the Senate.

The soft spin was not applied to "rorting" new mothers who "double dip" with parental leave. Social Security Minister Scott Morrison went as far as agreeing they were fraudsters. They seem to have joined the ranks of "dole bludgers", "rorters" or to use last year's language, "leaners". (More details on page 4)

Small business hoax

The centrepiece of the government's promises of economic growth and job creation is the \$5.5 billion Jobs and Small Business Package. This includes upfront tax deductions for non-consumable purchases of up to \$20,000 each for incorporated small businesses and a reduction in the tax rate from 30 cents in the dollar to 28.5 cents.

Contrary to some media reports, the government does not refund the full amount of the purchase. The expenditure is a tax deduction which can be claimed upfront instead of being depreciated (deductions broken up) over years to come.

So, someone spending the full \$20,000 would have their taxable income reduced immediately by \$20,000. That would reduce their tax bill by 28.5 percent of \$20,000 which is a refund of \$5,700. This could be claimed before the end of the tax year. There is no limit to how often they did this.

Hence the maximum saving per purchase would be \$5,700 after July 1 when the new tax rate is set to come in.

Hockey, who had previously overturned Labor's assistance to small business recognises the importance of winning this group over if the Coalition are to win the elections. He makes specific reference to "tradies". The message is rush out and spend, spend, spend and then vote for the government.

What job creation?

How the purchase of a new computer (imported), a new car (imported), new tools (imported), new coffee making machine (imported) or electronic equipment (imported) will create jobs is not made clear.

Maybe some in the retail sector? The government's predictions of rising unemployment over coming years, suggests it does not believe its own pre-election spiel.

The budget fails on all counts when it comes to job creation. There is no new money for infrastructure. Our new free trade agreements with China, Korea and Japan will result in a \$6 billion hit to the budget over the next four years because of the abolition of tariffs on cars, clothes, footwear, textiles and other imported goods. But these agreements and a new one with India are being promoted as "the big new drivers of

wealth creation and job creation over the next decade." The Trans Pacific Partnership could be a killer when it comes to services, agriculture and other sectors of the economy. Don't hold your breath, as the saying goes.

The government's predictions regarding economic growth appear to be based more on prayer than economic reality. Last year's "forecasts" came in way off mark and this year's look set to do likewise. The government failed to recognise that wage rises were low, GDP growth was sluggish, rising unemployment would reduce the tax take and the potential impact of poor terms of trade and falling commodity prices on profits in the resources sector.

With an early election on the books, to pre-empt an internal coup against Abbott and Hockey, the pre-election sales pitch runs roughshod over reality.

Smoke and mirrors

The government has responded to public pressure with \$600 million for new cancer drugs to be covered by the PBS and another \$700 million for other medications and vaccines over the next four years.

This is great news. But not everyone will be pleased by the removal of other medications from the PBS list.

The Medicare co-payment is off the table, or so the government says. It is true that it is not a budget item but the freezing of Medicare rebates paid to bulkbilling doctors will result in many of them being forced to abandon bulkbilling. The co-payment then will be much more than \$5. (*Guardian*, 06-05-2015, #1684, "Medicare: privatisation agenda continues")

Around 91,000 pensioners will have "a better retirement" with the loss of their age pension and a further 235,000 retirees will see their pension reduced. Others will have an increase.

Education Minister Christopher Pyne has funded one important research scheme by taking the money off another equally important one. The heading on page 168 of Budget Papers 2 reads, "Removing Double-Dipping from Parental Leave Pay". The use of the term was no slip of the tongue by Morrison. Is it an expression of the attitude of this government towards women (see page 5).

Backward, pro-big business

"This government is presiding over a growth in unemployment and inequality. This Budget hurts people who wage a daily battle to survive as long as it refuses to make the big end of town pay its share through progressive tax reform," John Falzon, CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia, said.

The grand sounding pursuit of multinationals who pay no tax in Australia is not expected to reap a cent in the coming years. That's not surprising. Staff levels in the Australian Taxation Office have already been slashed by 2,593 jobs in the past year. The government plans to employ 43 staff to chase down 100 of these corporations.

This is nothing more than a transparent, pre-election stunt to appear to be doing something. It reveals clearly where the government's loyalties lie.

The budget hits fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) workers by cutting their tax concessions. The government is relying on bracket creep (when wage increases take workers into higher tax brackets) for 80 percent of its increase in income over the next four years!

Workers and their families are also on the receiving end of all the cuts to education, health, social security, etc. Yet there is no shortage of money to splurge on military operations and so-called national security.

The government has failed to provide for public, affordable housing, has cut services and funding for women's refuges, legal and other community services.

The Australian economy is descending into crisis and requires a stimulus, but there is not a single genuine measure to create jobs or stimulate the economy.

"With unemployment at or above six percent for the past 11 months, the Abbott government should have used this budget to invest in infrastructure, skills and training, and the public service to create jobs and boost the economy," Ged Kearney, ACTU president said.

Superannuation rorts by the rich, tax dodging through dividend imputation or negative gearing, the \$6 billion Private Health Insurance rebate, military spending and other corporate welfare remain in tact.

Climate change is ignored. "Everything we spend in this budget is being paid for by prudent savings in other areas," Hockey boasts. In fact the "savings" (read "cuts") are often larger than the new spending, resulting in a surplus.

Hockey also warns of more cuts to come: "We must continue to look for sensible savings."

If the Coalition gains control of both Houses in the next election then what we have seen so far will be nothing. The government has already cut 17,300 public sector jobs since its election in September 2013. More jobs are in the firing line as departments are shrunk, merged or shut down. These responsibilities and work are contracted out, mostly to the for-profit private sector.

Longer term agenda

As Hockey pointed out in last year's budget, the government is changing the very role of government. This budget does not change the underlying fundamentals. The government is on a path of jettisoning its social responsibilities for the well-being of society. The for-profit private sector is lined up to grab the spoils. Agencies like St Vincent de Paul and Anglicare and community organisations are left to do what they can for the poor, the sick, the disabled, homeless, victims of domestic violence and others who the government has abandoned.

This is what Hockey referred to as "the end of the age of entitlement" or what in Britain is known as Big Society – as against representative government. ☺

Citizenship for sale

Peter Mac

Earlier this year, in one of its most disturbing initiatives the Abbott government commissioned a Productivity Commission report into the feasibility of selling citizenship rights to prospective immigrants. An issues paper which discusses various options for implementing the scheme has just been released, and the final report, entitled *Migrant Intake Into Australia* will be issued in March 2016.

Under the current scheme a migration visa is usually assessed according to the skill of the applicants in given areas of work, or their family connections, or whether they meet other criteria. However, under the new scheme, entry would largely be determined by the applicant's ability to pay the fee.

Migration visa applicants are currently charged an administration fee that's not set on a cost recovery basis. The current scheme brings in approximately \$1.7 billion in fees and fines, but the Commission claims the proposed scheme would bring in tens of billions of dollars which would help the government rein in the budget deficit, and enable it to slash the numbers of Immigration Department staff.

Options considered in the paper include setting a fixed price and letting demand determine the size of the intake, capping the size of the intake and letting demand set the price, auctioning off a fixed number of applications by way of a tender process, or conducting an admission lottery, as happens in the US.

The paper also canvasses the possibility of running a HECS-style loans program to assist migrants from developing countries gain entry, and giving applicants who could not afford the fee the option of foregoing their right to social services, including Medicare, to reduce the price.

The current program provides 13,750 places on a humanitarian basis. Refugees would not have to pay the immigration fee, but because the scheme would be primarily based on the wealth of the applicant it would inevitably reduce the number of immigrants accepted from less developed nations.

Under the proposal, businesses would also be entitled to pay the applicant's entry fee. That opens up the possibility of corporations bringing in contracted, low-wage, non-union labour from overseas, which

would particularly suit mining companies that conduct operations in remote areas.

Instant opposition

Unions and some employer groups, who support selection on the basis of skills or qualifications in a number of specified areas of work, oppose the Commission's proposal.

Ged Kerney, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, commented: "We are concerned the Productivity Commission's inquiry is focused on allowing only those rich enough to migrate, regardless of fulfilling the current requirements, including skills shortages".

The current family reunion program accounts for approximately one third of the current migrant intake of 190,000 places. The proportion has shrunk since the Howard years, and the Commission's proposal is opposed by migrant organisations, who do not wish migrant citizens to lose the right to reunite with close family members.

That has already happened to asylum seekers who accept temporary protection visas, which allow visa holders to work but don't grant them the right to have family members join them.

The commissioning of the report was ostensibly part of a deal to gain the support of Senator David Leonhjem for the introduction of the temporary protection visa scheme.

The Senator nominated \$50,000 as appropriate for the entry fee, and commented enthusiastically: "This would make a substantial financial contribution to the Australian budget and I hope that would lead to lower taxes".

In reply to criticism of the proposal, the government claims that "There are no plans to make significant changes to the migration program". But that's not the same as saying there won't be, and Abbott himself has left the door open, simply describing implementation of a paid entry scheme as "unlikely".

The government appears non-committal at this stage, but that's what it did with Labor's idea of dumping asylum seekers in Manus Island, a scheme which it later adopted, expanded and made more vindictive.

The issues paper appears to have been released with a view to the government assessing public reaction prior to release of the report, prior to implementing a paid entry scheme next year.

The government won't increase taxes for rich individuals and corporations that pay little or no tax in Australia, so the idea of charging for citizenship as a means of reducing the budget deficit is undoubtedly irresistible for the Abbott government.

How low can you go?

Britain's immigration scheme allows rich applicants to get early treatment of their applications provided they make investments. The Commission is undoubtedly considering including this policy, but it has received much criticism because some wealthy applicants have simply donated to businesses they have already set up in Britain.

In Australia the unions and migrant community are absolutely right to object to the Commission's proposal, which poses a major threat to working wages and conditions, and to the fundamental right to family unity. But those aren't the only reasons.

