



Racist land grab

Stand against forced closures of Aboriginal communities!

Len Waster

The Abbott Liberal-National government wants to shut down 150 Indigenous communities in remote Australia. Its actions threaten to leave some of Australia's most vulnerable people without water, electricity or basic services.

The remote or homeland communities that are under threat allow Aboriginal people to live on their traditional country, where they can sustain their language, their spiritual connection to land and their culture.

They are among the more than 1,200 small, discrete Indigenous communities in regional and remote Australia, which present policies place under threat of eventual closure and forced eviction.

As long as there are adequate services people experience better health and wellbeing in their homeland communities than when living in larger townships, where social dysfunction and disadvantage are often prevalent.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights, such communities are also effective as part of substance abuse and other programs for at-risk Aboriginal youth living in more populated or urban centres.

Federal and state governments are ignoring this, in their determination to be rid of remote indigenous communities. The Land Rights Act of 1976 returned large areas of remote country to Aboriginal people. At that time much of the land was regarded as marginal and not commercially useful.

By the time of the Native Title Act of 1993, which recognised traditional ownership of land, pastoral, mining and tourism interests were already in furious opposition to the return of ownership to Indigenous communities. Conservatives were promising these interests "extinguishment in spades" when they returned to government in 1996.

Now Aboriginal people in those communities are accused of violating the laws of neo-liberal economics, leading an existence and drawing on services in a way that is not economically efficient or sustainable, even though they have lived on these lands for tens of thousands of years.

"Lifestyle choices"

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has thrust the issue of remote Indigenous settlements into the spotlight with his infamous comment that Aboriginal people living in this way are making "lifestyle choices" which his government had no intention of endlessly subsidising.

However, conservative governments have made a persistent and calculated effort since 1996 to erode the gains made by Aboriginal Australians in Australia over the preceding decades and to "mainstream" Aboriginal society, that is, to reintroduce the policies of assimilation and deny the unique position of Indigenous Australians as the first people of this land.

None of these setbacks for Aboriginal people was recovered by the Rudd/Gillard governments, despite Kevin Rudd's lip service apology to the Stolen Generations.

The Howard government (1996-2007) made significant changes to native title and land rights during its term in office, culminating in the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation (extended largely intact for a further 10 years in 2012 by the Gillard government).

This legislation, referred to as the Intervention, is the primary reason small remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and elsewhere are now so weak and vulnerable to closure.

As well as giving the government powers of compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal land it increased the police presence in Aboriginal communities so they are now virtually under occupation.

This close policing has led to Aboriginal incarceration doubling, to its highest level in Australia's history. The number of women in prison has also skyrocketed.

It has also led to an unprecedented increase in forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families by "Child Protection" agencies across Australia to its highest level at any time in history – 15,000 children since 2007.

These outcomes of close policing are tied directly to the policy of closing remote communities. Western Australian child protection minister, Helen Morton, who also sits on the



WA government's panel to determine which communities get shut down, has claimed that "unsafe" communities will not be supported, because the government intends to do "whatever is necessary to protect the wellbeing of children and young people."

The Abbott Liberal-National government has moved this policy of forced removal to the next stage. It openly declares it is "not possible" to support remote communities and intends to close them down and move their populations to "hub" towns where services and infrastructure can be provided more efficiently.

While money can be spent on increasing policing and prisons, it cannot be spent on establishing viable electricity, water and waste systems or health and community services – even though these services are arguably much cheaper to provide, and be supported off-grid with a strong self-management focus.

Cuts provide trigger

Western Australian Premier Colin Barnett has announced the state will close 100 to 150 of the 274 remote communities in WA, because his government will not pick up the shortfall once federal funding ends in July 2015.

The argument for the same purpose in 2010 claimed the WA government was going to close remote communities because the federal government was unrealistically promoting remote communities when there were no jobs there!

Abbott has ensured there are no jobs by removing the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) from Aboriginal communities, effectively lowering local incomes further, and removing asset bases associated with the program. It is being replaced by a compulsory work-for-the-dole scheme at a lower rate of pay, which, rather than fund work within the local community, will mostly replace higher paid jobs that would otherwise

be available through local government and parks authorities.

