



Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Church and govt hinder inquiry

Peter Mac

Last week David Ridsdale testified to the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse that in 1998 he told former Catholic Archbishop George Pell he had been abused by his uncle, former priest Gerald Ridsdale, but that Pell tried to bribe him to remain silent. Pell has rejected Ridsdale's claims.

Lawyers acting for the Catholic Church in Australia have refused to cross examine surviving victims who have testified at the hearings, despite statements from Commission chairman Peter McClellan that they should do so if they are arguing that the witnesses have given false evidence or made a mistake.

The lawyers say they declined to cross examine "out of respect for the survivor witnesses". However, if Pell did attend the hearings in person, he himself could be cross examined and his testimony might provide grounds for a criminal prosecution.

The Church is also resorting to the "Ellis defence", under which it claims it is not a legal entity and therefore cannot be sued by abuse victims. That tactic has in the past forced victims to seek redress under a scheme run by the Church, which caps ex-gratia payments at a miserly \$75,000 and requires recipients to forego their right to sue.

The Catholic Church is not, of course, the only institution facing allegations of concealment of evidence of the abuse of children. As Cathy Kezelman, president of community group Adults Surviving Child Abuse has observed, "Child sex abuse knows no demographic, class, religious, geographic, racial or gender bounds"

Legal specialist Judy Cortin claims that 65,000 surviving Australians are victims of childhood sexual abuse. There have been 10 suicides by abuse victims within the Ballarat region alone since March last year. One 50-year old victim testified that a third of his Catholic primary school classmates have committed suicide.

The Commission has heard allegations concerning the abuse of children by members of a wide range of Australian institutions. In March the principal of private school Knox Grammar provided contradictory evidence concerning abuse allegations, and the Commission was also told that crucial records have been lost, suggesting that school authorities have concealed evidence of the abuse.

Sydney private schools Newington and St Ignatius have also notified parents about forthcoming inquiries into allegations of abuse of students at those schools.

The profit motive

The profit motive has played a role in many cases of child sexual abuse, and is also the primary reason why the incidence of child abuse is higher and concealment more likely in some institutions than in others.

Private schools, for example, are run for profit, and the possibility of a dramatic fall in enrolments after revelations of child abuse has provided some school authorities with a powerful motive for concealment.

There have undoubtedly been some cases of child abuse in public schools. However, they are run on very clear and strict rules for the public benefit, and because most of their funding is provided by government they do not have the same profit motive as the private schools to conceal cases of abuse.

That would, of course, change if the state and/or federal governments forced public schools to operate on a profit basis, as is beginning to happen.

The particularly widespread evidence of child abuse within the Catholic Church stems in part from its rigid policy that members of the clergy must remain celibate. That policy also had its origins in the profit motive; established in the 13th century with a view to ensuring that priests left their property to the church when they died.

Many members of the Church hierarchy appear to have accepted the idea that the abuse of children within the Church is inevitable, and that it must simply be concealed rather than brought to a halt.

Priests who were found by Church authorities to have abused children were transferred to another parish. This simply transferred the problem elsewhere, influenced other priests to engage in abuse and facilitated the development of a paedophile network, like a criminal virus.

The cover-up of abuse is now so well organised that there appears to be a second institution of offenders and their supporters within the institution of the Church itself.

That other institution

The third area of institutional child sexual abuse concerns the federal government.

Last year the Commission proposed the establishment of a national redress scheme



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for victims, to be headed by the federal government and paid for by all government and non-government institutions where the abuse occurred. The federal government was to act as "last resort" source of funding for compensation of victims from institutions that no longer exist.

The government, headed by Catholic arch-conservative Tony Abbott, arrogantly dismissed the proposal as too time-consuming, complex and expensive.

But now the government itself faces allegations of the sexual abuse of asylum seekers. Last year 44 allegations of child abuse were made during a Human Rights Commission inquiry into conditions for children asylum seekers in off shore detention centres. The Royal Commission has now formally requested

documents concerning another 28 incidents from the Immigration department.

Inquiries concerning Nauru and Manus Island are beyond the Commission's jurisdiction, but it will almost certainly investigate allegations concerning Christmas Island, and possibly mainland detention centres.

Children are protected by the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory. An inquiry could rip apart the cloak of secrecy with which the government has surrounded its cruel, vindictive and politically opportunist treatment of asylum seekers.

But the government is unlikely to co-operate. It is up to us, the public, to pressure the government and other institutions to ensure that victims of child sexual abuse receive a fair hearing and a just outcome. ★

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Guardian

Issue 1686

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Abbott isolated amid world refugee crisis

The Australian Prime Minister still thinks he is backing a winner with his “stop the boats” policy. While countries of the globe’s economic “north” and “south” struggle to deal with an upsurge in the numbers fleeing hunger and persecution and conflict, Tony Abbott is channelling his long-time mentor, John Howard. “Nope, nope nope,” he said recently. “We have a very clear refugee and humanitarian program ... we are not going to do anything that that will encourage people to get on boats ... I’m sorry, if you want to start a new life, you come through the front door, not through the back door.”

In this sanitised version of the reality confronting refugees, the wretched of the earth must wait their turn for however long in whatever circumstances they might find themselves for “processing”. Boarding a people smuggler’s ship is “queue jumping”. The presumption is that asylum seekers’ current conditions are bearable and safe and that their cases will be considered within a reasonable time frame. The people who used to make it to Australian territorial waters are accused of exploiting this country’s supposedly kindly and helpful authorities to settle in a wealthy country. The line is old, tired and discredited but is still carried by the corporate media; the tabloids and shock-jocks in particular.

In Europe, a wave of desperate people is seeking refuge following the collapse of the economy and social order in countries such as Libya. People’s memories are not that short. They realise it was the US and NATO that precipitated the crisis in Libya and several other countries across North Africa and beyond. There are no safe havens for these people and, while a policy of burning people smuggling boats has been adopted by European authorities, there is an acceptance that a program for settlement has to be negotiated by EU members. The process will be difficult. Many European countries have very high rates of unemployment and growing racist and fascist movements.

In our region, we have seen Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia adopt and then step away from a version of Abbott’s “turn back the boats” stance. After a brief application of his methods, the Malaysian and Indonesian governments have decided to give sanctuary for 12 months to the refugees arriving in their territorial waters. The latest surge in arrivals has been due to a humanitarian disaster across the Bay of Bengal region, including among the stateless Rohingya people from Myanmar.

Before the policy U-turn, it was left to the poor fishermen and community of Tamiang in Indonesia to properly express our common humanity with acts of generosity and welcome. “You know they were on the boats for so long, they lost everything, we felt pity for them,” one of the fishermen said. Compare this with the Australian prime minister’s oafish “Nope, nope, nope” comments.

Australia’s reputation with regard to the acceptance of refugees has been thoroughly trashed. Indonesia, which is not a signatory to the UN convention on refugees, has shown greater responsibility than Australia in recent times. Officials of the Indonesian and Malaysian governments have rightly criticised Abbott for failing to live up to commitments made to the international community.

There will be tensions at the regional summit set to commence on May 29 to consider the growing refugee crisis. The Australian government will be embarrassed about revelations of sexual abuse at the offshore processing centre on Nauru. A Senate committee has heard disturbing allegations involving employees of Transfield Services, the company contracted by the Australian government to run the detention facility.

Abbott & Co would much rather that Australians, particularly those of voting age, ignore the plight of the refugees in detention, currently starving in camps abroad or adrift on the seas in our region. This sort of tragedy will continue to play out as long as predatory capitalism and imperialism exist. But it is up to us to force the Australian government, given its added responsibility in creating a number of the humanitarian crises behind a large part of the refugee exodus, to join with others in efforts to relieve the suffering.

PRESS FUND

The stress involved in separating from a violent spouse or partner is likely to be compounded by a hefty increase in the financial burden, because the government wants to increase fees for Family Court and Federal Circuit Court divorce cases by \$66.6 million. Just under half will be used for upgrading court buildings and procedures; the rest will be pocketed by the government. That’s consistent with the ultra-conservative religious view that marriage is instituted by God, and divorce is a blasphemy for which separating couples must suffer a heavy penalty. But speaking of costs, we really need Press Fund contributions, which help 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:

Tom Costa \$20, Mark Mannion \$5, “Round Figure” \$10, S Talbot \$10

This week’s total: \$45 Progressive total \$3,430

Subjected to violent beatings in prison

Shireen Issawi, the sister of legendary hunger striker Samer Issawi, has told Hanan Al Khateeb, attorney of the Council of Prisoner Affairs, that she suffered a brutal beating in Hasharon prison on May 3, 2015.

Shireen stated that on that day, prison guards invaded the female prisoners section under the false pretext of one prison guard having been attacked. When Shireen and five other female prisoners protested against being taken into isolation, she was assaulted and savagely beaten on all parts of her body, leading to injuries and severe pain. She added that the prison guards were shouting at the prisoners wildly, and threatened

to post pictures of the beatings on social media.

She was taken into isolation in Ramleh prison, under the false accusation of incitement. She was subjected to an internal trial and then sentenced to seven days of isolation, and one month without family visits.

She described her conditions in isolation as being extremely harsh, being kept in a tiny cell that has no bed, forcing her to sleep on the floor, and without the presence of a washing basin or any other commodities whatsoever. She was completely isolated from the world, and her cantina account was closed, adding to the harshness of her condition by not being able to buy any food.

Shireen Issawi is a lawyer, and this is the second time she is being imprisoned, without any charges or fair trial. She has been in detention for well over a year, and was granted the Al Karama Human Rights Award in December 2014, while imprisoned, for her efforts in defending the rights of Palestinian political prisoners.

Both of her brothers, Samer and Medhat, are also still being detained. Samer Issawi, who waged the longest hunger strike in history against his former detention, recently had his old sentence of 30 years reinstated, causing outrage among human rights advocates everywhere.

Human Rights Defenders

United against uni deregulation

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) are challenging the Australian government to come clean on its position in the secret Trade in Services Agreement (TISA) negotiations, now at a crucial stage.

The NTEU is accusing the Abbott government of using the international TISA negotiations to covertly open up government subsidies to international profit-making higher education providers.

“Twice the Australian Senate has rejected legislation to deregulate university tuition fees, cut funding to public universities and extend CSPs (Commonwealth Supported Places) to private higher education providers. The government must give the Australian Parliament and public the assurance that it does not intend to let this slip through in the wording on public subsidies” in the TISA”, said NTEU national president, Jeannie Rea.