The government has already dumped an internationally-recognised fundamental human right concerning citizenship, by declaring that children of asylum seekers do not have the right to be citizens even if they were born on Australian territory. The issues paper proposal would also have the effect of discriminating against people from certain nations, just as the white Australia policy did.

Moreover, the proposed slashing of immigration staff numbers implies an effective abandonment of "border protection" policies in the cases of those wealthy enough to buy their way in. Immigration Department staff are already targeted for cuts in this week's budget, and the Commission has admitted that a price-based system might lead to "some loss of control" over the immigration intake.

The proposal is one of the most degrading ideas of Australia's conservative coalition, whose political values are centred on money, property and markets.

The Australian national anthem extols our good fortune, and invites others to "join us now" and "advance Australia fair". But by buying their way in? Is citizenship, then, just a commodity that can be bought and sold?

The proposal to charge prospective migrants a market-based fee represents the ultimate commercialisation of Australia's national life and character, and should be rejected outright. ☒

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Something to say? Write to the Editor.

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Budget 2015-16

Assault on Australia's battlers

Bob Briton

There was plenty in Treasurer Hockey's second federal budget for those who least require assistance. Expenditure for US-led military adventures is locked in. Incentives to build a dystopian trade zone across the north of the country are in there. Superannuation tax breaks for the truly wealthy have been left alone. So have the Private Health Insurance Rebate, the Diesel Fuel Rebate and all manner of mega-expensive taxpayer gifts to local and global corporations.

The Australian Rail Track Corporation will be sold to appreciative private owners. The ASIS spy agency will get a \$300 million boost. It's a different matter for average Australian workers and worse still for its battlers. While the corporate media has played along with the line that it is "softer" and "fairer" than its resoundingly rejected predecessor, this budget continues the punishment of the least well-off in Australian society.

Abbott and his ministers have tried to move away from the unconvincing "debt and deficit" nightmare and "end of the age of entitlement" rhetoric that failed them so badly last year. Actions speak louder than words, however.

When it comes to Australians receiving pensions and "benefits" the message is still there that you are bludging on the Commonwealth. While promoting their spectacularly shrunken paid parental leave scheme – supposed "centre-piece" of the nasty budget – Team Abbott couldn't help describing parents (low-paid mothers in the main) from claiming the very modest Centrelink benefit and employer payments as "double-dipping", "rotting" the system and possibly guilty of "fraud".

Unfortunately for the government, the wives of Finance Minister Mathias Cormann and Assistant Treasurer Josh Frydenberg were both "guilty" of the non-existent "crime" of paid parental leave "fraud". The likes of Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull and former Assistant Treasurer Arthur Sinodinis, were left to gloss over the lapse into last year's media style. The facts of the matter are that even some low-paid workers – including those at Woolworths and McDonalds – have access to no-frills paid parental leave. The Large Family Supplement has been axed. These parents are among the big losers on budget night.

Retirees have been the victim of a lengthy media campaign to portray them as undeserving of the Age Pension. The hostile move in last year's budget – to shift indexation of the pension from changes in average weekly wages to those in the Consumer Price Index – was dropped in favour of changes to asset tests for eligibility. An estimate 91,000 retirees will now have to look to using up assets outside the family home as they lose their part pension. Rent income from the former family home that pensioners put toward the cost of residential care and accommodation used to be tax-exempt. Not any more. Bit by bit, and faster rather than slower, the aged are being pushed into poverty and far fewer choices.

The unemployed continue to live under official disapproval and sanction. They are the main target of a new \$1.7 billion push to wipe out social security "fraud" (that word again). The current one week wait to commence receiving Newstart payments will be pushed out to four weeks. During this month without income, many unemployed people will be forced into debt and/or homelessness. High unemployment, made



Superannuation tax breaks for the truly wealthy have been left alone. So have all manner of mega-expensive taxpayer gifts to local and global corporations.

much worse by government job cuts, has charity organisations braced for a new wave of needy people at their doors.

Dr John Falzon of the St Vincent de Paul Society has slammed the federal government's priorities. "It can find the money to fund childcare and nannies for the rich, but only at the expense of the poor. In the meantime it refuses to lift the abysmally low Newstart unemployment benefit – resorting to income management instead of income adequacy," he said. "This Budget doesn't dull the

pain because it refuses to reinstate and increase funding for social services, social housing, public health and public education, with many of these essential services slashed in last year's Budget. It persists in putting the boot into the unemployed, young people, sole parents, and people with a disability, blaming them for their own exclusion. It recycles a tired work-for-the-dole plan, instead of boldly building a nation through a Jobs Plan and an economic development plan especially in areas of high youth unemployment."

Dr Falzon went on to note the 105,000 people who are experiencing homelessness and 200,000 people waiting for public housing and the abandonment of these people to charities with diminishing resources. Needless to add that funding to states for the maintenance of remote Aboriginal communities was not restored. With or without the "age of entitlement" spin, this was an anti-people budget that must be stopped by the sort of resistance shown to last year's howler. ☹

Remembering Al Nakba

Richard Titelius

On May 15, 1948, 750,000 Palestinians (over half the population) were expelled from their homeland. Hundreds of Palestinian villages were depopulated and destroyed in an event remembered by Palestinians as Al Nakba or "catastrophe".

Each year the Palestinian diasporas around the world and their supporters in their new lands, organise rallies of remembrance to mourn this day and call for the right of return, an end to the occupation of their lands and a Palestinian state.

In Perth a rally organised by Friends of Palestine WA was held on May 16, in steady rain in the Murray Street Mall of the Perth CBD, attended by about 100 people. Speakers included ALP Senator Sue Lines who herself has seen at first hand the devastating effect which the occupation and illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank have on Palestinian people.

Ayman Qwaider, a Palestinian

refugee, said when he talks regularly with family and friends back in Palestine they say it feels like Al Nakba every day when they wake up to the ongoing repression by the Israeli state. Ayman also spoke of the more than three million Palestinians who live close by their homeland in the Arab states of Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, many who have had a tenuous existence in their adopted lands, including several hundred thousand still living in refugee camps.

One especially poignant form of repression against the Palestinian people has been establishment of the "Nakba Law" in 2011, which authorises Israel's finance minister to revoke funding from institutions that reject Israel's character as a "Jewish State" or mark the Independence Day as a day of mourning. Yet what else can it be for the dispossessed and now continually repressed Palestinian people. Under the new government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his reactionary coalition partners hopes

for a peace settlement and the recognition of a Palestinian state are further away than ever.

While protesters braved a steady rain to march around the two main malls of the Perth CBD, stone throwing Palestinians including children have had to brave attacks by Israeli soldiers who fired tear gas, rubber bullets and water canon to disperse their protests in the West Bank.

Other rallies and marches were held around Australia and the world including in Sydney outside the Town Hall and in King George Square in Brisbane.

The Communist Party of Australia calls on the Australian government to put pressure on the Israeli government to cease the establishment of further illegal settlements on Palestinian land, to enter into meaningful and binding talks to establish a Palestinian state, with power to protect its sovereignty from incursions by the Israeli state by whatever means. ☹



Stone throwing Palestinians including children have had to brave attacks by Israeli soldiers who fired tear gas, rubber bullets and water canon to disperse their protests in the West Bank.

Budget 2015-16

Shelters axed as murder rate soars

Peter Mac

Sydney mother Linda Locke was the 34th woman murdered during a domestic violence incident in Australia this year. A woman is hospitalised every three hours because of these attacks, and in NSW nearly half the state's murders are related to domestic violence.

Despite the rapidly rising rate of violent incidents, the Abbott government's funding cuts have forced many women's shelters into full or partial closure, and have crippled the operations of other organisations dedicated to protecting women.

The federal government is considering using location based technology to track frequent domestic violence offenders. It has also reversed a previous decision to cut funding for homeless services. However, the budget's only positive move was the contribution of \$16.7 million to a \$30 million domestic violence awareness campaign.

Although welcome, that initiative does nothing to fill the enormous financial gaps left by funding cuts to organisations that run men's behaviour programs, primary prevention initiatives and crisis and counselling hotline services, as well as community legal centres and organisations providing special services for people from Indigenous and other cultural backgrounds.

Last year the federally-funded phone counselling service 1800RESPECT received about 55,000 calls for help, but 18,631 of them went unanswered because of inadequate resources. Karen

Willis, executive officer of Rape and Domestic Violence Australia, which runs the service, has estimated that at least \$2 million in extra funding would be required for all the calls to be answered.

Fifteen women's shelters in NSW are now closed at night because of lack of funding. Many women seeking protection from domestic violence will no longer have access to shelters that specialise in helping victims of domestic violence, and will have to resort to institutions offering shelter to homeless men and women.

And the resources of those institutions are already stretched to the limit. Community group Fair Agenda says that because of funding cuts more than 400 people seeking shelter were turned away every night in the 2013-2014 financial year, and approximately 150,000 people were denied help at community legal centres.

Four shelters in Sydney are now run by Christian charity services. They include Elsie, Australia's first women's shelter, which was established in the inner Sydney suburb of Glebe in 1974 and has now been taken over by St Vincent de Paul.

The situation has eliminated the secular and independent character of the shelters, and the religious emphasis of the new management tends to deter some victims who hold other religious views from those seeking their protection.

A number of other support organisations are now depending on the Abbott government's wafer-thin promises of assistance. Others have closed down or are no longer providing services to domestic violence

victims. Staff redundancies are widespread.

The Abbott government offered none of these organisations any help in the recent budget.

Moreover, under the budget restrictions half the nation's new mothers will lose paid parental leave benefits, and access to childcare benefits will be more restricted. This will add to the financial penalties involved in leaving an abusive domestic environment.

Despite the government's lip service to addressing the problem, under the current budget arrangements the outlook for victims of domestic violence has become bleaker than ever.

Background to the crisis

The NSW Domestic Violence Committee includes within its definition of domestic violence verbal and psychological abuse, sexual assault, the withholding of money and other resources for support, and the prevention of contact with family or friends. The overwhelming majority of victims are women.