Combined with the introduction of "income management" Aboriginal people will once again be reduced to working for rations!

Remote communities vital

The racist and neo-liberal mindset that drives the present and previous governments' policies on land rights and remote, self managed communities does not recognise any culture or society that may be based on community or collective principles, or practises ecological land management, developed for this environment over tens of thousands years.

The UN State of the Indigenous Peoples Report (2009) observed that free-market economies have devastated Indigenous peoples worldwide.

An International Land Coalition Report (2012) calculates that 203 million hectares of land worldwide was acquired between 2000-2011, through deals brokered by foreign governments or transnational corporations from local communities. Most of these for commercial or industrial purposes, such as agricultural, mining, logging or tourism: with limited (if any) consultation, limited (if any) compensation, and a lack of regard for environmental sustainability and equitable access to, or control over, natural resources.

What is going on with the forced closure of Indigenous communities and the driving of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands has all the hallmarks of a land grab – rolling back the hard won recognition of land rights and native title in Australia.

Australia's First Nations peoples and their supporters are coming together in unprecedented numbers to fight back against community closures and policies that foster cultural genocide and disempowerment. ✪

SYDNEY STANDS UP AGAINST FORCED CLOSURE OF FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

**RALLY – 1pm Sunday June 28
Sydney Town Hall – 483 George Street Sydney**

It's time again to hit the streets right across Australia against moves to shut down Aboriginal communities.

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From slavery to self-reliance

Guardian

Issue 1690

June 24, 2015

From budgie smuggler to people smuggler

The Indonesian government has asked the Australian government to respond to claims that it paid the crew of a boat carrying 65 asylum seekers \$5,000 each to return to Indonesia. Shocked Indonesian authorities suggested the terms “bribery” and “people smuggling” could be used to describe Australia’s actions. Tensions rose as Australia refused to respond to their questions, instead citing the now all-to-familiar “operational matters” and “national security” reasons.

The Immigration Minister Peter Dutton was in denial when first asked and then later clammed up citing “on water matters”.

Indonesian police have provided Fairfax media with photos of thousands of dollars as evidence of the turn-back. “It is now up to you and other organisations to demand an answer from the Australian government,” General Endang Sunjaya of Nus Tenggara Timur province told Fairfax media.

The crew and asylum seekers have been separately interrogated by Indonesian police. “They all said the same thing: they were paid by Australian officials to return to Indonesia,” General Endang said.

Australian officials reportedly put them on two wooden boats, after spending two days on HMAS *Wollongong*. Each boat was given a 20-litre drum and left to sink or drown near Ashmore Reef, not in the Java Sea as promised.

As one Indonesian official described it, the boats were sent on a “suicide mission”. The asylum seekers were very lucky to be rescued by villagers when their boat hit a reef off Landu Island at low tide.

Relations with Australia were already strained with Australia’s policy of turning boats back. Australia has international obligations to accept asylum seekers on its shores, to process them as quickly as possible, and then release them into the community unless there is a genuine security risk or they are not genuine refugees.

The allegations are yet to be officially confirmed by Indonesian police and, as the payments were allegedly made in Australian waters, the legal aspect may come under Australian jurisdiction. If that is the case, the Australian government will do all it can to bury the matter.

Abbott boasts that he has “stopped the boats”. The boats may have stopped landing in Australia but at what price? They are still coming, overloaded with desperate people fleeing wars and persecution. The excuse for the government’s harsh measures is that it is saving lives by sending boats back. In fact it is sending people back to die at sea.

In this incident the asylum seekers were lucky to survive, but how many boats have been turned back? How many people have lost their lives as a result of this illegal, racist and inhumane policy? All so a reactionary Prime Minister can continue to boast, for political purposes, that he has “stopped the boats”.

In a report released in March 2015, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, found that various aspects of Australia’s asylum seeker policies violate the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In particular, he found that recent amendments to the Maritime Powers Act, which give the government unprecedented powers to detain and return asylum seekers intercepted at sea, violate the Convention.