“The NTEU supports a clearer definition of public services which retains the right of governments to provide and fund public services without being obliged to provide subsidies to private providers,” explained Rea.

The AEU and NTEU are gravely concerned about reports that the Australian government, along with the governments of Colombia, New Zealand and Norway, is proposing the inclusion of education within the scope of the international Trade in Services Agreement.

The two unions, representing teachers, academics and other workers in schools, TAFE and universities, oppose trade agreements which liberalise and further commercialise and privatise education.

The purpose of the TISA negotiations, which are being conducted in secret by members of the World Trade Organisation, is to further liberalise trade in services across the world. The final details of any agreement struck will not be disclosed until 5 years after it is signed.

“Australians should be concerned about the threat posed to public education in these secret negotiations and alarmed by the lack of transparency,” said AEU federal president, Correna Haythorpe.

“Education is a right, not a commodity, and accessible public education must continue to be provided by governments. Australia must not put its world-class public education system at risk simply for the convenience of global corporations.

“The liberalisation of education and facilitation of the private education market, as a consequence of including education in the TISA, would have negative consequences for public education. We have seen the huge damage done in the VET sector by uncontrolled privatisation. We do not want this secret agreement to extend this damage,” added Haythorpe.

The two unions argue that restricting the capacity of

governments to regulate the provision of education in their national interests poses a direct threat to quality public education for all, potentially impacting on student learning conditions and the working conditions of teachers, academics and other education workers. It is also a direct challenge to democratic processes and the public governance of education, claim the two unions.

“Across the world we are seeing strong pressure to commercialise and corporatise education. In Australia we have seen the huge damage done by the privatisation of vocational training, but we are also heartened by the widespread public opposition to the federal government’s current agenda of higher education deregulation and privatisation,” stated Jeannie Rea.

“Putting our education systems up for negotiation in secret is not acceptable. We need stronger protections and investment in public education, not a watering down of regulation and accountability,” emphasised Correna Haythorpe.

“Public education must remain at the heart of the Australian education system because it is the only way to ensure that quality education is available to all,” concluded Haythorpe.

The AEU and NTEU are calling on the Australian government to join with countries such as Mexico, Switzerland, Korea, Taiwan and Japan, which have all opposed the inclusion of education in the TISA. ✪

Sydney

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7 ways the budget will affect public sector science

While there was no repeat of last year's widespread cuts to CSIRO and other publicly funded research agencies, the budget delivered some contradictory messages for science.

1. Not much love for CSIRO

No additional funding cuts for CSIRO but not much in the plus column either.

- No new expense measures.
- An average staffing level of 4,971 representing an increase of a single position from last year's figures.
- Appropriation funding for CSIRO over the forward estimates totalling \$3.08 billion – including three years of small budget cuts before a promised \$48.8 million increase in 2018-19.
- No money for CSIRO properties, infrastructure or National Facilities.

2. More science job cuts

The budget papers forecast average staffing levels to fall in:

- Department of Industry and Science – cut by 269 positions
- Bureau of Meteorology – 102
- Department of Environment – 35
- Clean Energy Finance Corporation – 24
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – 13
- National Water Commission – 12
- National Health and Medical Research Council – 10
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority – 5
- Australian Institute of Criminology – 3
- Climate Change Authority – 2

- Australian Renewable Energy Agency – 2

3. CRC program takes another hit

The Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) program – of which CSIRO is the single largest participant – will suffer a funding cut for a second year in row.

- CRC funding will be cut by \$26.8 million from 2015-16 over four years.
- The overall program remains under review so there is uncertainty whether the remaining \$732.4 million will survive over the forward estimates.
- In last year's budget the Government cut funding to the CRC program by \$80 million.

4. Research grants raided to save NCRIS

The National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) has been thrown a temporary lifeline.

- The government has announced the continuation of NCRIS funding to the tune of \$150 million in 2016-17.
- However the continuation of NCRIS funding has come at the cost of the Sustainable Research Excellence (SRE) program which will lose \$262.5 million over the estimates.
- According to the *Australian Financial Review* – who described the funding shift as a “pea and thimble trick” – the cut to the SRE “will have a major impact on university research because this program tops up the research money which universities receive in competitive grants from the

Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council.”

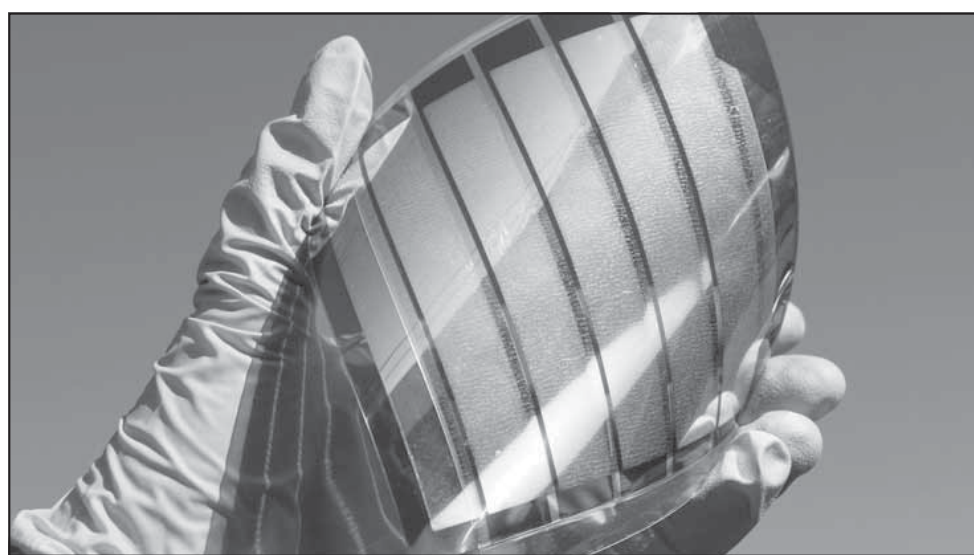
5. Some funding for ANSTO and the Australian Synchrotron

Two major capital measures were announced for the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) plus an expense measure to maintain funding to the Australian Synchrotron.

- Interim radioactive waste storage – \$22.3 million over three years for ANSTO to rationalise radioactive waste stores and increase interim waste storage capacity at its Lucas Heights site.
- Repatriation of radioactive waste – \$26.8 million to enable the return of intermediate level radioactive waste from the United Kingdom in accordance with an intergovernmental agreement.
- Synchrotron – \$20.5 million to ANSTO to contribute to the operating costs of the Australian Synchrotron, representing the maintenance of existing operations in funding partnerships with the Victorian government and the New Zealand Synchrotron Group Ltd.

6. Money for Northern Australia

There's a veritable shedload of money being thrown north as the government starts to pick winners ahead of the release of the Northern Australia White Paper. While there are no specific measures targeting CSIRO, there may be opportunities for new projects and research with private and public sector partners.



Organic photovoltaic solar cells are low cost and environmentally friendly to produce. CSIRO's thin, flexible solar cells could offer an affordable solution to meeting the needs of increasing energy demands around the world.

- Northern cattle supply chains – an extra \$101.3 million over four years to improve cattle supply chains in the north, “drawing on the CSIRO's state of the art logistics modelling.”
- Tropical health research – \$15.3 million for NHMRC to invest into research into exotic disease threats to Northern Australia and the region, build collaboration and capacity in the health and medical research workforce. An extra \$8.5 million over four years to establish an Australian Tropical Medicine Commercialisation grants program to commercialise therapeutics and diagnostics in tropical medicine.

7. What about the rest?

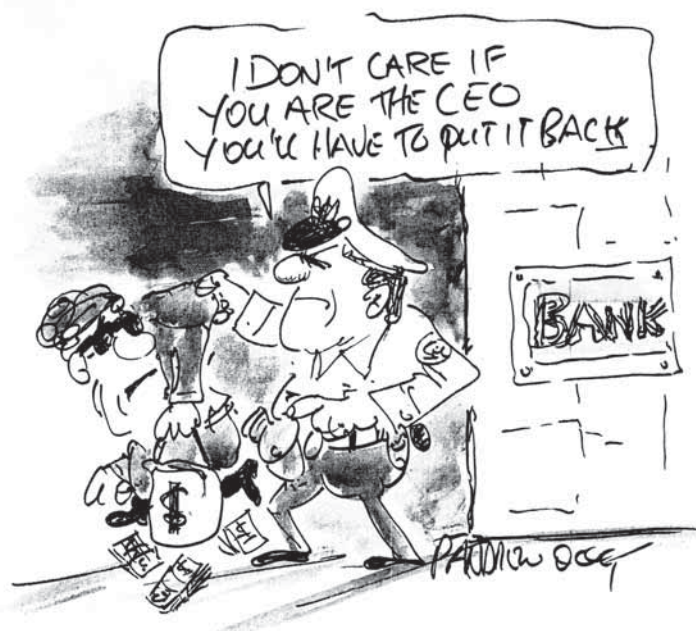
It's a mix of the good, the bad and the ugly.

- \$27.3 million cut from the Entrepreneurs' Infrastructure Program.
- \$31.7 million cut from Industry grant programs including Commercialisation Australia, Enterprise Connect and Industry Innovation Precincts.

- Plans to abolish the CSIRO Environment Strategic Advisory Committee, with the function relocated to a flagship advisory committee.
- CSIRO Marine National Facility Steering Committee to become a subcommittee under the CSIRO Board.
- \$4 million to establish Bjorn Lomborg's Australian Consensus centre. Venue TBA.
- \$9.4 million for the Antarctic to maintain station operations and science projects.
- \$6.1 million to extend the Climate Change Authority until December 31, 2016.
- \$100.0 million for the Reef Trust to support the delivery of priority projects in the Great Barrier Reef.
- \$234.7 million to enhance the core capacity of the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- \$22.7 million cut from the Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program through a reduction in funding for water buybacks.
- Introducing a \$100 million expenditure cap on the Research and Development tax incentive.

CSIRO Staff Campaigns ★

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Taking Issue – Chelman Lentz

Plan reveals Australia's colonial status

Last week US assistant defence secretary David Shear announced to a Congressional hearing that the United States would soon be basing B-1 Lancer bombers and surveillance aircraft in Australia as a deterrent to China's "destabilising effect" in the South China Sea.