The rate of violent incidents has risen partly because of involvement of the drug "ice", which can induce particularly savage behaviour in users. However, it also indicates we are only now beginning to understand the extent of the problem.

A spokesperson for 1800RESPECT commented that the rate had risen every year since it started operation in 2010, and that "we have never caught up".

But there are other reasons for domestic violence. One is the general glamorisation of violence evident in sport, video games and the mass media.

The feudal notion that women are the property of men persists because of the marketing of commodities which depict women as inferior and



naturally subordinate to the sexual demands of men, and/or incite violence against women and suggest that sensitivity towards them is unmanly.

Businesses which cater to this market not only respond to the abuse of women, they also contribute to it. And they include some of Australia's biggest retailers.

After a recent campaign by domestic violence workers and sex workers, Target Australia and K-Mart removed from their shelves copies of the video game "Grand Theft Auto" V, which depicted sex workers being used and then killed to avoid the "heroes" having to pay for their services.

Coles and Woolworths now face protests over their sale of Zoo magazine, which uses photos of young girls lifted from porn sites, and runs promotions for the best shots of the breasts of their male readers' girlfriends. The magazine offers young men hints about how to ply a girl with liquor and "separate her from the flock". It suggests: "Then how about you let her know she's being f***ed? ... She'll like you taking charge like a real man!"

But will the Abbott government take effective steps to stamp out domestic violence at its roots? Don't hold your breath. The closing of women's shelters and the effective forcing of women back to abusive households actually suits the outlook of the most reactionary members of the federal coalition, i.e. that a woman's place is in the home, and in the most servile relationship.

And you can judge Abbott's position by his remark that "...this idea that sex is kind of a woman's right to refuse to absolutely withhold, just as the idea that sex is a man's right to demand ... both need to be moderated, so to speak".

In other words, women don't have an absolute right to refuse to engage in sex, and in some situations a man may be within his rights to demand it, even against the woman's wishes.

A good step to tackle domestic violence would be to dump Abbott and the coalition as soon as possible. ☘

Lorena Pizarro

Australian Speaking Tour

June 2015 – Human Rights In Chile

Lorena Pizarro is human rights activist and currently President of the Association of Families of the Detained and Disappeared in Chile. She will be speaking in Australia in June 2015 to highlight the importance of seeking justice for human rights abuses in Chile and to lend her support to the campaign for the extradition of Adriana Rivas who is accused of the aggravated kidnapping of seven people in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship as well as fleeing Chile whilst on bail.

TOUR DATES

Melbourne June 6 - June 10
 Sydney June 11 - June 13
 Canberra June 14 - June 17
 Melbourne June 18 - June 21



For tour information or media interviews contact
 Pilar Aguilera: 0404 165 331
 nctruthandjusticechileau@gmail.com
 www.truthandjusticeforchile.com

Tour organized by the National Campaign for Truth and Justice in Chile

Our Common Asks

What the Federal Budget can deliver for Australia

Leaders from the community sector, including Vinnies CEO Dr John Falzon and Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) CEO Dr Cassanda Goldie, came together at the Australian Progress Conference held in Melbourne on May 7, 2015 to discuss the kind of Australia they would like to see. This information was first published on the ACOSS website (www.acoss.org.au).

The release of the Federal Budget is an opportunity for all Australian people to define what we should do with our nation's resources. The budget exists at the service of our communities, and must reflect the priorities of the country we want to live in – now and in the future.

1. Make sure everyone, people and corporations, pay their fair share of tax so we can invest in a future for all Australians.

2. Make us a more equal country with a strong social safety net so everyone has enough to live on with dignity.
3. Support families who need it with the costs of raising children, because every child and family deserves to thrive.
4. Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – living standards, employment opportunities and access to health and education.
5. Guarantee quality preschool education and invest in our schools so that every student can achieve their potential.
6. Deliver excellent universal healthcare for all people, no matter where we live or whether we can individually afford to pay.
7. Properly fund universities, science and research because the intellectual capital of our nation

- will be what defines Australia's success in the 21st century.
8. Stimulate investment in the industries, jobs and entrepreneurs of the future.
9. Cut carbon pollution and transition to 100% renewable energy for a cleaner, safer, sustainable future.
10. Build the critical physical and social infrastructure, the public services and effective government we need to be a great society.
11. Position Australia as a generous and responsible global citizen that provides foreign aid, development and poverty alleviation.
12. Provide services that enable full and equal participation by women in the Australian economy and public life. ☘

Public funding of private schools

David Zyngier

How many of you have travelled overseas by plane? If like me you travel economy – I am sure that you have envied those up front as you enter the plane in Business Class at a steal of \$6,000. And what about those in First Class who have a chauffeured car pick them up from home, personalised immigration and lounge services, whole room and a personal menu sommelier and butler, all for only \$10,000!

We all get to the destination at the same time, just with a different modicum of comfort. But do the people in First or Business expect those of us in cattle class or even those who do not fly to subsidise their lifestyle choice?

Well, that's how our education system in Australia works!

Australia is one of the very few countries in the OECD that publicly funds students in private schools. More than 40 percent of Australian secondary children now attend private schools – either so-called independent or religious schools. Australia has one of the most privatised school systems in the OECD.

Prior to the late 1960s private schools received no government funding whatsoever in this country. While most OECD countries have a private school system, very few of them receive public funding. Think about England, the home of the elite private school, and the exclusive private schools in the USA: not one cent of taxpayers' money goes into their budgets.

Priority must be public education

The purpose of an excellent, appropriately funded public education system is to help ameliorate the inevitable inequalities that result from the lottery of birth. No better mechanism for creating a well-educated general population has so far been discovered.

The choice model promoted by federal and state governments has contributed to the decline in enrolments in public schools nationally. The importance of choice for parents has been promoted at the expense of equity for students.

Choice is only available for those who have the wherewithal to make that choice. We have heard about the end of the age of entitlement. However, when a person on the basic wage of \$55,000 a year pays his or her taxes, that person does not have a choice, but their taxes go to enable someone who is on a salary of \$150,000 or more per annum to exercise that choice. So it is a bogus choice. Over the last 40 years we have seen an increasing commitment to privatisation of our education system.

Stephen Dinham of University of Melbourne and the president of the Australian College of Educators wrote that:

"It is hard not to conclude that what we are seeing is a deliberate strategy to dismantle public education, partly for ideological and partly for financial reasons. If these developments continue then the inevitable outcomes will be greater inequity and continuing decline in educational performance that will provide the proponents of change with further 'evidence' to support their position and for even more far-reaching change."

The more that our public education system becomes residualised the greater will be the flight of those who can flee. People are now buying properties in middle class suburbs in order to be in the zone for the middle class schools. Property values have gone up more than \$150,000 in those areas. It is still cheaper than sending your child to the equivalent independent school – instead of sending them to

Scotch College you would send them to, for example, Balwyn High.

Government schools therefore experience a higher demand on their existing resource base than similar private schools operating within the same area. Indeed, they can find themselves in the position of having to cater for students where the private systems have been unable to meet a student's educational needs.

Immediate requirement

Additional funding is an immediate requirement if equity of outcome is to be achieved by all students. It is not the responsibility of governments to fund private schools or families using private schools; that responsibility rests – or should rest with the private individual or the private institution.

Since the 1970s Australia has seen significant increase in inequity of funding and has a much wider achievement gap. In fact we can actually chart the decline in our PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) results with the growth of state and federal funding of private schools; they correlate. International comparisons show Australian students are among the best performers in the world but one of the lowest ranking in terms of the size of the achievement gap.

Middle-class parents, well-educated parents, parents who have got university degrees – their children will do well no matter where they go. We know, from research that has been done, that 50 percent of a child's academic outcomes – not that that is the only measure – is derived from their home background, before they set foot in the school. Increasing funding for well-resourced and middle class schools where there is a lot of what is called cultural capital already in place is not going to further advantage those children. It is a case of diminishing returns, because adding extra money at that top level is not going to give you any advantage. In fact it is wasted money. Where we need to be focusing as much of our pie as possible is on the long tail of underachievement.

Chile's divestment in private schools

It's time to rethink this mistaken inequitable policy and, like Chile, stop all public funding to private schools and redirect it to disadvantaged public schools. Due to the market structure imposed in the 1980s by Chilean dictator, Augusto Pinochet, the education system is the most socioeconomically segregated in the OECD, favouring private, for-profit schools with nearly 52 percent of enrolled students attending there. The same thing has occurred here in Australia – not imposed by a dictator – but under our very noses in a democratic country.

These Chilean reforms include the end of public funding to private, for-profit schools, to make all primary and secondary education free of charge, and prohibit contested selective practices used in school admission processes. Their education reform bill is an upheaval of the system in order to change the benefits of education from being for an affluent minority to the deserving majority. These reforms are to be paid through new taxes on the wealthy and business.

So where is our (public) education money going?

New figures from the Productivity Commission show that government-funding increases, between 2008-09 and 2012-13, massively favoured private schools over public schools.

Funding for private schools in Victoria, for

example, increased by 18.5 percent per student, or eight times that of public schools. Across Australia the dollar increase for private schools was nearly five times that for public schools. The average increase for private schools was \$1,181 per student compared to only \$247 for public schools.

Other research indicates clearly that the equity gap between our school systems has continued to grow since the Gonski review in 2011. Each private school pupil now receives, on average, a non-means-tested public subsidy of over \$8,000 per year at the expense of the less privileged public school student. So much for the end of the age of entitlement!

Do private schools outperform public schools? Is there a return on this public investment?

Parents can spend up to \$30,000 a year on private education. According to the Australian Scholarship Group, the forecast cost of sending a child to private school in Melbourne is \$504,000 over 13 years of schooling after tax, in addition to the massive public subsidy these schools receive.

A new analysis of school NAPLAN test results shows that the results in like public schools are just as good as those in private schools. The analysis reported:

"The often-presumed better results of private schools are a myth. Public schools are the equal of private schools. Public, Catholic and independent schools with a similar socioeconomic composition have very similar results."