Australia is yet again treating international law with contempt, showing total disregard for human life and, as Abbott says, “will do what ever it takes”, “by hook or by crook” to be able to boast to the electorate that he has stopped the boats.

Increasingly, Australians are becoming aware of the inhumanity and cruelty behind those slogans. Stop Abbott, not the boats and stop the wars that drive people from their lands.

PRESS FUND

Members of community group GetUp have nominated their top five areas of concern as climate change, asylum seekers, coal seam gas, the Great Barrier Reef and a fair democracy, in that order of priority. Those topics, and a great many others nominated by them as of major importance are covered frequently and in depth in the *Guardian*. However, to continue our work we really rely on your support by way of contributions to the Press Fund, which helps cover our operating costs. So please, if you possibly can, send us something for the next edition. Many thanks to those who contributed this week, as follows:

KM \$25, Mark Mannion \$5, “Round Figure” \$10

This week’s total: \$40 Progressive total: \$3,860

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UN rights expert denounces secret talks on trade treaties

Kanaga Raja

A United Nations rights expert has expressed deep concern over the general lack of awareness of the adverse effects that existing bilateral and multilateral free trade and investment agreements, or those under negotiation, have on the enjoyment of human rights, particularly in the developing countries.

The UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, Alfred de Zayas, who is from the United States, said that he is concerned about “the secrecy surrounding negotiations for trade treaties, which have excluded key stakeholder groups from the process, including labour unions, environmental protection groups, food-safety movements and health professionals”.

In a press release the rights expert emphasised that proactive disclosure by governments, genuine consultation and public participation in decision-making are indispensable to making these agreements democratically legitimate.

De Zayas warned that “fast-tracking” adoption of such treaties has a detrimental impact on the promotion of a democratic and equitable world order.

“It is tantamount to disenfranchising the public and constitutes a violation to accepted human rights law, which stipulates that every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity to take part in the conduct of public affairs,” he said.

The expert underlined that there is a general lack of awareness concerning the adverse effects that existing bilateral and multilateral free

trade and investment agreements already have on the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to health, the right to education and the right to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Investor-state arbitrations

The UN expert called for human rights impact assessments to be urgently undertaken, given the numerous treaties currently under consideration and the potential risk they represent for the enjoyment of human rights.

“I am especially worried about the impact that investor-state arbitrations [also known as investor-state dispute settlement – ISDS] have already had and foreseeably will have on human rights, in particular the provision which allows investors to challenge domestic legislation and administrative decisions if these can potentially reduce their profits,” he said.

The rights expert pointed out that such investor-state tribunals are made up of arbitrators, mostly corporate lawyers, whose independence has been put into question on grounds of conflict of interest, and whose decisions are not subject to appeal or to other forms of accountability.

De Zayas also pointed out that the apparent lack of independence, transparency and accountability of ISDS tribunals entails a violation (prima facie) of the fundamental principle of legality laid down in international human rights law, including Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which requires that suits at law be adjudicated by independent tribunals.

“It has been argued that ISDS tilts the playing field away from democratic accountability, favouring big business over the rights and interests of labourers and consumers,” he said.

The rights expert further underlined that the establishment of parallel systems of dispute settlement and their exemption from scrutiny and appeal are incompatible with the principles of constitutionality and the rule of law, and as such are harmful to the moral welfare of society (“contra bonos mores”).

“Because all States are bound by the United Nations Charter, all bilateral and international treaties must conform with the Charter and its principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, sovereign equality of States, the prohibition of the threat of and the use of force and of intervention in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of States.”

According to the rights expert, Article 103 of the UN Charter clearly stipulates that provisions of free trade and investment agreements as well as decisions of ISDS arbitrators must conform with the Charter and must not lead to a violation, erosion of or retrogression in human rights protection or compromise state sovereignty and the state’s fundamental obligation to ensure the human rights and well-being of all persons living under its jurisdiction.

(Article 103 states that “in the event of conflict between the obligations of the Members of the United Nations under the present Charter and their obligations under any other international agreement, their obligations under the present Charter shall prevail.”)