This move is, in fact, part of the USA's pre-existing "pivot to Asia" strategy, which aims to gradually emplace a blockade on China, so the USA can strangle China economically by 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 USA that allows "enhanced aircraft cooperation initiatives." It has already had heavy bombers (B-52s) deployed in Australia, though the justification at this stage is that these have only been "visits" for exercises and training.

For the US Defence forces it is apparently OK to inform their own Congress about their plans for further deployment of military forces before informing the government of one of their most obviously obsequious colonies of their intentions.

However, the Chinese government almost immediately issued a statement expressing "serious concern", declaring it would "resolutely uphold its territorial sovereignty" and warning the United States to "talk and act cautiously and not take any actions that are risky or provocative".

Following the Chinese reaction, the Australian Prime Minister Abbott and his Defence Minister Andrews were soon claiming that the US government had contacted them to advise

that the official had "misspoke" and as far as the PM understood, "the US does not have any plans to base those aircraft in Australia."

Abbott's statement betrays the real relationship between Australia and the United States – Abbott "understands" the Americans have no "plans" at present for basing aircraft in Australia, but there is no independent Australian view on the matter.

Contrast this with the government view on refugees and immigration – "We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come."

The Pentagon's spin is that "the specifics of future force posture cooperation are yet to be finalised." This is an admission that the US does not regard the current status of "visits" and deployments as having reached their limit, whether or not the US will involve the Australian government in planning further development of US facilities in Australia, or whether it merely expects Australia to go along with whatever it decides.

The mention of the planned basing of B-1s in Australia was not the only thing the US Assistant Defence Secretary mentioned to the Congressional hearing: he also declared that there would be a doubling of US marines bound for Darwin, so as to maintain a "very strong continued posture ... and to continue ensuring peace and stability in the region".

That peace of course is the peace of Pax Americana, the imposition of US imperial rule!

Australia is bound by thousands of intricate and all embracing ties and dependencies to the US empire – of which an expanding network of military and intelligence bases is just



US Marine Corps Sgt. Robert Cole informs Marines of the firing procedures during a live-fire exercise on Kangaroo Flats Training Area in Darwin, Australia, May 1, 2014. (Photo: Cpl. Scott Reel)

one aspect. Australia is almost completely integrated into US rule.

As WikiLeaks and other sources have shown, Australia's political, business, public service and even union establishments are riddled with US "protected assets". Our media, for news and information, as well as its program content is greatly dependent on US (and British) sources. Mass culture and consumerism greatly reflects its US origins.

As pointed out by John Pilger ("The Forgotten Coup – How America and Britain Crushed the

Government of Their 'Ally', Australia") and many others, there is very strong evidence that the Whitlam Labor government was brought low at the instigation of the United States in 1975, when it queried the continued operation of the United States' Pine Gap spy facility near Alice Springs.

Most of all, we are colonised in our minds. Much of the population is seeing itself as a part of the team, a "democracy", part of the "free world", accepting that the US is exceptional and does legitimately

maintain "law and order" throughout the world, that its world view is authoritative and the US is automatically the "goody" arraigned against whatever "baddies" are in its sights.

There is much to do for Australia to achieve its independence. It can only be through taking on imperialism – including our own ruling elites inextricably tied to imperialism – and by building solidarity and class consciousness within Australia and with the working and oppressed masses throughout the world. ✪

National Justice Coalition wants record changed

Jillian Mundy

A coalition of 16 leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and human rights organisations is urging all Australians to work together to reduce the staggering prison rates and violence faced by Australia's First People.

The National Justice Coalition, co-chaired by Kirstie Parker, who is also co-chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, and Shane Duffy, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services chair, launched the Change the Record campaign in Redfern.

They are calling on Australian governments to show leadership in closing the gap in imprisonment rates and the disproportionate rate of violence by 2040.

Figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that between 2004 and 2014, the number of Indigenous people in prison rose by 88%.

The statistics for Indigenous people are alarming: 13 times more likely to be imprisoned than other Australians; 3% of the Australian population making up 27% of the prison population; women hospitalised at a rate 34 times more than their non-Indigenous sisters as a result of family violence; and higher re-imprisonment rates than Year 12 retention rates.

The National Justice Coalition says this is devastating communities and generations of people, with so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people simply missing from their families.

"They are missed, they are someone and they matter in our communities," Ms Parker said. "Which one of us is prepared to look another generation in the eye and concede that while the solutions were in our grasp we did not take them and we didn't try?"

The crisis has been described as one of the most significant human rights challenges facing Australia. The National Justice Coalition

believes that, while the situation is critical, it is not hopeless and many proven solutions exist.

Members are calling for investment in prisons to be redirected into early intervention, prevention and diversion strategies, which address the causes of violence and imprisonment, and are urging all levels of government to work with Indigenous people, communities, services and their representatives, to develop and implement solutions.

As well as smarter sentencing, they called for appropriate focus on rehabilitation, reintegration for prisoners, and smarter social policy and public health provisions so the prison system is not filled with those suffering homelessness, mental illness, poverty or addiction.

At the launch, individuals shared their personal stories of incarceration, hope and optimism. Mr Duffy used the justice reinvestment program at Bourke, NSW, as an example of good practice, where the community was engaged in

shaping its own solutions to lower its community's incarceration rates.

"Solutions"

"The strength of the Change the Record campaign is that it consists of organisations that have the experience and expertise to identify what the solutions are and work with the public, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the government to implement them," he said.

"We don't believe the current approach to crime and public safety is working."

Ms Parker said the campaign had been generated through the great frustration among grassroots and other organisations that things are not getting any better.

"In fact, they're getting worse," she said. "Frankly, we are all tired of hearing the bad statistics. We know there are solutions and that with a shared commitment we can change these statistics."

Mr Duffy said more and more was being spent on prisons and not

enough on crime preventative initiatives and justice diversion, which could reduce the cost on the public purse.

"It's about spending money allocated to crime and justice in a smarter way," he said. "Justice reinvestment is an evidence-based approach which provides better bang for the buck by ensuring funding is sent where it will have the greatest impact. That's fiscal economic sense."

"We are also asking everyday Australians to stand with us in this effort. We know the issues and we know the solutions. We all want to live in safe and strong communities. Work with us, support us and together we can Change the Record."

The coalition encourages the public to sign an online pledge and promote Change the Record (www.changetherecord.org.au) via social media including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The Koori Mail ✪

Sydney University silent on professor cleared of anti-Semitism

David Brophy

Jake Lynch, an associate professor at Sydney University, has been cleared of any suspicion of anti-Semitic behaviour while defending students who disrupted a March 11 talk by pro-Israel lobbyist Richard Kemp.

You'd think that this finding would be good news for the University of Sydney management. It can now come to the defence of its employee and seek to remedy the damage done to his reputation and to its own.

In recent times, the university has been embroiled in a racism scandal surrounding Professor of English Barry Spurr, who referred to Aboriginal Australians as "human rubbish tips." One could assume, then, that its management might be relieved not to have a similar anti-Semitism controversy to deal with.

So far, though, university management has not publicly announced the investigation results, effectively allowing the accusation of anti-Semitism to continue to tarnish the reputation of Lynch and other staff and students who support the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel.

It fell to Lynch's union, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), to inform its members that the accusations of anti-Semitism had been dismissed.

Tens of thousands of students and non-union staff, who all received correspondence headlined "Concerns about anti-Semitism on campus" from Michael Spence, the

university's vice-chancellor, remain in the dark on this point.

Aspersions left hanging

Why is the university's leadership keeping silent about Lynch's vindication? Surely it would be appropriate, at the very least, for Spence to reassure his institution's Jewish staff and students that troubling rumours of anti-Semitism on campus have been shown to be groundless.

Spence has stated that he wishes to avoid prejudicing the outcome of the ongoing disciplinary processes by making further comment. Yet is it not highly prejudicial to leave aspersions of anti-Semitism hanging in the air, while the university begins prosecuting pro-Palestine activists on entirely different grounds?

The defeat of the anti-Semitism slur will be disappointing for those who raised it so insistently: groups such as the Australasian Union of Jewish Students, who petitioned for Lynch to be sacked for anti-Semitic behaviour.

By keeping quiet, the university is allowing these pro-Israel voices to avoid questions about their role in formulating and promoting the evidently false charge of anti-Semitism against Lynch.

Although the main thrust of the attack on Lynch – the accusation of anti-Semitism – has now collapsed, the university has initiated formal proceedings against him for breaches of a staff code of conduct. It also intends to bring disciplinary action against five pro-Palestine students.

The codes of conduct, according to a recent statement from the university, "require all staff, students and affiliates to be tolerant, honest, respectful and ethical at all times." Punitive measures to enforce these codes are necessary, the vice-chancellor has argued, because Sydney University "must remain an institution where discourse is civil."

Affront to civil liberties

These words will be familiar to those following the case of Steven Salaita, who was "un-hired" by the University of Illinois for his supposedly uncivil tweets about Israel's attack on Gaza during the summer of 2014.

Joan W Scott has recently chronicled the history of "civility" as a concept invoked to silence dissent on campus, a study highly redolent of the situation at Sydney University.

While the specific charges against Lynch and the students remained wrapped up behind confidentiality clauses, the basic facts of the meeting involving Kemp, a former colonel in the British Army, are well known.

Students raised their voices in protest against a notorious apologist for Israeli war crimes. While remonstrating with security guards to stop them from brutalising these students, Lynch defended himself against abuse and physical assault from other audience members.

The suggestion that these actions warrant disciplinary action, carrying penalties up to and including sacking (for Lynch) and expulsion (for the students), plainly constitutes an affront to civil liberties on campus.

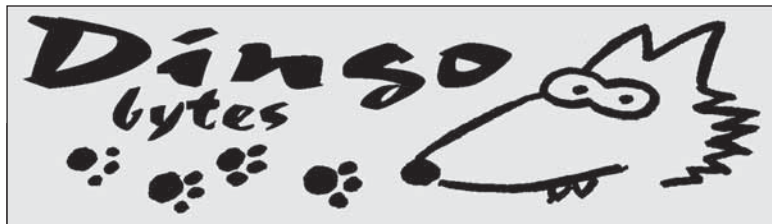
This continuing witch-hunt will be fought with a vigorous political campaign. The open letter calling on Spence to drop charges against pro-Palestine activists has already attracted more than 1,600 signatories, including prominent figures such as Desmond Tutu, Noam Chomsky and John Pilger, along with politicians from the Australian Greens and Australian Labor Party.