Other research found similar results for HSC in NSW:

"If you're just looking at academic results, it probably isn't worth paying all that money for an elite private school."

But don't private schools save public money? We all pay taxes!

The private school lobby often makes this spurious claim alongside the claim that those who choose private schools already pay taxes so should receive at least a contribution from their taxes to pay for that education choice.

Independent Schools Victoria claims that sending a child to a private school is actually a saving to the taxpayer of \$5,000 per student.

This is akin to the Automobile Chamber of Commerce suggesting the use of private cars not only saves public money on public transport but actually wanting their members to receive a subsidy on the purchase of their new Mercedes or BMW.

Similarly no one believes that those choosing to use private toll roads should receive a subsidy for the use of the toll instead of driving on the public and free road system that their taxes have funded.

Ongoing disparity

The massive ongoing disparity in funding increases for public and private schools is a national disgrace and scandal. The learning needs of disadvantaged students are being ignored by the priority given to funding more privileged sections of the community.

Unacceptably large percentages of low socioeconomic status, Indigenous and remote area students do not achieve national standards in literacy and numeracy. There are huge achievement gaps between rich and poor schools.

More than 80 percent of low socioeconomic and Indigenous students are enrolled in public schools. Only the full implementation of the Gonski recommendations would ensure that we improve educational outcomes in our under-resourced public schools without additional drain on the budget bottom line.



Students at Glenmore State School (Rockhampton) are given

Given there is an ever-shrinking tax base, we need a discussion about gradually reducing public funding to private schools by 25 percent every four years until it is zero. This should give these schools time to get their budgets in order. Prior to 1972 they were doing quite well without public support.

Findings provide compelling evidence that "money does matter and that better school resources can meaningfully improve the long-run outcomes of recently educated children", a paper released this month says.

"The results ... highlight how improved access to school resources can profoundly shape the life outcomes of economically disadvantaged children and thereby significantly reduce the intergenerational transmission of poverty."

The Minister of Education, Christopher Pyne, has stated that "education spending increased in real terms by 44% between 2000 and 2009. Class sizes have been reduced by about the same number. We must look to the evidence to show us where we should spend taxpayers' money". He argues that resources are not the issue but teacher quality, principal autonomy and parental engagement are.

So what does the evidence actually show about funding?

This figure of 44 percent has been used by politicians of all sides and comes from flawed research by Jensen in the Grattan Institute. Apart from the 2008-2009 BER capital investment in all schools that helped save Australia's economy from meltdown, Australia's spend on education as a proportion of GDP according to the World Bank and OECD has declined from 4.9% in 1999 to 4.4% in 2008.

Over the same period government expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure in Australia fell from 14.2% to 12.9%.

Only 71% of Australian government spending goes to public schools – the majority of the increase in government school funding over the past decade has gone to private schools.

The percentage of gross domestic product spent on all education per head in Australia has dropped from almost 5.5% in 1974 to 4.9% in 2012. Over the same period Australian governments have transferred large amounts of public money to private schools.

More importantly the gap between the lowest and top-performing students as is

The learning needs of disadvantaged students are being ignored by the priority given to funding more privileged sections of the community.

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on a presentation by BushTV (www.bushtv.com.au) about a career in media.

evidenced by the PISA results, NAPLAN results, continues to widen. The Minister claims that “much of this expenditure in the last 20 to 30 years has gone towards efforts to reduce class sizes, despite evidence that this does not have a significant impact on improving student outcomes”. My research refutes this claim.

What has been happening over the last 20 years is a flight of the middle class from the local schools, where they can afford the choice to leave their local primary or their local secondary school which then increases the marginalisation of the children who are remaining and those parents who have absolutely no choice to take their children somewhere else. These schools become marginalised and self-fulfilling prophecies of failure. Hence over the last 10 years we can see the decline in our results in PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS, and in NAPLAN as well in these particular schools. With the movement of middle-class cultural capital out of these schools, the peer support, which research shows is almost as important as the school itself, who you go to school with is almost as important as the school itself in its contribution to students' academic outcomes. They become marginalised and that peer factor needs to be alleviated with increased funding to support that disadvantage.

What needs to be done?

What we need are targeted resources to support students and teachers related to the school's needs. This can ensure that all students meet required standards.

We need to deliver the most funds and resources to students who are the most difficult to teach. These schools need the best teachers, and students must get more time to enable them to catch up.

Funding should continue to be directed to students through their school systems and funding systems should be designed to ensure that these funds are directed to the schools on the basis of need.

In terms of prosperity and stability, strong, well-funded and supported public education systems are indispensable. In sheer economic terms, the fact that other nations are more equitably educating all their available talent will inevitably rebound on our international competitiveness in the future.

The equity implications of school Socio-economic Status are considerable. Not only are individual students advantaged or disadvantaged by their own background but the impact of this can be reduced or magnified in the schools they attend. School choice is

exercised in Australia, favouring those with resources for choice – while reducing opportunities for disadvantaged students who are increasingly sitting in classrooms alongside their own peers.

One of the things that independent schools do, especially the high fee-charging independent schools, is cherry-pick the best from the public school system to enhance their final-year outcomes, to raise them up the ladder. They offer them scholarships and they therefore attract them to their schools. Again that diminishes the local public school and enhances their reputation. Of course, when independent schools have children who are troublesome, they shunt them off as they can, because it is within their right to do so, back to the public school system – because the public school system has to take all children regardless of their needs or difficulties. Of course it is also anecdotally known that the private schools do not shunt off high performers, no matter what they do. If their students are high-performing and yet they are a bit naughty, they will tolerate them because that will enhance their – I was going to use the words “bottom line”, but it is actually their upper line – their achievement level.

What I want to emphasise is funding according to real need:

- Properly resource those schools which disproportionately serve the most needy students.
- Enhance confidence in apparently underachieving schools.

Bestselling author David Gillespie shows parents how to choose the best school for their kids, how to avoid fees, and how to make a less-than-perfect system better.

David Gillespie has six kids. Like many parents, he and his wife faced some tough decisions when it came to choosing a high school. He calculated that sending his kids to a private school would cost him \$1.3 million. A businessman at heart, he thought it worth doing

some research to find out what he'd get for his money. In other words, would his kids get better results? The answer was no.

Intrigued, David continued his research, only to discover he was wrong on most counts – as are most parents – when it comes to working out what factors deliver a great education. Among other things he found out that class size doesn't matter, composite classes are fine, fancy buildings and rolling lawns are a waste of money, the old-school-tie network won't cut it in the new industries and NAPLAN is misread by everyone so is largely meaningless as a measure of quality.

Though he could afford to buy the best education possible, he writes:

“Streaming our entire education system ... creating a multi-tiered system not only entrenches disadvantage at the bottom but weakens the entire system.”

The only alternative is to implement the Gonski recommendations in full

In doing so we can improve opportunities for our poorest students and families by boosting their schools – and national achievement levels. All of the most important of these reforms cost money, and if they are to achieve an impact they must be targeted strategically at areas of greatest need.

We must end the flawed SES area based model of funding that continues to fund non-government schools to ensure that the education system is not one that promotes social segregation and generational disadvantage. There are good grounds for funding Prep to Year 2 at the same level as secondary schools. The national SRS should provide for this.

I work in primary teacher education. Any strong outcomes that children have at the end of 12 or 13 years of education is as a result of the foundation years, the early years of education. My research into class sizes, in particular in the early years, leads me to believe that that is where we need to focus our greatest target of funding, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds – Indigenous children, migrant children, children whose second language may not be English and children from low-SES communities. It is this area where we can make the biggest difference. In fact a Nobel Laureate in economics from the United States a few years ago wrote that for every dollar you invest in early years you get \$10 back in productivity gains over the life of that person.

Genuine choices

We can hardly refuse parents the right to enrol their children in any school they wish if that school meets religious or other requirements. That does not mean that the taxpayer must fund whatever lifestyle choice that parents make. A system of equal per capita grants to non-government schools is inequitable and unjust and also wasteful.

The Catholic system and the independent system are not being philanthropic. They are very exclusive. Within the Catholic sector in particular there is a large number of high fee-charging schools that receive a lot of state and federal money. In the last four years we have seen it right down the eastern seaboard – Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria – where education budgets have been cut and cut very severely to the tune of about \$3 billion in total between those three states. The private sector, the independent and Catholic systems have not been touched. Their funding has been maintained.

One of the most alarming things is that in all the growth corridors of our major cities

we are seeing that public infrastructure is not being supported. We are seeing the development of low fee-charging private schools, often Christian fundamentalist schools, being supported by our public taxation in those growth corridors. Our governments should be building public schools so that the parents have a choice and have the possibility of supporting public education.

Public schools are meant to be funded by the government appropriately through our taxes. Yet schools have to resort to chocolate drives, raffles and parent-run fetes to ensure that the “extras” like computers, interactive white boards and aides are available.

How many of you saw the advertisement for Catholic education “Having Faith: Catholic Education” (*The Age*, 22-03-2015)? It inadvertently highlighted what is wrong with the way private schools are funded. Four pages of glossy advertising featuring four elite and very advantaged Catholic schools – all with very high percentages of students from the upper two quartiles of society, the lowest at 75% the highest 95% charging parents between \$5.3K and \$21K per annum but receiving between \$6K and \$8.5K per student from public funds in 2013. De La Salle, for example, charged parents \$7.8K and received \$8.1K from the public – which really makes them a public school! On top of this they received between \$1.5M and \$3.6M in public funds for capital works. Yet Minister Merlino has promised to ensure that these schools continue to receive as a minimum 25% of what it costs to educate students in the public system. It is time to put a halt to public funding of elite private schools and reconsider how public money is used to assist the most disadvantaged children – 80% who attend public schools.

However, as Connell wrote in 1993, “if a poor child wants to do well in education then they should have chosen richer parents!”