“Agreements or arbitral decisions that violate international human rights law are null and void as incompatible with Article 103 of the UN Charter and contrary to international ordre public,” de Zayas said.
Third World Resurgence ☛

The CPA website is about to have a major renovation and make over and we are currently looking for someone with really good graphic design skills to help in this project.

Get in contact with us if you can help.

magnolia@cpa.org.au

APPEAL – Website and computers

The CPA is launching a special appeal to members and supporters for donations to a fund to update the Party’s website and computer systems. The CPA relies on its website and print technology, in part for producing Party documents, leaflets, booklets, the *Australian Marxist Review* and other material and the Party website as a means of communication and to promote the Party’s policies.

Any contributions of \$1,000 or more will be offered a 12-month subscription to the *Guardian*. All contributions will be acknowledged unless otherwise requested. We urge you to dig deep, for your Party and its work for a better world.

Website and Computers Appeal

Name/Organisation _____ Phone Contact: _____

Address _____ Contribution: \$ _____

Cheque/Money Order: make out to “Communist Party of Australia”.

Credit card: sign, give name on card, card number & expiry date: Visa Mastercard

Name on the card _____ Signature: _____

Card Number: _____ Expiry Date: ____ / ____

I agree / I disagree to having my name published in *The Guardian*.

Send to: 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010 or phone it through on: 02 9699 8844

Thank you for your support.

Young workers – Unite to Fight

Statement by Young Communist League – Sydney District

The Abbott government has set out to impose “austerity” on the great majority of Australians – workers, students, pensioners and unemployed. Like most governments around the world it aims to make the people pay for the crisis capitalism – the employer class, especially big business – has got itself into.

This means the workforce of this coming generation can expect lower living standards and less life chances than the generation before – unless we turn things around. In Australia the share of national income that goes to wages has steadily fallen. Profits are soaring, the rich are getting richer and unions grow weaker.

Youth unemployment is at its highest for 15 years, and under-employment at its highest for 30 years. The Abbott government, on behalf of employers and big corporations, sees this as an opportunity to really hurt workers and the poor. Its actions include:

- anti-labour laws to undermine workers’ ability to fight for their rights, and to stamp out trade unions in the workplace.
- attacks on penalty rates for

weekend and other work outside normal hours. This especially hits young people – more than half the jobs held by young people are part-time and many must work to support themselves at school, college or university. The more hours they must work to pay their way the less time they have to study.

- funding cuts to public schools, TAFEs and universities and imposition of high enrolment fees, to make it even harder for young workers to take the courses and gain the skills needed for well paid, quality jobs.
- making the unemployed wait longer to get the dole, making them jump through more hoops to get it, increasing penalties for infringements, such as not getting to an interview; and expanding “work for the dole” schemes, when what is needed are real jobs for real wages, not jobs on the cheap that undercut other workers’ wages.

The Abbott government aims to make life harder and more expensive; it will destroy prospects for many people, in lots of ways. These attacks

are just the start. The government is using budget cuts, privatisation (selling public assets) and leaving it to “market forces” to provide health, housing, education, childcare, transport and other needed services and infrastructure.

This makes these services more expensive and harder to access for many people. Most people in this situation will simply go without and sink to the bottom of the social heap.

What we can do

We can take on the government! But to do this, we must get up to date on these issues and start to discuss how to make our voices heard and our actions count!

We need to address the most immediate threats – including:

- attacks on penalty rates for work outside normal hours.
- attacks on the unemployed: in particular the introduction of “Jobactive” on July 1, which will make it harder than ever for those without a job in Australia.
- pricing beyond reach trade, traineeship and other vocational courses for many young people,



destroying their chances for the future.

We need to:

- work on plans of action to effectively take on these issues.
- seek key allies to work with.
- spread the word and make a call to action: Organise! Mobilise!

Young communists are committed to this struggle. Help us build strong campaigns against these attacks! You can start by “liking” Young Communist League of Australia on Facebook; contact us and

keep up to date with events, action and discussion.

Young communists understand that if we are to live in an enlightened, civilised society and aspire to “an era of peace, and happier days than the doomed generations of capitalism have ever known” we must fight to create that future. We commit ourselves to that struggle. We call on others to join us in this common venture to create a better world.