The NTEU has taken a strong stance in defence of Lynch, writing to Spence that it "believes the allegations are without substance and solely designed to placate external parties that have pressured the vice-chancellor."

For its part, the Student Representative Council has unanimously endorsed a motion expressing solidarity with the victimised students. David Brophy is a lecturer at the University of Sydney. He is a member of Sydney Staff for BDS and National Tertiary Education Union Members for BDS. *The Electronic Intifada* ✪



Jake Lynch, an associate professor at Sydney University.



Joe Hockey is calling on all Australians to go out and "pend, spend, spend" It may work well in those public relations get-togethers where they try to think of more slogans to "sell" the latest budget. In the real world everybody knows how tight family budgets are and how difficult it is to survive on an ever-decreasing income. Pay rises are at 12-year low. The Australian Institute of Management surveyed 557 organisations employing 25,000 workers and found that average wage increase would fall to 3.2 percent in 2016. Workers in utilities are forecast to suffer the sharpest slowdown, from 4.88 percent in 2014 to 3.59 percent. On the other hand, we are all delighted to know that Macquarie Group chief Nicolas Moore's pay for the year ended March 31 jumped 26 percent to \$16.5 million.

The government will spend nearly \$27 million over four years to return radioactive waste which has been treated in Britain. The radioactive waste material will be stored in a temporary storage facility at Lucas Heights. The second batch of nuclear material was sent to France for treatment. The government is conducting a search for a place to set up a national radioactive waste dump which will take in nuclear material from other countries. Environmental and Indigenous groups in South Australia expressed their concern and objections to a nuclear dump in that state. Iron ore company Gindalbie Metals has proposed a section of land it owns in Western Australia as a potential site for a national nuclear waste facility. While Australian Conservation Foundation stated that "the waste coming back to Lucas Heights is the least worst way to manage it", the proposed national nuclear waste dump is highly controversial, especially if it involves other countries dumping their nuclear waste here.

The Abbott government is very quick to accuse unions of all the sins under the sun. However, it is not as quick to respond to allegations that large companies are using migrant workers as slave labour, making them sign contracts that could see the workers sacked and deported if they join unions. There will be a Senate inquiry into the controversial 457 visa scheme into exploitation of foreign workers. Infrastructure giant Thiess employed migrant workers on contracts which threatened termination for engaging in "trade union activities". The Electrical Trades Union claims the contracts amount to the "most flagrant violation of international labour rights we have ever encountered". The union's state secretary Troy Gray said: "The terrifying part is, if these threats can be made in writing to migrant workers by an iconic Australian construction conglomerate, what's happening everywhere else?"

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

*Write
a letter to
the Editor*

Austerity measures in Greece

The need for change in the class structure of society

Presentation by Takis Sarelis
at the Cypriot Club May Day Forum,
Sydney, May 3, 2015.

On May Day, we honour the struggles of the world's working class for a better society.

The gains that make for a better society have had to be won by the working class. They have never been given as gifts to workers. The working class, the working people have only ever won them through hard struggle and rivers of spilled blood.

These gains worldwide, wherever they have been made, the capitalist class of each separate country now wants to take back. If the people do not understand this, then surely, the peoples of the whole world will embark on the road to misery.

How did we get into this situation? Why this crisis?

Many analyses blame the working people for the "opulent life" they are living, others blame the Germans, the Zionists, "illegal migrants" and so on. Through the global media, the ruling capitalist class spreads confusion, to prevent working people distinguishing the real "parties" in this crisis.

Every working person needs to understand events from their class side, the working class point of view, to develop a class conscience, to learn and know who their enemy is and who is their friend.

Our starting point is – Greece is a class society. We cannot properly analyse its problems without recognising this. It is not very helpful to talk about "Greeks" in general when assessing the current situation.

In the class system there are the workers – those who produce goods and services for a wage: in the factories, on the ports, on the ships, in the mines and in transport; in food processing, in supermarkets and in banks and offices; workers in government administration, in health and welfare services and so on.

There are the small businesses – people who have family-owned bakeries and other small shops. There are trade contractors, people who own small factories and trucks and taxis; the owners of souvenir shops who rely on scraps from tourists while airlines, shipping companies and big hotels rake in the big money.

There are the small farmers in the villages, in rural areas and on the islands, and the fishermen.

There are professional people like self-employed lawyers, accountants, etc.

There is the army and the police.

There are young people – students and trainees not yet in the workforce; then those who have retired from the workforce and of course the unemployed who can't get into the workforce.

Then there is the dominant class, the capitalist class who owns and runs the private companies. The biggest companies are the monopolies.

With this "class approach", we try to see events in Greece, not from the point of the interests of the European Union, NATO or the Americans and Russians.

At first look we see the distribution and redistribution of global wealth is in fewer and fewer hands – trusts – monopolies. We are talking about one percent of the population (the

capitalist class), who owns 80 percent of the global wealth.

So, we should not see the Greek issue cut off from the international situation and the interests and character of the Greek capitalist class and Greek monopolies.

Certainly in Greece people live in difficult times with unemployment officially at 28 percent and among young people 60 percent; with reduced wages and with thousands of small businesses shut down, with thousands looking in the garbage to find food and more suicides than ever before.

Hospitals are underperforming and there is reduced expenditure for social welfare, education, etc ...

This crisis in Greece is paid for by workers, the retired, small shop owners and the farmers, but *not* by the local and transnational monopolies and the capitalists.

Big business and Greek monopolies do not have a crisis. They continue to avoid taxes and receive government subsidies, while transferring their funds to foreign banks with secret accounts. Wealthy Greek capitalists are the best customers in the property market in London, Brussels and elsewhere.

As a class they dominate the whole economy and have a powerful influence over government.

They influence government to the extent it pursues economic objectives, such as borrowing money from other countries, if the monopolies approve. Government lets foreign companies set up business in Greece if the Greek monopolies approve. Irrespective of what foreign companies or foreign capital do in Greece, Greek monopolies retain the dominant role in the economy.

The people, as our great poet Varnalis says, "Coward – fatalistic – and inconsiderate, expect some miracle".

Most possibly they expect it from the Syriza government elected in January, with its program of "rupture", promises to abolish the European Union "memoranda" and to restore wages. All this however, with the belief that at the same time there is a continuity of the State, therefore continuity of the unpopular laws of all previous governments; and balanced accounts of the State, that is, outlays not to exceed revenues.

This is impossible where the State debt is more than 180 percent of gross national income.

If you enter into discussion with your executioners, you will reach the point where you say you agree with at least 70 percent of your debt, and chat about the measures covering the other 30 percent. You come to say you do not want conflict with your lenders. So there is no way out except for the debt to grow instead of decline and to accept the pressure for further cuts to wages, pensions, education and health and facilitating monopolies and bosses to sack workers whenever and as many as they want.

We should also see that in Greece, compared with other capitalist countries, monopolistic development is still far behind, so there is pressure for reforms that benefit monopoly development and belief that this growth will bring jobs and prosperity. This is why people give their "blessings" to a reformist Government such as Syriza.



So we ask, when the government borrowed 350 billion euros over the years, who got this money? Who benefited? Which class benefited?

Who got the benefit of billions spent on construction for the Olympics? The monopolies got the cream.

Modern day capitalist theory says if the monopolies are thriving, the system is going OK. If the monopolies are producing and selling their products, the whole economy is going well. This is the theory of "trickle down" effect – that the profits the wealthy elite make will trickle down to other classes of people.

But it hasn't worked like that! The economy is in crisis and has been for more than five years, with production at a very low level. Greece's GDP is around 250 billion euros and existing loans are nearly 400 billion euros.

The solution of the previous and present governments is that the monopolies must be given *even more* favours!

If the system hasn't worked, if national production levels are low, that means the monopolies haven't been helped enough! This is what they say!

This is the solution Greek governments put forward and it is the solution the EU chiefs, the European Bank and International Monetary Fund put forward.

Their solution is to increase monopoly domination of the economy – by giving more favours to them in the form of subsidies, tax concessions, handing over government enterprises, providing them with infrastructure to

conduct their operations, and giving them land, natural resources and other public assets.

On top of this, they want to decrease workers' wages so there is more profit for monopolies. They are not concerned about the unemployed and people begging in the streets and on the metro because unemployment helps keep wages low.

They want to cut government spending on pensions and welfare – they want people to provide for themselves – because that is the capitalist ethic. What should be done about it? Will the strategy of the EU and the Greek government succeed?

Some commentators say it will not work – they say production levels will not increase in Greece, Greece will not be able to re-pay loans or even pay interest on the loans and the country will go bankrupt.

Well, the new Greek government says it will go along with EU demands in order to get the EU to pay the interest on the loans every few months. The new government goes along with the idea of *bolstering* the monopolies as the key to increasing national production.

And recently the government introduced the idea of a "Social Dialogue" between government, employers and unions so that they all go along with this economic strategy.

We recall in Australia, Prime Minister Bob Hawke's Prices and Incomes Accord, which resulted in a considerable weakening of the trade union movement.

Which is what they want in Greece – because they know that only the power of the workers and the oppressed classes can turn things around in Greece. And it is true. Society only changes through mass actions and struggle.

Prior to the last national elections, Dimitri Koutsoumbas, General Secretary of KKE (Communist Party of Greece) said that regardless of who wins, the day after the elections people will be in the streets fighting for their rights. He was correct.

Day by day workers are waging industrial campaigns, students are protesting, pensioners

Big business and Greek monopolies do not have a crisis. They continue to avoid taxes and receive government subsidies, while transferring their funds to foreign banks with secret accounts.

The dilemma of soy

Since 1996, when Argentina began planting genetically modified soy, its expansion has resulted in the displacement of local farmers and has thus compromised the country's food security. **Fabiana Frayssinet** reports on these and other adverse effects of industrial soy production.

Industrial soy production continues to expand in Argentina, pushing small farmers out of the countryside and replacing other crops and cattle.

It presents a challenge in a country where 70 percent of the food consumed comes from family farms, but which also needs the foreign exchange brought in by what has been dubbed "green gold".

In 2013, exports of soybeans, soybean meal and soybean oil brought in US\$23.2 billion, representing 26 percent of the country's total sales abroad, according to the business chamber that represents producers of grains and cereals, the Camara de la Industria Aceitera-Centro de Exportadores de Cereales. That makes transgenic soybeans Argentina's main source of foreign currency. And the soybean production chain accounts for 5.5% of GDP and 10% of tax revenue.