My colleague Professor Jane Kenway has written that:

“We can judge the virtue of a nation by how well it treats its most vulnerable people. Equally, we can judge the virtue and thus the quality of an education system by how well it educates its most vulnerable students.”

A strong and viable government school system is vital for the nation's future. Australian society and its distinctive values depend on the practical expression of tolerance, fairness, egalitarianism and equality of opportunity that public schools provide.

The Canadian philosopher John Ralston Saul writes that “the wilful undermining of universal public education by our governments and the direct or indirect encouragement of private education is the most flagrant betrayal of the basic principles of ... representative democracy”.

On the signing of the education reform bill, President Bachelet of Chile, said:

“Today we are fulfilling what we promised Chile, to begin a process of deep transformation of our education system, which will ensure quality, gratuity, integration and an end to profit-making in education. It is not fair that the resources of the Chilean people, instead of enriching our education, enriches private individuals.”

John Ralston Saul observed that:

“Any weakening of universal public education can only be a weakening of the long-standing essential role universal public education plays in making us a civilized democracy.”

If only such a commitment would be made by Australia's political leaders.

A talk given by Dr David Zyngier (Monash University) at the Melbourne Unitarian Church on April 12, 2015

The Beacon ✪

We are seeing the development of low fee-charging private schools, often Christian fundamentalist schools, being supported by our public taxation.

Where to now?

Keith Ewing

Shortly after the general election in 2010, I wrote in these columns that David Cameron would win the 2015 general election (*Morning Star* June 18, 2010).

The reason for this was largely historical. In this country Tory governments typically get at least two terms. Indeed since the end of the Second World War only one Tory government – that elected in 1970 – has failed to do so.

But history was not the only factor that led me to this pessimistic view. The concern I expressed then was that the 2015 election would be fought on territory chosen by the Tories and the right-wing press.

This was an agenda that would be misinformed by selective memories of the deficit in 2010 and claims about Labour's alleged economic mismanagement.

What I did not anticipate of course was the eruption in Scotland, which provides an opportunity for a different explanation of the defeat. Nobody could have anticipated Labour's grave mistake in swallowing the Cameron agenda during the independence referendum.

It may have won the referendum vote, but Scottish Labour died on September 18, 2014. Nor could anyone have foreseen the impact of the Scottish Question on the English electorate.

Terror stalked the land about the danger of Scottish influence in a British government, stoked by voices since curiously mute about the fact that a Tory Party now governs Scotland with only one MP at Westminster. The Scots, it seems, just have to put up with it.

Trade unions will now pay a heavy price for Labour's defeat. Tory plans are set out clearly enough in their election manifesto, including the much-trumpeted proposals for

yet more restrictions on strike ballots, most notably a requirement that strikes in certain sectors will need the support of 40 percent of those eligible to vote, as well as a majority of those voting.

As has been said many times before, this is a requirement that offends democratic principle, and it has been rightly condemned.

At the 2015 general election the Tories won about 37 percent of the vote nationally, representing only about 25 percent of those eligible to vote. The legitimacy of the Tory mandate will of course make no difference – but the hypocrisy is clear and complete.

Nor will a lack of legitimacy stop the proposed attack on trade union facility time or the use of the check-off to collect trade union dues.

The attack spearheaded by the coalition against PCS (Public and Commercial Services Union) seems about to go viral. Nor will the lack of legitimacy stop the proposed attack on the trade union political levy and the right of unions to an effective political voice.

Yet it will get worse – much worse – before it ever gets better, if only because of the European Question. Whatever happens in the forthcoming EU referendum, the referendum will split the movement.

Just as importantly, whether we are in or out, it will lead to further erosion of employment rights – paid holidays and redundancy consultation. For trade unions, this is a crisis like no other, and it is one that catches us ill-prepared.

Membership is in decline, leading to a loss of authority and income; collective bargaining coverage is at historically low levels, so that we are touching the lives of fewer and fewer workers; and we are about to have zero political influence, as civil war breaks out in the Labour Party.

Yet my fear now is that the



present government is embedded for another 10 years and that we will have at least a three or four-term Tory hegemony, as in 1951-64 and 1979-97.

Labour will not be ready for government in 2020 and in any event there are about to be boundary changes and fewer MPs, handing another 20 parliamentary seats to the Tories in the process.

But even if Labour is ready for government, Scotland will almost certainly not be ready for Labour. The corpse of Scottish Labour will still be decomposing in 2020. Indeed, Scotland may be a sovereign

state by then. At least for now, the Scottish National Party – and some of its impressive candidates who speak about workers' rights – are the authentic voice of the working class, whether sceptics like it or not.

In this bleak political landscape, the challenge for trade unionism is huge, now facing a challenge of leadership, a challenge of purpose and a challenge for survival.

How are trade unions to deal with the ideological onslaught about to overwhelm their members and their organisations? And how are we to deal with the fresh legal onslaught that is about to hit us?

The movement is about to be tested like never before. It would be a serious mistake to baton down the hatches until the next general election and hope for a Labour government.

We need a new, clear vision to lead the movement not for the next five years but for the next generation – a vision that questions organisational activity, as well as industrial and political strategies.

We will need it soon. Keith Ewing is professor of public law at King's College London and president of the Institute of Employment Rights. *Morning Star* ✪

Police agents "spied on fire union chief"

Conrad Landin

The leader of a major trade union has demanded answers after a whistleblower suggested that he had been personally spied on by an elite undercover police unit.

Fire Brigades Union (FBU) general secretary Matt Wrack said he was "shocked" but "not surprised" to learn that officers of the Metropolitan Police's special demonstration squad (SDS) had monitored his activities in the trade union and anti-fascist movements.

The now-disbanded SDS, which has previously come under fire for allowing undercover officers to sleep with their targets, is heavily implicated in recent revelations over blacklisting in the construction industry.

Evidence suggests that police officers routinely passed information to the Consulting Association, the right-wing bosses' club whose database of blacklisted workers was seized by the Information Commissioner in 2009.

In March former SDS copper Peter Francis revealed that he had spied on activists from the FBU alongside those of the Communication Workers' Union (CWU), Unison and the National Union of Teachers (NUT) when undercover and using the name Peter Black.

Fellow SDS officer Mark Jenner had infiltrated the labour movement so deeply that he even chaired union and left-wing meetings, according to *Blacklisted* co-author Dave Smith, who addressed an FBU fringe meeting last week.

Mr Smith also alleged that MI5 and Special Branch operate dedicated industrial units.

But in new developments, sources have suggested that Mr Wrack was directly spied on by the SDS as part of its operations targeting trade unionists, socialist activists and the anti-racist movement in the 1990s.

And in his speech to firefighters, Mr Smith confirmed that "Matt Wrack was part of the same anti-fascist events where Peter Francis was operating."

"I've been on anti-racism protests where Peter Francis was there and Matt Wrack was also there."

In his book, Mr Smith reports that he himself had been spied on by undercover officers and that other targets included socialist activist Dan Gilman, RMT assistant general secretary Steve Hedley and bricklayer Frank Smith, who was active at the Colin Roach community centre in east London.

It has also been suggested that police disguised efforts to gather intelligence on trade union activities

as surveillance of the anti-fascist movement.

Speaking exclusively to the *Star*, Mr Wrack confirmed that he would request a copy of his file from the Met and was currently discussing the matter with lawyers.

"Any intrusion, even as someone who is around the movement and knows what goes on ... it comes as a shock to experience it," he said.

But he said it was "no surprise" that FBU members were targeted "because we do organise campaigns and fight back."

"People will find the degree of (the blacklisting operation) and the degree of state involvement staggering," he said.

Mr Wrack demanded that top police officers ditch their policy of refusing to disclose reports from undercover agents.

"Anyone directly involved has the right to know what spying was done, who (carried it out) and what reports (were compiled)," he said. "You'd have to demand transparency and an end to any political policing structures."

"All special units targeting people engaging in legitimate political and industrial activity should be scrapped and their archives made accessible."

Morning Star ✪



Senate sidetracks TPP for now

Mark Gruenberg

WASHINGTON: Dealing a setback to President Obama and congressional Republicans, the Senate voted on May 12 to sidetrack the fast-track presidential trade promotion authority, at least for now.

Union leaders hailed the Senate vote, which forces senators to postpone the debate on fast-track until after the Memorial Day recess and gives its foes, led by workers, environmentalists, church and community groups, more time to lobby lawmakers.

"It's like David and Goliath. We're David and we have a slingshot," Communications Workers president Larry Cohen told Press Associates Union News Service in a walk-and-talk after a rally to unveil a progressive agenda. "We get at least two more weeks to mobilise."

Unions and their allies have rounded up a heavy majority of congressional Democrats, in both the House and the Senate, against fast-track. Unionists note that all prior trade pacts are job losers. "The TPP threatens jobs," said Democrat Rosa DeLauro, its leading House foe.

"I challenge any member of Congress to show us a trade deal that gave us a net increase in jobs and a net increase in wages," Steelworkers president Leo Gerard declared at the progressive agenda rally. "They can't find it."

And they note fast-track would let Obama, and his successor, jam through the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), the worst of three trade pacts Obama wants to implement before he leaves office. Another is with Europe, while the third opens trade in services – including government services – to foreign firms.

The TPP pact is considered the worst because, like the others, it doesn't write worker rights into its text, and because it includes nations with extremely low wages and massive worker repression.

Multinationals could then export US jobs to those countries.

"We shouldn't engage in trade agreements that put our manufacturing workers in direct competition with workers earning 60 cents an hour," Democrat Senator Jeff Merkley, told the progressive agenda rally. The agenda includes opposition to fast track.

The TPP also includes a secret trade court, the Investor State Dispute System, to let corporations challenge federal, state and local laws that might harm present or future profits. The ISDS would threaten everything from Buy American laws to job safety and health laws.