We can change the world! Help us create a better future! ✪

Asylum seeker facts

Australians are misinformed when it comes to some basic facts on refugees and asylum seekers. Most people think it’s a crime to come by boat without a visa seeking protection and most think there’s an official queue refugees and asylum seekers can join to be resettled.

Our survey of 1,000 people 18+ across Australia found the public don’t really know the scale of the issue nor the realities refugees and asylum seekers face. Further, women are more likely than men to get the facts wrong. The quiz-style survey questions included facts based on the most recent data from the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees. “It’s not a crime to come to Australia by boat without a visa and ask for protection – yet almost seven out of 10 people think it is,” Australian Red Cross CEO Robert Tickner says. “Everyone has the right to seek asylum from persecution in other countries, and it’s not illegal to cross boundaries without documents or passports to do so. People have been fleeing persecution for centuries; think the fall of the Roman Empire, World War I, the Vietnam War.

“Red Cross is concerned there’s so much misunderstanding. We think if some of the myths are dispelled we will have a more

compassionate and stronger community,” said Mr Tickner. “People impacted by migration need our help. They are some of the most vulnerable in Australia today; they often face much hardship, limited choices and have few support networks.”

Our survey found that even though there is no official queue for people coming to Australia seeking asylum, more than six in ten people think there is. “The UN system doesn’t work on a queue system, there is no orderly line, it’s a discretionary process and there is no guarantee that if a refugee waits for a period of time they will be resettled.”

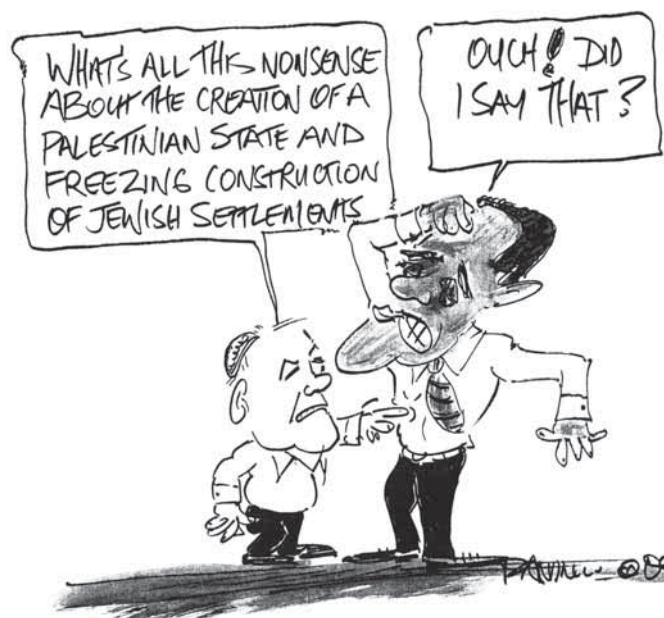
There are some 17.9 million refugees and asylum seekers in the world today. But we found close to one-third of people think there are more than four times (about 80 million) as many as there actually are, and almost a quarter think there are half as many (about 9 million).

“Added to this lack of knowledge of basic facts, our survey also found some two-thirds of people think Australia is doing enough or should do less to help refugees and asylum seekers. Younger people (18 to 34 year olds) are the age group most likely to think we should do more, while people over 55 are more likely to think Australia does enough,” Mr Tickner says.

“Red Cross works with people based on need regardless of how they arrived in Australia or their visa status because we believe that everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. Red Cross operates on the principle of neutrality and our work leaves us well placed to discuss the realities faced by asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants.”

Find out more on our website at redcross.org.au/refugeefacts. To support our work with vulnerable migrants you can make a donation via our website www.redcross.org.au or by phoning 1800 811 700. ✪

Pete’s Corner



Sydney

CPA Port Jackson Branch

invites comrades and friends to join us for our

Port Jackson Discussion Hour

Tuesday July 7

What’s wrong with the Talisman Sabre military exercise?

Tuesday July 21 [5.30 – 8pm please note extended time]
The political and personal importance of solidarity – Screening of PRIDE

Tuesday August 4

The public housing crisis

Tuesday August 18

Defending workers rights

Tuesday September 1

What’s causing the environmental crisis?