"Above and beyond the questions of taxes or added value, without a doubt soy is the biggest contributor in the chain of oilseed production, in exports and in the surplus of dollars that it brings the economy," economist Luciano Cohan told Inter Press Service.

"Without the dollars brought in by soy, the economy of the country would have to make a tremendous adjustment," added the author of "El aporte de la cadena de soja a la economía argentina" ("The soybean chain's contribution to the Argentine economy").

Soy, which covers 31 million hectares, is Argentina's leading crop. In 1990, there were only 4.8 million hectares of soy, according to the Asociación de la Cadena de la Soja (ACSOJA), the soy industry association.

Cohan said the expansion began in 1996, when genetically modified soy began to be planted, and it picked up speed in 2008, when producers began to grow soy to the detriment of other crops like wheat, after a crisis in rural areas due to a conflict between agribusiness and the centre-left government.

"Due to several reasons, [genetically modified] soy can be seen as a less risky crop than other activities," he said. "For example, it is much cheaper to produce soy than maize, beef or dairy products, and it is a crop that has fewer regulatory risks."

"Soyisation' in terms of monoculture is not a positive thing," agronomist and academic Carlos Toledo says.

"But if producers don't see better conditions for planting other crops, and if soy brings in the best tax revenue for the state, we find ourselves in a vicious circle that is very dangerous for the sustainability of our production systems."

Impact on farming

"The growth in the surface area covered by soy and by transgenic commodities in general has meant the displacement of local farmers and an increase in cattle raised in feedlots," says Carlos Vicente, a member of GRAIN, a Barcelona-based international organisation dedicated to global agricultural issues.

As an example of the impact, he said, thousands of small dairy farms had closed down. "In the [eastern] province of Buenos Aires alone, 300 shut down," he said. "This means production is stagnant and concentrated in the hands of large producers, who are now acting as an oligopoly."

A study by Miguel Teubal, a researcher at Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), reports that between 1997 and 2005, soy production rose by nearly 20 million tons, while the sunflower harvest fell by two million tons and rice fell by 0.5 million.

In the central province of Cordoba alone, the increase in soy production led to a shrinking of the number of head of cattle by 17 percent. The production of fruit and vegetables around the big cities also went down, "driving up the

prices of widely-consumed basic products like tomatoes and potatoes", the report said.

Soybean production has also led to greater concentration of land ownership, while driving up the value of land, GRAIN said. In 2010, more than 50% of soybean cultivation was controlled by just 3% of producers.

"That led to an unprecedented rural exodus: by 2007, more than 200,000 small farmers and rural workers and their families had left the countryside," Vicente said.

"Soy is important as a source of income to finance social plans," he said. "But the big paradox is that those plans will have to cover the basic needs of those who have been driven out of the countryside by this model of production."

This has seen the exodus of many farmers from the dairy and beef-producing area, who did not necessarily first shift to "the soy model". They moved to cities because their productive activities were not supporting them and they saw no future for their families.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), 14.4 percent of the territory in Argentina – nearly one hectare per capita – is still available for cultivation.

For that reason food security and soy production run on different tracks. The question is whether small and medium-sized farmers are being provided with better conditions for diversifying their production.

Food security

To strengthen family farms, in 2008, the government of President Cristina Fernandez created what is now called the Secretariat of Family Agriculture and Rural Development.

And in January last, a law was passed on "historic reparations for family agriculture to build a new rural reality in Argentina", which says family farms are "of public interest" due to their contribution to food security and sovereignty.

Figures from the government's National Registry of Family Agriculture indicate that the sector represents 20% of agricultural GDP,

20% of the country's farmland, 65% of farmers and 53% of rural employment. It also provides 70% of the food consumed in this country of 42 million people.

But 66% of farming families live in poverty, FAO reported.

The aims of the Secretariat include curbing the rural exodus, creating one million farms for some five million people.

"We need 50 years of investment in the agricultural sector to recover what has been destroyed," said the head of the Secretariat, Emilio Persico. But Persico added: "The issue is not soy, it's agribusiness".

"The most important conflicts we have aren't with soy," he said. "In Santiago [del Estero], we have problems with cattle farmers, in Rio Negro with alfalfa producers, in Misiones with pine exporters, and in Mendoza with wine producers."

Miguel Fernandez, the head of the Foro Nacional de Agricultura Familiar, the family farmers' association, mentioned other causes of the exodus, such as deforestation (partially fuelled by soy cultivation), climate change (floods and harsh droughts have hit poor farmers hard), and large-scale business developments in real estate deals, tourism and agribusiness.

"The possibilities of producing more or of owning our own land are disappearing ... small farmers have been driven away by the rich, as if we were dogs; they have us cornered," he told IPS.

To turn that process around, Vicente said, efforts are needed to combat other critical problems, such as the monopoly exercised by the multinational agrochemical corporations that produce genetically modified seeds, and the way they are "displacing and contaminating other crops".

"These agrochemicals and transgenic seeds destroy the soil," Fernandez said. "We are worried that even though we have land, in the future we won't be able to grow anything."

Third World Resurgence ✪



getting organised, small shop keepers are running public campaigns, hospital workers, teachers and many other groups are in struggle.

The future of Greece – and the way out of the economic mess – depends on the successful struggle of the workers and oppressed people leading to change in the class structure of society.

It is a question of ownership. So long as an elite, privileged class own these big monopolies, they use this to get power over the whole economy and power over the whole of society. In doing so they bring misery to the rest of the people.

So we give our solidarity and support to these struggles and in the Communist Party of Australia we express our solidarity with our fraternal party, the Communist Party of Greece.

What solution does the class oriented workers' movement and its Party propose?

The debt, created from loans to banks and Greek monopolies, is not the people's debt; the people do not recognise it and it should be cancelled.

Greece should leave the European Union and the euro, because in "a pit of lions" there is no solution for the Greek people and for the people of Europe.

The people must take hold of their fate for themselves and nationalise all monopolies, airports, ports, etc. (everything sold to private ownership); make the national wealth the estate of the people; have free public health and education; restore all those gains workers have lost to capitalist governments and "to revenge the dreams – for progress and social justice".

The Greek people, all people, must arrive at the conclusion that capitalism is a "tight corset". They must place themselves on the anti-capitalistic road, which is the labour movement, to escape from the "utopia" that a "humanised capitalism" can be introduced or created and recognise there can be no "good" administration of the capitalist system. It must be abolished!

Long live the class oriented labour movement! Long live the Working Class! ✪

YOU ARE MY COUNTRY

You are the field
I am the tractor
You are the paper
I am the typewriter
My wife
The mother of our son
You are a song
I am the guitar
I am a damp, warm windy evening
You are a woman strolling on the quay
And watching the lights on the other side
I am the water
You are the one who drinks it.
I am walking along the street
You are the one who opens the window
To wave at me.
You are China
I am the army of Mao Tse Tung
You are a fourteen-year-old Philippine girl
I am rescuing you
From the hands of an American marine.
You are a village in Anatolia
On top of a mountain
You are my city the most beautiful
You are a cry for help.
You are my country
The footsteps running towards you are mine.

Nazim Hikmet



Ukraine

Inflation, rampant unemployment, human misery

Stephen Lendman

Ukraine's economy is a sinkhole of economic Depression. It is teetering toward collapse. Its first quarter GDP plunged 17.6% year-over-year. It is down 6.1% from the fourth quarter 2014. Ten of the last 11 quarters saw economic contraction. Kiev depends on outside aid to keep operating.

Inflation is out-of-control. The Financial Times reported it reaching 61% in April. Its hryvnia currency is headed toward becoming worthless toilet paper. It is worth less than 5 cents to the dollar. Adjusted for its decline, real inflation tops 270 percent year-over-year.

Living standards are plunging. Poverty is a growth industry. So are unemployment, underemployment and human misery. Most Ukrainians struggle to get by. They can't make ends meet. Skyrocketing prices makes basic goods and services unaffordable.

IMF diktats exacerbate already untenable conditions. They include laying off government employees, wage cuts, abolishing pensions for some retired workers, freezing them for others, and major cuts in other social benefits en route to eliminating them altogether – a prescription for economic collapse and perhaps Maidan II [2014 Maidan Square clashes].

Corruption is out-of-control. Grand theft is standard practice. Government, military and business officials are on the take. Lucrative schemes are created to plunder the state budget.

Ordinary Ukrainians suffer hugely. A billionaire oligarch class amassed enormous wealth – the old-fashioned way by stealing it. At the

same time, millions of dollars are spent daily waging war on Donbass. Ukraine budgeted US\$5.4 billion for so-called defence and national security at a time it is bankrupt and can't pay creditors.

Its declared debt moratorium is a step toward default except for IMF loans.

Growing numbers of Ukrainians are justifiably angry. Intermittent protests have erupted since late last year – the latest last week. Crowds demonstrated outside parliament in Kiev. They burnt tires. They tried breaking into the building. Clashes with police erupted. Arrests and injuries followed.

Ukrainians are angry over economic crisis conditions affecting them hugely – including soaring prices, rising unemployment, poverty or sub-poverty wages for workers lucky to have jobs, lost social benefits, unchecked rampant corruption, and regime officials doing nothing to alleviate things responsibly.

At the same time, taxes are rising, hiked gas prices are unaffordable for millions, and tuition fees were imposed for the first time.

Protesters oppose regime cost-cutting measures. They want legislation regulating bank credit and deposits. They want refunds on depreciated deposits in banks hard hit by economic crisis conditions.

They demand legislation allowing loan repayments at the same exchange rate in place when they received them – 5 hryvnas to the dollar instead of over 20 currently. Parliament has so far failed to pass legislation mandating it – or anything else helping ordinary people.

They demand National Bank of Ukraine chairman Valeriya Hontareva resign. They want prime minister



Most Ukrainians struggle to get by. They can't make ends meet. Skyrocketing prices makes basic goods and services unaffordable.

Arseniy Yatsenyuk and finance minister Natalya Yaresko replaced.

"Out with the gang," protesters shouted. Some vowed to stay the course until their demands are met.

During a December 2014 anti-regime demonstration, one participant said "If our demands are ignored, we are ready to take radical measures. We are addressing you, the servants of the people. You have already done everything, so that we don't have anything more to lose."