"The fast-track bill is halted - for now," AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said in a statement. "That's good news for America's working families, domestic producers, and communities. We appreciate those senators who stood with working people today against a bill that would have led to undemocratic trade deals that lower wages and eliminate jobs. This vote sends a message loud and clear."

"If Congress is serious about creating jobs, reviving US manufacturing, and raising wages, it needs to use its leverage to reshape the terms of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. It must remove special legal privileges for foreign investors, add enforceable rules to prevent currency manipulation, strengthen rules of origin, and redouble efforts to ensure workers everywhere can organise and bargain collectively."

Labour mobilised its members to sidetrack fast-track in the Senate and to continue its lobbying in the House, where the vote is, so far, too close to call. The Steelworkers activated their Rapid Response network for weeks, and Cohen predicted that if CWA had 10,000 activists working against fast-track before the Senate balloting, it'll have 20,000 now.

"Working families are tired of Washington politicians telling them

what's economically best. We are all living today's reality of trade policies that have accelerated offshoring and outsourcing of good jobs. Working Americans don't want their elected leaders using a rubber stamp for a trade deal that is hidden behind a veil of secrecy," Gerard said in a statement, separate from his speech at the rally.

Before the vote, Trumka had made it clear that labour isn't reflexively opposed to trade – but that it is opposed to trade pacts that hurt workers.

In an op-ed piece in the Washington Post, entitled "Let's see a TPP that respects workers' rights," he said unions and workers had, for five years, submitted and lobbied for pro-worker changes to the TPP. The Obama Administration never replied, or even acknowledged the proposals, he added.

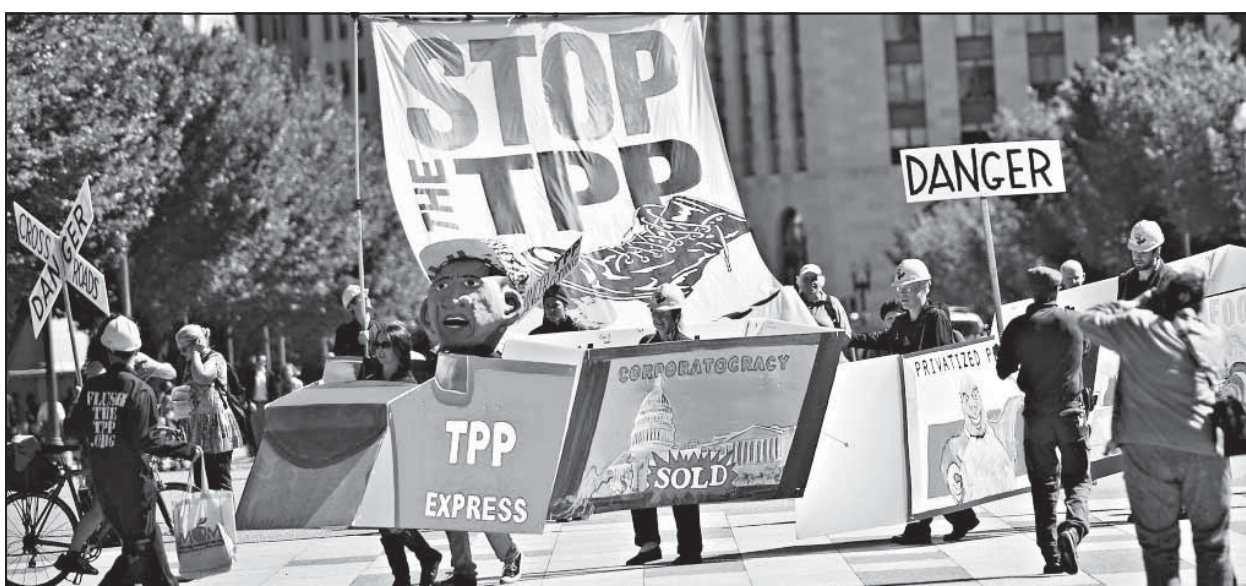
"The AFL-CIO, working with union federations from the other TPP countries" sought to improve the pact's labour chapter "and address the failures of prior trade deals," he explained.

Its proposals included the right to submit "a single egregious violation" of worker rights – such as a mass firing or killings – to the trade courts, "clear rules and deadlines for action on meritorious cases," a ban on child labour, protection for migrant workers and new standards for labour inspections and decent work. All would be enforced by "an independent secretariat".

The administration's response has been silence. "We don't know whether any of our proposals made it into the TPP, since the text has not been made public. The administration has given no indications that our suggestions have been incorporated into its own negotiation text" much less the TPP itself, he said.

Under those circumstances, he said, workers cannot support the TPP – or fast-track that would permit it.

People's World ☛



Region Briefs

According to an interview with Basir Noori, spokesman of the National Union of Afghanistan Workers, more than 7.2 million eligible workers in the country are currently unemployed, nearly 24 percent of its total population. More than four million Afghans live in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran. Najibullah, an Afghan waiting to enter Iran for work, said that unemployment and poverty forced him to leave the country to find a job to support his family. Another Afghan, Karimullah, who has a similar background to Najibullah, said that he will not leave the county if he can find a job with a monthly wage of around \$190 dollars.

Vietnamese President, Truong Tan Sang, recently visited the Czech Republic where he received a warm welcome from the Communist Party of the Czech Republic and Moravia Chairman, Vojtech Filip. Both sides praised the bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the past 65 years. The President believed that the Czech Party would play a bigger and a more important role in domestic politics. The Chairman congratulated Vietnam on the successes in economic reform and that he wished to increase cooperation.

According to a press conference in Hanoi, Vietnam, the banking sector will provide more than A\$700 million to the Central Highlands region, funding power plant construction, transportation and agriculture development. The banking sector in socialist countries provides funds to alleviate poverty and hunger, ensure social security, improve living standards and upgrade infrastructure.

A Chinese boss spent more than A\$16 million, giving 6,400 of his employees a free four-day long trip to France and Monaco, in order to celebrate his company's 20th founding anniversary and to show appreciation to the workers.

More than 24 people (including the Socialist Party of Malaysia Chief) were arrested after participating in a large Malaysian May Day rally by thousands of people. Most of the arrested were human rights activists and reform campaigners. There was increasing criticism of the country's Sedition Act that empowers police to arrest the political opposition to the government. Malaysian Prime Minister, Najib Razak, recently pushed for even harsher penalties, allowing people to be detained without judicial review.

The US Human Rights delegation to the UN faced furious questioning and criticism from more than 100 countries' UN representatives. A recent UN human rights record of the United States showed that country's violations in law enforcement abuse, racial, sexual and religious discrimination, and illegal detention and torture. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying, said that any country which went through a UN review "should be modest enough to listen to the advice of various countries, work hard to resolve its own human rights problems and improve its human rights status".

The Vietnam of Friendship Organizations (VUFO)

&

The Cuban Institute of Friendship With The People (ICAP)

VII Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of Solidarity with Cuba

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam will be the venue of the VII Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of Solidarity with Cuba from September 8th to 9th, 2015, in the capital city of Hanoi. Its celebration constitutes another action aimed at strengthening the friendship and solidarity among our respective nations.

The event will take place in the year of the 55th anniversary of the creation of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples and the 70th anniversary of the Proclamation of Vietnam Independence. Undoubtedly, the Conference will be a further example of the excellent and fraternal relations between Cuba and Vietnam.

Main topics to be discussed during the conference

Role of the solidarity organizations with Cuba in the demand for the lifting of the economical, financial and trade blockade against Cuba as the main obstacle for its development.

Strategies to strengthen the solidarity movement with Cuba through alternative media and for spreading the reality of Cuban social, political and economical life.

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



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A sad reflection

Domestic violence is much spoken about lately and rightly so. The situation is pretty grim and is not getting any better. Many attempts are made to combat it and educating young people on how to behave is an important part of it. A recent survey on behalf of Our Watch – the national organisation to prevent violence against women

and their children – revealed shocking results.

Three thousand 12 to 24-year-olds were interviewed as part of the campaign to combat domestic violence. One in three young people believes “exerting control over someone is not a form of violence”. One in six respondents believed women should know their place, and one in four thought it was normal for men to pressure women into sex.

These views are a sad reflection on a society which does not respect women in the first place. It is true that many young people get information/disinformation from porn and pop culture. But it is also very disturbing that some of these disgusting ideas are being promoted in schools by chaplains who are supposed to provide “support” and religious studies to students.

The material they are using in regards to women is degrading and

backward. The sooner the Department of Education looks into it the better. Violence against women and children is unacceptable under any circumstances.

Mati English
Sydney

Deep science funding cuts on the horizon

The Federal Budget shows that while there is a welcome reprieve for science funding in 2015-16, further deep cuts of around \$290 million to key Australian science and research programs lie on the horizon.

Despite immediate relief for the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure scheme (NCRIS) and an ongoing commitment to establish a Medical Research Future

Fund, overall funding for science in Australia will continue to decline.

It's great that NCRIS facilities will continue to be supported for the next two years but significant reductions to block grants to researchers in universities is like taking engines off the jumbo jet.

You need to fund the scientists as well as the tools they need to do their work, it can't be one or the other. NCRIS needs a long-term sustainable funding model.

While there are forecast selective cuts there have also been selective increases, and we look forward to seeing those increases sustained into the future.

The government has committed to working with the Australian Chief Scientist and the Commonwealth Science Council to develop a national strategy for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). This is a welcome move,

but it is absolutely imperative that this strategy is linked to significant additional funding for the sector, and that this funding begins to flow soon.