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

Enquiries: Hannah 0418 668 098

"Grow 40"

Moving Melbourne in the 21st Century

A talk given at the Uniting Church, Melbourne by **Anthony Morton**, President Public Transport Users Association.

I don't know that many of you would have come to this place by tram. But I couldn't help registering while on the Victoria Parade tram just how much things have changed since just 10 years ago – let alone 20 years ago when I first joined the movement for better public transport in Melbourne and Victoria. Though it was early on a Sunday morning, my tram was filled to standing room only. Until a decade ago the same tram would have been lucky to have three people on it.

This is just one example of how public transport in Victoria has been embraced by the public in a way not seen for decades. Yet many public transport services are still catching up. Many Sunday morning and evening services still run at the half-hourly or worse frequencies that were the norm in the 1990s. Back then it was said there was insufficient demand to justify running services more frequently. We can see now this is just another excuse for inaction.

This brings us to the public debate about where we are going with transport policy in Victoria and what kind of city Melbourne will be in the future. Transport policy ought to be led by the people – a community conversation where politicians keep their promises and act as the instruments of the popular will. In survey after survey, poll after poll – not just in Victoria but in Australia as a whole – it is public transport to which a majority of people give priority over road expansion. But we have waited far too long for political leaders to act on this.

Melbourne is a growing city

that faces big transport challenges. Some forecasts suggest that there will be 1.2 million more people in Melbourne by 2050 – equivalent to adding another city the size of Adelaide. Of course there is much we can debate about an appropriate and sustainable population policy for Victoria and I don't intend to broach that subject here. The one point I'd like to make is that urban population growth is not something we should fear. Our transport system can be improved to handle a larger or more dense population – as Paris or New York manage to do every day – if there is the political will to make it happen.

The kind of transport solutions required for a large, growing, liveable city also happen to be those with strong support in the community: namely public and active transport. Our rail network must be brought up to scratch and extended to serve as the backbone for more of our travel. But most importantly we need to direct attention to the suburban bus networks that are the only public transport within walking distance for most people who live in Melbourne. They need to run more frequently, connect better with trains and knit together into a network allowing travel from any point to any other in reasonable time.

It is regrettable that the previous government, despite promising in 2010 to build rail extensions, boost public transport services and give planning priority to public transport over roads, suddenly turned around and did the precise opposite. Much effort had to be expended fighting off a road megaproject that would have, in the words of the late Dr Paul Mees, soaked up all funds available for public transport for a generation. We have hope that with the recent change of government, the opportunity will be taken for a genuine change in direction.



Of course the main alternative to the East West Link in the public eye lately has been the Melbourne Metro rail tunnel. This is an important project and will be of particular benefit for the western part of Melbourne that has been historically disadvantaged with public transport services.

We all know about the huge problem of traffic on the West Gate Bridge. So it's worth considering that every morning in peak hour, some 30,000 people per hour travel on trains through Footscray station on the way to the city. This is around four times as much as the 8,000 per hour who travel in on cars over the West Gate.

The Regional Rail Link opening later this year will provide capacity for about another 12,000 per hour on trains. But if we get the Metro tunnel, that provides capacity for between 20,000 and 30,000 extra people to travel from the west of Melbourne toward the city and eastern suburbs – around three alternative West Gate Bridges' worth.

But we are wary of the Metro tunnel being seen as a panacea. It is a megaproject, and all megaprojects bear serious question marks due to their sheer cost. It requires an unusually large benefit to justify such spending. But we do have the assurance of Infrastructure Australia that the benefit from the Metro tunnel is well above its cost, and we expect a new Infrastructure Victoria agency will confirm this as well. In any event, we can't let this be the only public transport improvement that goes ahead in Melbourne in the next few years.

Bus services

That brings me back to buses. For decades our bus services in particular were in a death spiral. Planners saw declining patronage on these services, so responded with service cuts and fare hikes. This caused more people to desert the buses for their own cars, and patronage dropped further. This vicious spiral led to a situation where patronage collapsed and buses ran to almost useless standards. If you want to avoid losing money on public transport, you don't do it by running a bus once an hour so that only two or three people are willing to use it!