Viktor Medvedchuk is a former Leonid Kuchma regime head of presidential administration. He heads the Ukrainian Choice political organisation. He opposes EU membership. Putin is his daughter Darina's godfather.

Months earlier, he said Kiev "authorities have failed to learn anything from the Maidan. The government and the people are again on the opposite sides of the barricades."

The Moscow-based Institute for Social and Political Research's Sergey Markov believes Kiev won't let protests reach critical mass. Legislation passed late last year permits "isolating trade union leaders and organisers of protests from society, while the protests will be suppressed violently," he said.

Police states operate this way. Polls show growing dissatisfaction with Poroshenko.

Kiev-based Centre for Social and Labour Research sociologist Volodymyr Ischenko says "many people

are starting to speak quietly about the idea of another Maidan – maybe not at the senior political level, but by regular people in everyday discussions."

"The economy will deteriorate more and we are about to see huge energy price increases. This will affect not just the poor but the middle class as well, and the question is how long society will tolerate this?"

The ingredients for social upheaval are evident. Another Maidan may be just a matter of time – with perhaps no better outcome next time than in February 2014.

globalresearch.ca ☛

McDonald's on notice: \$15 and union

Teresa Albano

OAK BROOK, ILLINOIS: Surrounded by corporate office buildings, high-end shopping malls and major expressways, fast food workers from around the country marched to McDonald's headquarters here on May 20 demanding \$15 an hour and a union. The colourful banners, boisterous marchers and festive atmosphere livened up the sterile and austere setting. Police on bicycles lined the wide suburban street as workers, ministers and community activists chanted "\$15! \$15!" Two helicopters hovered over the warren of parking lots, plazas and malls as security guards made sure private property was not breached.

One bus of Chicago marchers, which had at least a dozen senior citizens on board, discharged its passengers in front of the headquarters of Hub Group, a multi-billion-dollar transportation management company, only to be met by red-faced executives barking at the racially diverse group of riders to get back on the bus. "This is private property!!!"

one man bellowed. "You cannot be here." Pointing to one of his colleagues yelling at another group of bus riders, he said, "You know who that is? It's the CEO's son!"

One could not help but think, "Welcome to the class struggle in the 21st century."

For all the attempted intimidation, the demonstrators answered with a single-minded determination to send a message to McDonald's on the eve of its stockholders meeting: People are fed up with poverty wages.

Besides nearby Chicago, buses and participants came from across the country, including Pittsburgh, St Louis, and Kansas City, Madison and Milwaukee, Minnesota New York and North Carolina.

Andrew McConnell, 33, a McDonald's drive-thru cashier in Kansas City, Kansas, has eight children and works more than one job. He said they live week-to-week. "It's very, very difficult," he said. "You have to find what you are going to do one week versus what you are going to do another week. You can't ever get it all done at the

same time and that's part of the problem."

McConnell challenged the idea that paying \$15 an hour would raise food prices. He pointed to the fast food giant's profits, which are more than US\$1 billion per year. He said, "They don't have to raise the price of food to give the workers what they owe us," adding that "every year the price of food goes up anyway."

Another corporate argument is that if they raise wages to \$15 it will push teenagers out of the job market. But McConnell noted, "There are 35 million low wage workers in America and not all of them are teenagers. The majority of them are over the age of 27. [We] can't go find better jobs. We have to make the jobs we have better jobs." A 2012 Economic Policy Institute study backed up McConnell's numbers: 26 percent of the US workforce (35 million) earn less than \$10.55 an hour.

That sobering fact contrasts with another hair-raising statistic: The annual income of the 400 wealthiest individuals in the United

States is equivalent to US\$97,000 an hour, according to billionaire Warren Buffett. In a New York Times article that makes the case for taxing the rich at higher rates, Buffett wrote that this "group's average income in 2009 was \$202 million – which works out to a 'wage' of \$97,000 per hour, based on a 40-hour workweek."

As the march turned down McDonald's Drive for a rally in front of the hamburger giant's corporate offices, the Reverend William Barber, architect of the Moral Monday Movement in North Carolina, marched behind the lead banner which read, "McDonald's: \$15 and union rights, not food stamps #FightFor15."

Income inequality is a "deeply moral" issue, he said. Low-wage workers should be able to "enjoy the fruits of their labour."

These workers are "changing the conversation from minimum wage to living wage," Barber said. "This movement can penetrate systemic racial and economic injustice."

Barber compared the fight for

higher wages and a union to other transformative movements in US history. "These young people are as important as SNCC [Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee], this movement is as important as the abolitionists," he said. Along with winning essentials like jobs and health care, winning \$15 an hour and union rights would be a "third Reconstruction," he added.

The Fight for 15 campaign announced that McDonald's workers had delivered 1.4 million petition signatures to the company's annual shareholder meeting calling for \$15 an hour and union rights. In addition, four major public pension fund officials urged the company to curb "buybacks," a recent and widespread corporate practice of distributing profits among shareholders instead of investing in the company's long-term growth and improved wages for employees. McDonald's is also under US government and global scrutiny for a variety of violations, including tax evasion and abusive labour practices, the campaign said.

[People's World](http://People'sWorld) ☛

Torture that degrades a nation

Slomon Highes

Last year's US Senate report on CIA torture confirmed earlier findings that the CIA's post-September 11 program of "enhanced interrogations" of terror suspects was in part based on "reverse engineering" – the survival, evasion, resistance and escape (Sere) training given to US pilots and other forces to prepare them for capture and possibly torture by enemy forces.

The CIA employed military psychologists who helped run the Sere training to design interrogations. The mock-torture sessions given to US forces became the basis for real torture in CIA "black sites." Captives were waterboarded, frozen, put in stress positions and beaten.

Subsequently, various forms of sexual abuse and sexual humiliation have been a signature of post-September 11 interrogations by US forces.

From the weird rituals of Abu Ghraib to the "rectal hydration" revealed in the 2014 Senate intelligence committee report, different kinds of sexual and semi-sexual humiliation keep surfacing from the darker corners of the "war on terror".

Guantanamo detainee Mohamedou Ould Slahi's recently published diary describes repeated sexual humiliation alongside the beatings, freezings and other abuses.

These humiliations are not necessarily the worst aspects of the US interrogations – some detainees were beaten or frozen to death.

But they are politically difficult because they make CIA interrogators and their assistants look like unpleasant perverts.

This sexual abuse was actually present in the Sere training of US soldiers used to design the interrogations at Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib and the black sites where the CIA held captives.

In the mid-1990s, a "sexual exploitation" element was introduced into Sere training to reflect the way two female soldiers captured in the first Gulf war in Iraq were sexually assaulted by Saddam Hussein's troops.

But this sexual element of the mock interrogations soon got out of

hand and led to a sex-abuse scandal where US air force trainees complained of mock rapes and other forms of degrading sexual abuse.

This scandal – exposed on national television in the US – was a forewarning of the abusive interrogation methods carried out by the CIA on "war on terror" suspects. It was also an indication that the sexual abuse elements of CIA interrogations may have some origins in Sere.

The shift of sexual abuse from Sere to interrogation can be seen in one official paper, the oddly named Pre-academic Laboratory Operating Instructions, a key Sere paper used to help design CIA interrogations.

The US government released the paper in 2012 following a freedom of information request. The military manual described how to run Sere courses – the mock torture of military trainees happened under "laboratory" conditions, hence the name.

This paper was used to help design war on terror interrogations and, in particular, it was used to help write White House legal papers authorising torture. So a paper written to help US troops deal with potential torture by the enemy was used to help design torture of the suspected "enemies" in CIA prisons.

The paper discusses the use of techniques which were later used in the "war on terror" interrogations, such as "walling, cramped confinement, facial slap, sleep deprivation, attention grasp, facial hold and stress positions."

It also has a fuller suggestion of the use of sexual humiliation in Sere and hence in "war on terror" interrogations. The paper says mock interrogations should include the "humiliation and degradation of a strip and body-cavity check," with the latter used to make the subjects feel "uncomfortable and degraded." It stresses that here should be a special "observer" from the "opposite sex" to witness these body-cavity checks.

This official document still falls short of describing the actual sexual assaults that happened both to air force cadets in the 1990s and to CIA prisoners in the 2000s. But it does show that Sere practices were at least partly to blame for both.

Official inquiries often skirt

around this issue. The 2008 Senate Armed Service Committee Report into mistreatment of detainees is the most direct on this subject. It describes an investigation into the Abu Ghraib abuse by General George Fay, appointed by the US army to look into the scandal, and makes clear that he saw the Abu Ghraib abuse as having some origins in the CIA-led interrogations.

Fay says that the practice of stripping prisoners nude was "imported" to Abu Ghraib and could be "traced through Afghanistan and GTM" – meaning CIA sites in Afghanistan and Guantánamo – and this in turn encouraged the "depravity and degradation" of Abu Ghraib.

The report is also clear that "stripping" and related "degradation" of detainees, including "controlling the use of the latrine," "invasion of space by a female interrogator" and "treating the student like an animal," have their origins in Sere.

It is generally forthright about prisoner abuse but the senators suddenly lose their nerve over sexual "humiliation."

The report redacts a whole series of degradation techniques contained in a Sere guide which were used to inform interrogations: "With respect to degradation, the guide contains examples of the methods used by Sere instructors to take away the 'personal dignity' of students at Sere school. Examples of degradation techniques used at Sere school include (redacted). Mr Witsch, the instructor who led the March 8, 2002 training, told the committee that stripping could also be considered 'a degradation tactic'." Three lines of examples were blacked out.

The redaction refers to degradation and appears alongside "stripping," which suggests this may refer to the politically difficult "sexual exploitation" techniques.

The same report does not redact any references to waterboarding, stress positions, beating, extreme cold and so forth, so the senators must have thought these words were particularly difficult – the techniques the CIA used in the "war on terror" didn't just degrade their prisoners, they degraded the senators themselves.

Morning Star ☪



Region Briefs

International communities celebrated the 125th birthday (May 19) of Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh. In a celebration in New Delhi, India, guests recalled President Ho's visit to India in 1958, saying that many Indians still remembered the leader's sincerity and modesty, and they also highlighted President Ho's contribution to Vietnam and to revolutionary movements of the world.