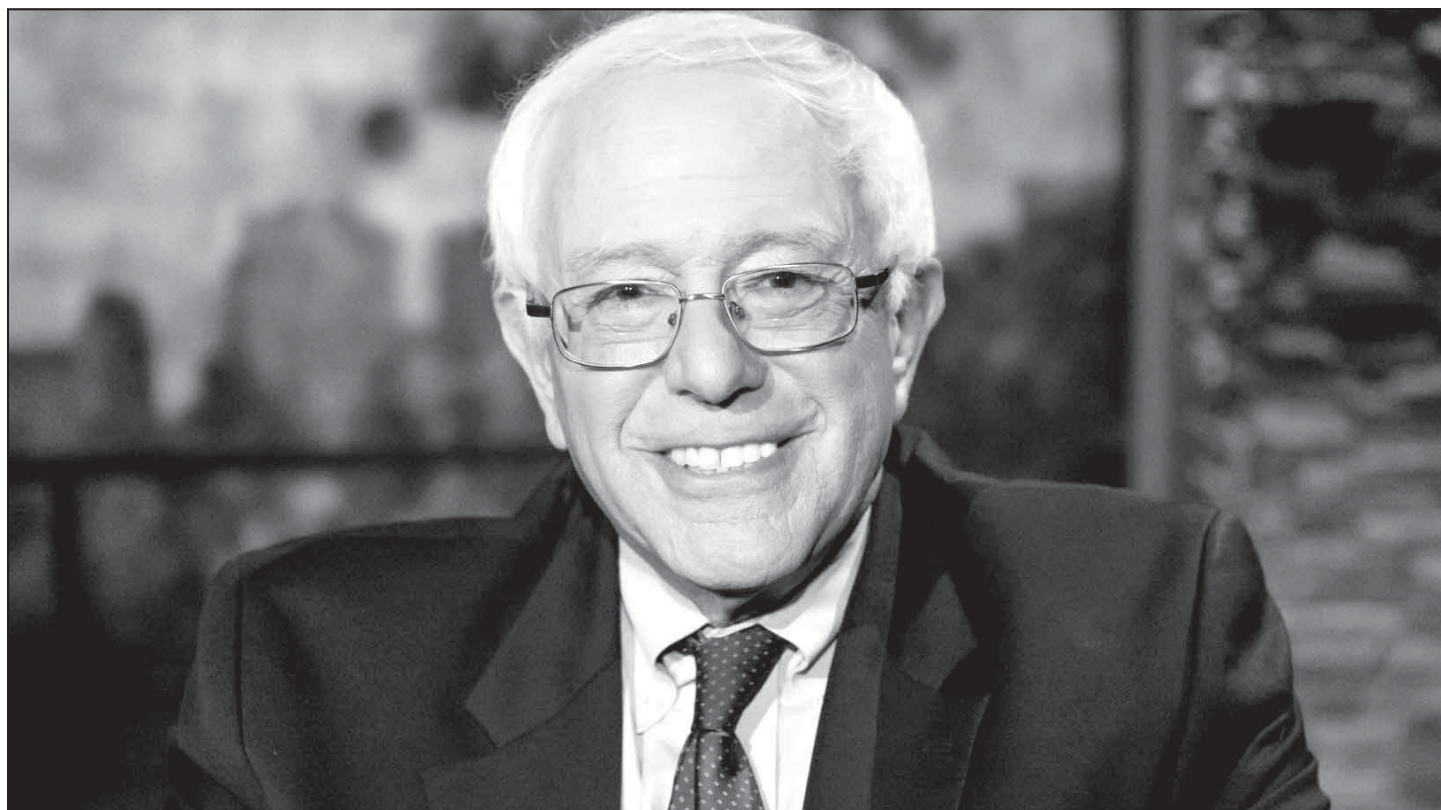
The Industry Minister and Prime Minister say they want to see science play a greater role with industry and yet in this budget we're seeing nearly \$30 million cut from Cooperative Research Centres that are designed to help improve collaboration with business. What will replace them in generating jobs from research and development?

As the mining boom slows, this should be a time of growth in science funding to allow us to better prepare for the knowledge economy we need. Instead our future prosperity is at risk.

Professor Andrew Holmes.
Australian Academy of Science

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland



US presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders.

Candidates and capitalism

“Can somebody who is not a billionaire [and] who stands for working families actually win an election in which billionaires are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into the election?” That’s the question posed by US presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders, a senator from Vermont who is seeking to become the Democratic nominee for President.

“I think I’m the only candidate who’s prepared to take on the billionaire class which now controls our economy, and increasingly controls the political life of this country,” Sanders said in a TV interview. In addition, he championed “bold leadership” to tackle the climate crisis, and voiced clear opposition to the pending Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact.

“I think what the American people are saying is that at a time when 99 percent of all new income is going to the top 1 percent, and when the top 0.1 percent owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent, maybe it’s time for a real political shake-up in this country.

“I get very frightened about the future of American democracy when [elections] become a battle between billionaires,” he added.

Some of us would say that “American democracy” has been in deep trouble for a long time but it’s refreshing to see a progressive position being taken by a mainstream candidate, even if his chances of defeating Hillary Clinton are slim. Mrs Clinton has a very well stuffed war-chest and backers with very deep pockets. As Sanders says, “Hillary Clinton has been part of the political establishment for many, many years.”

Nevertheless, many ordinary people have already given Sanders their support. The progressive presidential candidate raised \$1.5 million online in only one day after announcing his bid. 35,000 people donated just over \$40 each.

It may not be enough to defeat the big corporations and their political machine, but it is good to know that despite all the relentless propaganda and the corrupt practices there are still plenty of Americans prepared to fight the good fight.

In an article on privatisation in the US on the *Common Dreams* website, Paul Buchheit listed a litany of capitalist ploys, ambitions and grasping practices that taken together are simply gob-smacking. Climate change, for example: to most of us, it is a crisis threatening our very future and requiring concerted government action to be taken “without fear or favour”. Capitalism sees it differently, however.

According to former World Bank Chief Economist Nicholas Stern, climate change is “the greatest market failure the world has seen.” But not for the canny ones. As the Bloomberg news agency reports, “Wall Street firms are investing in businesses that will profit as the planet gets hotter.” Reminds me of the old definition of a capitalist as someone who, on his way to the gallows, will try to sell you some rope for the noose.

And what about the things that are essential to sustain life, like food and water, not to mention health care? A water security expert in

the US actually suggested that “One promising solution is to create water markets that allow people to buy and sell rights to use water.” Only a capitalist could see that as a “solution”! And of course, corporations are greedily eyeing the privatisation of water supply as a potential profit bonanza.

And why not? A 2009 analysis of US water and sewer utilities by Food and Water Watch found that private companies charge up to 80 percent more for water and 100 percent more for sewer services! The same global corporations are seeking to privatise water supply services in Australia, in search of similar profits.

As for health care, the almost totally privatised US system is “the most expensive in the developed world, with the price of common surgeries anywhere from three to ten times higher than in much of Europe, and with 43 percent [nearly half!] of sick Americans skipping doctor’s visits and/or medication purchases in 2011 because of excessive costs”. The US system is the preferred model for the Abbott government.

Banking began as entirely made up of private for-profit companies, but eventually life demanded that governments establish publicly owned banks, as essential components of a well run economy. In more recent years, as capitalists desperately searched for new sources of profit, the public banks were also disposed of by obliging governments.

Buchheit points out that “thanks to private banks, interest claims one out of every three dollars that we spend”, and that by the time we retire nearly half of our superannuation package “is lost to the banks”.

However, “the normally privatisation-minded *Wall Street Journal* admits that the public Bank of North Dakota (BND) ‘is more profitable than Goldman Sachs Group Inc, has a better credit rating than JP Morgan Chase & Co and hasn’t seen profit growth drop since 2003’.” Meanwhile, in the US, “at least \$2.2 trillion per year in tax expenditures, tax underpayments, tax havens, and corporate non-payment go mostly to the very rich, the most brazen of whom make the astonishing claim that their hedge fund income should be taxed at a much lower rate than a teacher’s income.

“Their tax breaks are augmented by the payroll tax rate limit, which allows multimillionaires to pay a tiny percentage compared to middle-income earners; by high-risk derivatives that are the first to be paid off in a bank collapse; and by a bankruptcy law that allows businesses, but not students, to get out of debt.”

Buchheit makes the relevant observation that “At the heart of privatisation is a disdain for government and a distrust of society, and a mindless individualism that leaves little room for cooperation. ... Adherents of privatisation demand ‘freedom’ unless they need the government to intervene on their behalf.”

He also notes that “The people in position to take from society seek to rationalise their actions ... through the philosophy of Ayn Rand, the author of *The Virtue of Selfishness*” and the views of Margaret Thatcher who proclaimed “There is no such thing as society”.

What a system! ☘



Sunday May 24–
Saturday May 30

Again this week I will devote the column to just one program, the Academy Award-winning documentary feature *Bowling For Columbine* (ABC2 Sunday May 24 at 8.30pm). Made in 2002 by Michael Moore, the film explores the nature and possible reasons for the prevalence of gun violence in the USA, taking as its starting point, the Columbine school massacre in 1999 that shocked the whole country.

It's a topic that deserves attention: in the film, Moore contrasts the statistics on gun-related homicides the previous year in various developed countries. Japan had 39 deaths (that's a rate of 0.030 per 100,000 of population). For other countries the figures are Australia: 65 gun homicides (0.292/100,000), United Kingdom: 68 (0.109/100,000), Canada: 165 (0.484/100,000), France: 255 (0.389/100,000), and Germany: 381 (0.466/100,000). For the United States, however, the figure jumps exponentially: 11,127 gun-related killings (3.601/100,000, nine times the rate in Germany!) [If suicides and accidental shootings are included, the US figure actually climbs to over a staggering 30,000!]

Moore looks at the various reasons that are advanced for why America is so violent (frontier history, ethnic mix, violent TV shows, etc) and shows them to be largely spurious. He concludes, after comparing the situation in the USA with its neighbour Canada, a country with a similar "frontier history", that the reason is the climate of fear and paranoia that is assiduously fostered in the US by the government and the media coupled with the ridiculously easy access to guns in the country.

He suggests that this culture of fear leads Americans to arm themselves, to the advantage of gun-making companies. In an early scene in the film, a bemused Moore goes to a bank in Michigan that gives customers a free hunting rifle when they make a deposit of a certain size into a time deposit account. Just before leaving the bank, Moore asks: "Do you think it's a little dangerous handing out guns at a bank?" (In a later montage, he shows us the town of Virgin in Utah that actually passed

a law requiring all residents to own guns).