The Vietnamese and Chinese military have created a joint border patrol. This patrol is one of many activities of the second Vietnam-China Border Defence Friendship Exchange. The two countries' Defence Ministers attended the exchange, and they said that "the exchange was successful and reflected the solidarity and friendship between the two armies and two peoples." They also confirmed that the next exchange would be held next year. The Vietnamese side stressed the importance of the exchange to maintain a peaceful, stable and mutual-benefiting cooperation. The Chinese side praised the Vietnamese army's contribution, building a peaceful and friendly border line with China.

Vietnam's North Central Region will provide health insurance to 95 percent of local people whose incomes are just above poverty line, by the end of 2015, and the percentage will increase by three percent the following year.

A six-person Chinese medical team has arrived in Jamaica, providing free medical services under the Chinese government's foreign aid project. The team will stay in the country for 10 days and operate 200 cataract surgeries and outpatient services. They will also donate around A\$400,000 worth of medical equipment and supplies to local hospitals. The team had offered similar medical support to Antigua, Barbuda, Trinidad, Tobago Guyana and Dominica before going to Jamaica. This foreign aid is part of China's Bright Journey project that have benefited many Asian and African patients since 2003, and this project now also applies to the Caribbean region.

Japanese Communist Party Diet (parliament) member, Koike Akira, has criticised Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's proposal that planned to increase the length of the international technical intern training program from the current three years to five years. Akira said that the proposal would allow illegal companies to exploit overseas workers even more. There are 33,000 companies and 169,000 overseas workers under this program, with 79.6 percent of the companies violating the Labor Standards Act. For instance, 20 Chinese trainees sued the Nissan Tokiwa Corporation for not paying wages. The workers said that they only had two days off every year and were forced to work overtime more than five hours a day, but their hourly wage was only AU\$3.50 compared to the AU\$6.79 legal minimum. Akira demanded the government remove illegal labour-practice companies from the program and implement the workers' labour rights.

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 economic life.

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Gasfields Free Declaration Day

The Hopeland community in the Western Downs last week celebrated saying NO to coal seam gas (CSG) taking over their farmland, threatening their water supply and ruining their lifestyle.

About 30 locals gathered at a local property where Reverend Graham Slaughter of the Uniting Church accepted the declaration saying a massive 85 percent of locals did not want the invasive gas.

Attendees included some of the region's local identities and farmers

including Lee McNicholl, Roy and Heather Flett and Pam and George Bender, Chris Hasler and Joe Hill. Parts of Mr Hill's farm last week was flooded with treated CSG waste water.

The Hopeland Community Sustainability Group organised the event as a celebration of people-power against multi-national mining companies, determined to intrude onto some of Queensland's best grazing and cropping land.

Speakers included the group's spokesperson Shay Dougall, general practitioner Dr Geralyn McCarron who spoke about the health concerns surrounding CSG and Lock the Gate's Drew Hutton who outlined the failure of governments – past and present – to protect local communities and farmlands. International performer, singer-songwriter, Pamela Fay made the event complete with her beautiful singing voice.

Ms Dougall said Hopeland farmers are exceptional business people. Farming is a business with a finite and delicate resource and a product with a premium and clean and green reputation, including some significant

operations in Hopeland that are certified organic and biodynamic. There is no room here for CSG which is in opposition to these principles.

The Hopeland community is the first in the region to take such a bold step.

**Drew Hutton
Lock the Gate Alliance**

National Reconciliation Week

National Reconciliation Week is coming up and runs from May 27 to June 3. Each year, Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week highlight the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) in a broader Australian culture. This year is no different, as we focus on equipping our first people with the abilities and tools to make a difference and close the gap between black and white Australia. What about the other 50 weeks of the year? Is Australia, as a nation, just paying lip service to issues that impact 3% of our population?

At Youth Off The Streets we respond to the needs of a community and work with young people in the area to identify a program that will best suit their needs. Each community we work in is made up of many different cultures and religions, however they have one thing in common, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in welfare service and experience greater disadvantage than other Australians.

In our crisis accommodation service Don Bosco Home, part of the Inner West Youth Homeless Service, ATSI young people make up 14.7% of the young homeless people we help (in the last six months). This is a troubling statistic given they make up just 3% of the population.

Aboriginal young people at Don Bosco Home are difficult to engage, but our Aboriginal Services aim to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and their families and communities. They do this by offering Outreach and Early Intervention services based on proven models that are culturally appropriate and specifically tailored to meet the needs of the communities

in which we operate. Our Aboriginal Services works across Youth Off The Streets ensuring the rights, needs and aspirations of Aboriginal young people are considered in all activities and programs.

We work in partnership with Aboriginal Elders, local service providers, government departments and community members with the aim of continual and lasting improvement in outcomes for the young people, families and communities involved.

This approach ensures that we equip communities with the tools to create positive change. Our vision is for all communities to work within a spirit of co-operation; accepting diversity, acknowledging strengths and supporting each other.

It's time that we start putting our money where our mouth is, not only during Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week, but for all 52 weeks of the year. We call for more Aboriginal specific funding and make sure the government knows the need for culturally appropriate programs and support.

**Father Chris Riley
Youth Off The Street**

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

The hypocrisy of capitalism

Capitalism and hypocrisy are almost synonymous, they so often go together. Whether it's the farcically spurious "choices" offered by bourgeois democracy being lauded as the ultimate expression of genuine democracy, or politicians representing corporate interests cutting the already meagre benefits for the poor while simultaneously cutting corporate tax rates even as they proclaim that "the economy can't afford" to go on paying pensions, hypocrisy is inherent within the system.

As the leading capitalist power, the USA practices hypocrisy on a global scale. So do all the imperialist governments, of course, but Washington's hypocrisy is so blatant it approaches the sublime. Apparently blinded by their own arrogance – and the undoubted potency of their weapons arsenal – US leaders seem oblivious to the glaring contradictions between their words and their deeds. They routinely pose as the champions of freedom, and yet they train some of the most repressive and barbaric "security" forces on the planet. They talk a great deal about defending peace, but they pursue a doctrine of "continuous war" and wage wars virtually without ceasing.

Since the end of the Second World War, almost every dictator that has emerged has been armed by the USA, their torturers trained by US experts, and their regimes funded by the USA. And still the US poses as the champion of democracy, a beacon of light to the oppressed of the world! As hypocrisy goes, it is quite breathtaking, wouldn't you agree?

US leaders present themselves as the ultimate advocates and protectors of "human rights", but the US Congress is in the process of passing legislation to further curtail women's right to abortion, to bring more social services and the exercise of human rights under religious control.

The US people have had to take to the streets to express their revulsion at the institutionalised racism in so many of the country's police forces. Slavery was abolished in the USA a century ago, but today largely white police forces intimidate and terrorise black populations, incarcerating thousands who then have to work as modern-day slaves for companies that have found the ultimate exploitable workforce.

For the huge number of mainly black people slaving in the US industrial prison system, "human rights" – indeed, any sort of rights – are just a sick joke. But the US still lords it around the world as the principal exponent of those same human rights!

At the same time as US capitalism is rediscovering the many benefits (to it) of slave labour, the ever compliant US government is cosy up even further to the slave-owning regime of the Saudi oil sheiks and their equally oppressive, equally feudal allies in the Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE and Oman.

Medea Benjamin, cofounder of US activist organisations Global Exchange and CODE-PINK: Women for Peace, notes that "the Saudi monarchy has been using its military and

financial might to impose its will throughout the Middle East. It is financially bolstering the repressive regime of Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt, who came to power in a coup. Saudi tanks brutally crushed Shiite protests in Bahrain. Years after the first invasion, Saudi forces continue to dominate Bahrain. The Saudi devotion to Wahhabism, a radical sect of Islam, has been responsible in exporting extremism around the globe, including 15 of the 19 9/11 hijackers."

Despite all the USA's posturing over the 9/11 outrage, there was never any suggestion of attacking Saudi Arabia. Instead, in an act of astounding hypocrisy, the US attacked Iraq, a country whose leader had adopted an independent attitude that threatened US control of that country's oil, but had no involvement in the events of 9/11.

As for Saudi Arabia: Medea Benjamin points out that "You don't have to go beyond Saudi's border to see its abuses. Organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have condemned the imprisonment of many political and human rights activists convicted for expressing dissent against the government, as well as the limited rights provided to women."

"In January, Saudi Arabia received worldwide condemnation for sentencing a political blogger to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes in public. Raif Badawi, husband and father of three, did nothing more than utilise his freedom of expression, a crime that is apparently punishable by a medieval form of torture.

While the Saudi ambassador attended free speech rallies in Paris after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, Badawi was subjected to his second round of lashings.

"Hundreds of political prisoners remain jailed, including Badawi's lawyer Waleed Abulkhair, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison for his role as a reform activist. Women have also become the targets of political repression, as driving is still viewed as a criminal offence. Legally, women are not permitted to be in public without adhering to a strict dress code that requires head covering. They are required to have a male guardian at all times, whether it be their brother, father, or husband, and must ask permission to travel freely."

The USA, "land of the free", is the mainstay and protector of the Saudi autocracy, the principal supplier of arms for the Saudi military, currently trying to bomb the people of Yemen into acquiescing in Saudi domination of their country, and the principal beneficiary of Saudi influence over the world oil industry. As Medea Benjamin notes with regard to the Saudi bombing campaign, "In the process of claiming to save Yemen, close to 1,400 people have died, including hundreds of children."

But that will not disturb US corporate interests. After all, capitalism knows no allegiance except to profit. All the fine words from US leaders about rights, and freedom and the rest are just a smokescreen, a hypocritical smokescreen with neither meaning nor substance. ☹





Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sunday May 13–
Saturday June 6

The core of all modern policing is to have a massive law-enforcement *organisation*, so that criminals are hopelessly out-resourced, outthought and – when cornered – outgunned. Unfortunately, such an organisation is more successful at solving crimes than in preventing them. To prevent crimes you need not only police but a population that is solidly behind the police; that views the police as *their* police. A supportive population will act as the eyes and ears of the police, increasing the force's reach exponentially.

Where that all-round support is lacking (and that is in most if not all capitalist countries), police are commonly frustrated in their efforts to prevent the perpetration of crimes, especially anti-social terror crimes. Meanwhile, alienated youth are brainwashed by religious fanatics into believing that if they commit hideous crimes against unknown civilians they will somehow strike a blow at the economic power of imperialism and simultaneously ensure their own entry to paradise as the favoured of God.

On April 15, 2013, as the front runners were crossing the finish line in the very popular Boston Marathon, with thousands of people lining the street to watch and many more watching on television, two homemade bombs exploded among the onlookers, killing a young woman and an eight-year-old boy and injuring many more. Within five days of the bombing, the bombers had been identified, tracked down and one killed, one captured.

In 2014, to mark the first anniversary of the bombing, the National Geographic Channel produced *Inside The Hunt For The Boston Bombers* (ABC2 Sunday May 31 at 8.30pm), a factual, step-by-step “police procedural” tracing the investigation from the initial bombing to the final capture.

A multi-force task force was set up to investigate the bombing, including federal agencies like the FBI and the ATF, and state and city police.

(At first glance an outsider could wonder why the ATF – the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms – was included in the investigation of a bombing, but the full name of the agency these days is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Like the FBI, it is a federal law enforcement organisation within the United States Department of Justice. Its responsibilities include the investigation and prevention of federal offences involving the unlawful use, manufacture, and possession of firearms and explosives and acts of arson and bombings as well as illegal trafficking of alcohol and tobacco products. So now you know.)

In much of the USA, especially in predominantly Black or Hispanic areas, the police are seen as an occupation force. Even in White areas, the police are often viewed with suspicion or resentment by the poor, who are too often on the receiving end of a cop's nightstick. However, faced with such a horrifying act as the bombing of the crowd at a “fun run”, people were quick to come forward with their mobile phone footage of the scene. It all had to be viewed, and some of the most effective sequences in this program deal with investigators combing through this mountain of material looking for someone – anyone – acting suspiciously.

The miracle is that they found him: a young man who walks across the scene with a backpack, but walks back across the scene without it. Meticulous forensic investigation establishes that the bombs were sealed in pressure cookers packed with ball bearings to create maximum carnage.

Some of the survivors of that carnage relate their experiences in the film, but as you expect with National Geographic, there is little depth to the stories beyond the physical experience. The badly injured male survivor, for example: he spent a considerable time in hospital and rehab – who paid his hospital bills? (An important question in the USA, land of the outrageous medical bill.)

As the investigators begin to close in on the bombers, they are plagued not by public hostility but by ratings-greedy private enterprise media. The investigators' attempt to keep the suspects in the dark that they have been identified is frustrated by media who bribe police to reveal the truth. When the final suspect is located hiding in a boat in someone's backyard, investigators try to stealthily close in, only to have the feed from their surveillance helicopter hacked into and the live coverage put on TV! The advertising dollar is of far greater importance to commercial television than jeopardising the hunt for a terrorist.



Inside *The Hunt For The Boston Bombers* (ABC2 Sunday May 31 at 8.30pm).

The program's “surface reality is all” approach also means that we learn practically nothing about the bombers themselves, apart from the fact that they were young and of Chechen nationality originally. Their motivation is left to conjecture. We do not know if they were part of an organisation or not (none claimed responsibility), but no information is given at all (where were they schooled, what did a search of their home reveal, if anything?).

As with other modern “documentary” programs, this one is a mixture of actuality footage, interviews with investigators and survivors, and re-enacted scenes “based on eye-witness accounts” using actors chosen for their close physical resemblance to the actual people. In the main it works well, but the popularity of this form increasingly blurs the line between documentary (filmed fact) and acted scene.

However well intended, a re-enactment is not the actual historical event. It can only be an interpretation, but increasingly we are asked to give someone's interpretation the same credence we give genuine historical actuality footage. Nevertheless, as one American reviewer noted, “Thankfully, we're spared some of the more horrific visuals, but the filmmaker's choice to put us in the space rather than merely watching a talking head describe it makes the events feel all too real.”

Although identifying the bombers was a tribute to painstaking forensic investigation, once they were identified – and once the commercial media had made it impossible to hide that fact – their pursuit and capture (or death) was more a matter of luck than good management (helped by a tip from a suburban homeowner concerned about the blood-stained man hiding in his backyard). ☘

Sydney

Public Meeting

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



7.30 pm Saturday, 6 June 2015
Teachers' Federation
23-33 Mary Street, Surry Hills

Also on Saturday, 6 June 2015 at the Teachers Federation

- 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 Beeton [Literacy for Life]
- 3.30pm **PANEL - CUBA IN TODAY'S WORLD**
with Kenia Serrano, Tim Anderson, Marce Cameron, guest East Timorese doctor
- Australian Cuba Friendship Society – Sydney
www.sydney-acfs.org

Sydney

POLITICS IN THE PUB

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;
Sebastian Rosenberg, Dr, Senior Lecturer, Brain and Mind Institute, Sydney University;

June 18

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT WEST CONNEX AND ITS IMPACT ON INNER CITY COMMUNITIES?

Michelle Zeibots, Institute for Sustainable Futures, UTS;
Jenny Leong, MP, Greens Member for Newtown;

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A reminder of comic books' anti-women problem



Marvel has an abundance of characters to choose from for a female-centric superhero film.

Blake Deppe

Recently leaked emails between the CEOs of Marvel Studios and Sony have generated waves of controversy. The exchange, a conversation between Marvel's Ike Perlmutter and Sony's Michael Linton, was one of the 30,000 documents recently published by WikiLeaks from this year's Sony hack. In one email, Perlmutter explains to Linton why doing a female-centric superhero film is a bad business idea. In other words, that it makes no sense to make Marvel movies featuring women in starring roles. The assertion has created an uncomfortable atmosphere, with some fans left outraged.

In Perlmutter's email, titled "Female Movies," he offers evidence to Linton why the idea is such a bad one, by citing three female-led superhero films that were critical and box office failures. First, he says, *Elektra*, a 2005 film not currently part of Marvel's shared cinematic universe, was a "very bad idea, and the end result was very, very bad." Next he cites the 2004 DC Comics film *Catwoman*, starring Halle Berry in the title role, remarking, "*Catwoman* was one of the most important female characters in the Batman franchise. This film was a disaster." And finally, he reaches back to the 1984 film *Supergirl* – quite a last-resort example, for reasons I'll soon explain – and notes, "*Supergirl* was one of the most important superheroes in the Superman franchise. Again, another disaster."

Perlmutter's criticism doesn't quite hold up for a number of reasons. *Elektra* was a spinoff of a previous film, the Ben Affleck-starring 2003 film *Daredevil*, which itself was a critical flop and a career embarrassment for Affleck.

Catwoman was simply a bad film, mostly due to its director's desire to completely extricate it from the Batman universe and make it entirely different from its source material. These differences ended up being seen as poor artistic decisions, and uninteresting characters and a lacklustre supporting cast didn't help it much. And *Supergirl*, a quasi-spinoff of the Christopher Reeve Superman films, came out at a time when superhero movies were sparse in number, were not taken seriously (critically or by audiences), and were qualitatively hit-or-miss. Citing it as an example in today's radically different climate – one in which comic book movies have tapped into our cultural zeitgeist – does not strengthen Perlmutter's argument, it weakens it.

The argument, moreover, is a fallacious one, because there have been more male-starring comic book films that have been poorly received than female-centric ones. Cases in point include the aforementioned *Daredevil*, but also most infamously the 1997 movie *Batman and Robin*, widely considered one of the worst films ever made and a deep regret for George Clooney, who had portrayed the Dark Knight. *Superman Returns* was a semi-remake of the series starring the famous Man of Steel, a role in which Brandon Routh was cast. It was mostly seen as a bad movie and a failure, and it took nearly seven years before DC dared try again with the much better reboot *Man of Steel*. Since then, Routh has moved on to better things, starring as the Atom on the CW's *Arrow* and making a number of subtle self-deprecating references to his prior role. And 2011's *Green Lantern* was seen as a "nice try," but still a rather ridiculous film and something actor Ryan Reynolds does not recall fondly. The list goes

on, and exceeds – by far – the number of female counterparts.

This needless and continuous dismissal of women in superhero films extends beyond a mere email exchange; it's something that has plagued the comic book community for some time now. The email leak comes on the heels of recent controversy over actors Chris Evans and Jeremy Renner (Captain America and Hawkeye, respectively, in the new *Avengers* sequel).

The two were asked during an interview about how they felt about Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow being romantically involved with Mark Ruffalo's Bruce Banner in the new movie, to which Renner jokingly responded, "She's a slut." Evans laughingly added, "I was about to say something along that line; she's a complete whore."

The replies were intended to be in good fun, rather than any sort of negative comment about the actress who portrays the character, but many couldn't help but feel a nasty, unpleasant sort of undertone there. If combined with the fact that Marvel Studios also opposed ideas to make a solo Black Widow film (much to Johansson's disappointment), and these recent emails, it does not paint a pleasant picture of how Team Marvel views women.

Think Progress challenged Marvel's position and quickly pointed out the fact that major action films starring women have broken box office records and been well-received – and these are examples that did not hyper-sexualise or objectify the leads in order to do it. *The Hunger Games* series, starring Jennifer Lawrence, was a major success, with a total haul of over \$2.3 billion to date, and the sci-fi series *Divergent* has totalled over \$561 million.

There are signs on the horizon that things

are changing for the better. DC is working on a *Wonder Woman* film (Gal Gadot has been cast as the titular Amazon warrior), which will share a universe with the upcoming *Batman v Superman*. They are currently seeking a female director. And Marvel, in part thanks to nudging from *Avengers* director Joss Whedon, has plans for a female *Captain Marvel* movie. While there's no word yet on who will fill that role, fans are loudly calling for Katheryn Winnick, who portrays shieldmaiden Lagertha on the History Channel's *Vikings*, to be cast.

And females are becoming more prominent in comic book series on television. *Arrow* is notable for having a strong female cast, while a TV adaptation of *Supergirl* (certainly destined to be better than the '84 film) is coming this fall, and Marvel is planning a Netflix series featuring superheroine-turned-lawyer Jessica Jones. Over at DC, there's even talk of another *Arrow* spinoff featuring the Huntress.

As was proven a decade ago for male-driven films of this type, it only takes two or three good movies for Hollywood to get the picture and run with it. Perhaps the upcoming offerings will shift the paradigm on both the executive and public levels. It's unfortunate that this dilemma, as with any other in a capitalist system, is about convincing Marvel Studios execs that taking a risk on a superheroine movie won't hurt their wallets. As for the deeper, underlying anti-women sentiments present in some of these developments, that can only be challenged when enough fans make their voices heard. But if reactions on Twitter are any indication, perhaps that process has already begun.

People's World ✪



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