Moore interviews former classmates of the two boys, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who carried out the Columbine killings, and questions whether the US school system is responding to the real needs of students or if it is reinforcing fear.

The film brought Moore international attention as a rising filmmaker and won numerous awards, including the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, the Independent Spirit Award for Best Documentary Feature, a special *55th Anniversary Prize* at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival, and (also in France) the César Award for Best Foreign Film.

The principal employer in Littleton, the town where the Columbine massacre occurred, is Lockheed Martin, the nation's largest military contractor. Moore wonders whether working for a company that supplies weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, to the US military, and the accompanying acceptance of institutionalised violence as a solution to conflict, contributed to the mindset that led to the massacre. It's a valid and interesting thought.

A spokesman for Lockheed Martin, however, defends their production of such weapons on the grounds that they "were built and designed to defend us from somebody else who would be aggressors against us". Moore tellingly counters with a montage of examples of how the United States has frequently been the aggressor nation. It's worth detailing:

1953: US overthrows Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq of Iran. US installs the Shah as dictator.

1954: US overthrows democratically-elected President Arbenz of Guatemala. 200,000 civilians killed.

1963: US backs assassination of South Vietnamese President Diem.

1963-1975: US military kills 4 million people in Southeast Asia.

1973: US stages coup d'état in Chile. Democratically-elected President Salvador Allende assassinated. Dictator Augusto Pinochet installed; 3,000 Chileans murdered.

1977: US backs military rulers of El Salvador; 70,000 Salvadorans and four American nuns killed.

1980s: US trains Osama bin Laden and fellow terrorists to kill Soviets. CIA gives them \$3 billion.

1981: Reagan administration trains and funds the Contras; 30,000 Nicaraguans die.

1982: US provides billions of dollars in aid to Saddam Hussein for weapons to kill Iranians.

1983: The White House secretly gives Iran weapons to kill Iraqis.

1989: CIA agent Manuel Noriega (also serving as President of Panama) disobeys orders from Washington. US invades Panama and removes Noriega; 3,000 Panamanian civilian casualties.

1990: Iraq invades Kuwait with weapons from US.



Bowling For Columbine (ABC2 Sunday May 24 at 8.30pm).

1991: US enters Iraq. Bush reinstates dictator of Kuwait.

1991 onwards: American planes bomb Iraq on a weekly basis. UN estimates 500,000 Iraqi children die from bombing and sanctions.

1998: Clinton bombs possible weapons factory in Sudan. Factory turns out to be making aspirin.

2000-2001: US gives Taliban-ruled Afghanistan \$245 million in aid.

2001: Osama bin Laden uses his expert CIA training on September 11 to murder 3,000 people.

The montage ends with handheld-camera footage of United Airlines Flight 175 crashing into the South Tower of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, the audio consisting solely of the emotional reactions of the witnesses, recorded by the camera's microphone.

The film is very relevant because Columbine was not the first school shooting and since then there have been numerous other school mass shootings in the US. But even more important is Moore's savvy awareness of the role of cultivated fear and paranoia in US politics and, consequently, in US life. Since the film was made, the so-called "war on terror" has been promoted world-wide with a concomitant growth in this climate of fear and the destruction of democratic rights, rights that capitalism finds inhibit its ability to increase exploitation.

Michael Wilmington of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote of the film, "It's unnerving, stimulating, likely to provoke anger and sorrow on both political sides – and, above all, it's extremely funny." And that it certainly is. The humour is grim, even weird, but it helps get across Moore's message about the relationship between social violence and the social system. ✪

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Cuba, the U.S. and the Future of the Revolution

with special guest speaker

Kenia Serrano

Member of Cuba's National Assembly and President of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples



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- 11.30am **MEET THE NEW CUBAN AMBASSADOR**
Report from Cuban Ambassador to Australia, José Manuel Galego, and discussion
- 1.30pm **PANEL - YO SI PUEDO**, Expanding Cuban program for Aboriginal adult literacy with José Manuel Galego [Cuban Ambassador], Jack Beetson [Literacy for Life]
- 3.30pm **PANEL - CUBA IN TODAY'S WORLD**
with Kenya Serrano, Tim Anderson, Marce Cameron, guest East Timorese doctor

Australian Cuba Friendship Society – Sydney
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Sydney

POLITICS IN THE PUB

May 21

COLONEL KEMP AND ISRAEL ARMY MORALITY: A RIGHT TO PROTEST: UNIVERSITY AS JUDGE AND JURY

David Brophy, Dr, University of Sydney;
Michael Bull, Journalist, *New Matilda*;

May 28

AUSTRALIA'S SHAME: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: CAUSES/SOLUTIONS – NEW THINKING NEEDED

Eva Cox, Sociologist and activist;
Roxane McMurray, CEO, Leichhardt Women's Health Community Centre;

June 4

NO MEETING

Public holiday long weekend;

June 11

PUBLIC SECTOR MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS – HOW SERIOUS IS IT?

Alan Rosen, Professor, Mental Health Policy Unit, Brain and Mind Institute, Sydney University;

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Vatican recognises state of Palestine

VATICAN CITY: The Vatican has officially recognised the state of Palestine in a new treaty. The treaty, which deals with the activities of the Catholic Church in Palestinian territory, makes clear that the Holy See has advanced its diplomatic recognition from the Palestine Liberation Organisation to the state of Palestine itself.

While the Vatican's action is basically symbolic, a *New York Times* report calls it "significant," saying it "lends a powerful signal of moral authority and legitimacy to the efforts by the Palestinian Authority's president, Mahmoud Abbas, to achieve statehood despite the long paralysed Israeli-Palestinian peace process."

The Vatican previously welcomed the decision by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012 to recognise a Palestinian state. But the new treaty is the first legal document negotiated between the Holy See and the Palestinian state and constitutes official diplomatic recognition.

"Yes, it's a recognition that the state exists," said the Vatican spokesman, the Reverend Federico Lombardi.

The treaty was finalised days before President Abbas visits Pope Francis at the Vatican. Abbas is heading to Rome to attend Francis' canonisation of two new saints from the Holy Land.

"This is a very important recognition as the Vatican has a very important political status that stems from its spiritual status," said Abbas' senior aide, Nabil Shaath. "We expect more EU countries to follow."

Hanna Amireh, head of the Palestinian Presidential Committee on Church Affairs, told the *Times* that the treaty broadly covered the Vatican's interests in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, including the status of churches and church courts and taxes on church charities, institutions and lands, and other cultural and diplomatic matters. He said the treaty had been under negotiation for about a year.

"The Vatican is the spiritual capital of the Catholics, and they are recognising Palestine, that's the chief importance," said Amireh, who is also a leader of the Palestinian People's



Party and a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's executive committee. He added that the move counters an image of Palestinians as militants or terrorists, calling it a "recognition of the Palestinian character that has a clear message for coexistence and peace."

The Vatican has been referring unofficially to the state of Palestine for at least a year.

During Pope Francis' 2014 visit to the Holy Land, the Vatican's official program referred to Abbas as the president of the "state of Palestine".

The Vatican's foreign minister, Monsignor Antoine Camilleri, acknowledged the change in status, but said the shift was simply in line with the Holy See's position.

The Holy See clearly tried to underplay the development, suggesting that its 2012 press statement welcoming the UN vote constituted official recognition. But nowhere in that statement does the Vatican specifically say it recognises the state of Palestine, and the Holy See couldn't vote for the UN resolution because it doesn't have voting rights at the General Assembly.

The 2012 UN vote recognised Palestine as a non-member observer state, made up of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, lands Israel excised in the 1967 "Six-Day War".

The Palestinians celebrated the vote as a milestone in their quest for international recognition. Most countries in Africa, Asia and South America have individually recognised Palestine. In Western Europe, Sweden took the step last year, while several parliaments have approved non-binding motions urging recognition.

The new Vatican announcement immediately sparked Israeli government ire. The Israeli foreign ministry claimed in a text message, "This move does not promote the peace process and distances the Palestinian leadership from returning to direct and bilateral negotiation." The United States and Israel have opposed recognition, arguing that it would undermine efforts to negotiate an Israeli-Palestinian deal on the terms of Palestinian statehood. But, while most countries in Western Europe have held off on recognition, some have hinted that their position could change if peace efforts remain deadlocked.

This isn't the first time that the Vatican under Francis has taken diplomatic moves

knowing that it would please some quarters and ruffle feathers elsewhere: Just last month, he referred to the slaughter of Armenians by Turkish Ottomans a century ago as a "genocide," prompting Turkey to recall its ambassador.

The Pope this week also warned "the powerful of the Earth" that "God will call them to judgement" if they fail to protect the environment so that everyone has enough to eat.

"The planet has enough food for all, but it seems that there is a lack of willingness to share it with everyone," Francis said at a mass in Rome to mark the opening of the general assembly of Caritas Internationalis, a federation of Catholic charitable groups.

"We must do what we can so that everyone has something to eat, but we must also remind the powerful of the Earth that God will call them to judgement one day and there it will be revealed if they really tried to provide food for Him in every person and if they did what they could to preserve the environment so that it could produce this food."

Francis is expected to issue an encyclical letter on the environment this year.

His top adviser, Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, blasted climate-change sceptic "movements in the United States," blaming capitalist ideology for their opposition to environmental protection.

"The ideology surrounding environmental issues is too tied to a capitalism that doesn't want to stop ruining the environment because they don't want to give up their profits," Rodríguez told a news conference in Rome at the start of the Caritas meeting.

People's World ✪

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117 Summer 2014

- ✪ Closing down and opening up "spozes"
- ✪ The US and Australia in the Asia-Pacific Region
- ✪ Constitutional recognition of the first Australians
- ✪ Chinese idea-political education at the university level - equipping tomorrow's builders of socialism

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