Yet too many of our buses not only run at atrocious frequencies but also stop running before 9pm, when a lot of people are still out and about. There has been a huge failure of imagination, which has caused many of us to resort exclusively to car travel even if we'd be inclined to use a half-decent public transport service. More people in Melbourne and Victoria need a genuine alternative so that they can leave their car at home and go about their daily business using public and active transport without adding to traffic congestion.

There have been some improvements to bus services recently, but this can't be done on a zero-sum approach where more buses in one suburb come at the expense of fewer buses elsewhere. Until recently there was a proposal to improve bus frequencies in the eastern suburbs – something we, of course, support – but also to remove services in the northern and western suburbs that, as

I mentioned before, have long been the most disadvantaged for public transport. Again it seemed that good working-class and disadvantaged communities were going to miss out.

We are pleased that the government has agreed to have a second look at this proposal. We hope that this won't stop the necessary frequency increases going ahead. The failure of imagination here is the failure to recognise that when you improve service and attract more passengers, this also provides more revenue to the system. Particularly when the passengers you attract are full-fare paying passengers as well as concession holders, you have extra revenue to support more improvements in service. You actually put the vicious spiral into reverse. To date there has been too little political courage to turn the death spiral around, to actually put public transport on the path to growth.

Message

Our "Grow 40" message is about attaining that growth because that's what Melbourne will need into the future. We call on the government to adopt a patronage target of 40 million additional trips by public transport each year. This is an appropriate target to keep Melbourne as a liveable city: this is what will get us 20% of trips by public transport in 2020, and 25% of trips by 2025. It obliges the government to take public transport seriously, to give people an alternative that competes with car travel. It is only what the community has asked for decade after decade.

The Beacon ☺

70 YEARS
70th anniversary of the
bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki



THURSDAY 6 AUGUST 2015

Candlelight procession 6pm
Assemble Cnr Elizabeth & William Streets 6pm
Walk to public meeting at 33 Mary Street, Surry Hills 7pm

Organised by the Hiroshima Committee
www.hiroshimacommittee.org

Sydney

We invite you to an event in solidarity with El Salvador

"No to violence in El Salvador"

4pm July 4

CFMEU Building – 12 Railway St, Lidcome

Free Entry – Salvadorian food and drinks available

For more info – Alfredo 0400 853 / Juan 0430 739 597

Organised by El Salvador Network FMLN Sydney Inc



Custody phone service saves lives



The Custody Notification Service (CNS) will be unfunded as of June 30, 2015. Please help #savetheCNS. There have been no Aboriginal deaths in police cell custody in NSW and ACT since the CNS began. The CNS is a 24-hour legal advice and RU OK phone line for Aboriginal people taken into police custody.

Under NSW law, Police must contact the Aboriginal Legal Services (ALS) whenever they have taken an Aboriginal person into custody.

The Police phone our CNS, and the Aboriginal person receives early legal advice from an ALS lawyer, ensuring their fundamental legal rights are respected and less Aboriginal people are imprisoned.

The ALS lawyer also asks the Aboriginal person: RU OK? Often, the answer is no. Threats of self-harm or suicide are common. Concerns about access to medication are common. Notifications of injuries sustained that need to be examined by a health professional are common.

Our CNS lawyers are trained to carefully respond to these concerns, including notifying custody Police who partake in appropriate duty of care.

Our CNS lawyers can also contact the person's family and an Aboriginal Field Officer, ensuring parental or family concern for that person's whereabouts and health are minimised.

Simply, the CNS is not just a hotline, it's a lifeline.

At nearly the same cost per year of detaining two juveniles, the CNS assists over 15,000 Aboriginal people every year.

It was set up in 2000 in response

to NSW legislation implementing recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, that Police should notify the ALS whenever they take an Aboriginal person into custody.

Significantly, there have been no Aboriginal deaths in police cell custody since the CNS began.

Aboriginal men, women and children in custody trust the ALS and share their medical or other concerns with the CNS lawyer, knowing the lawyer will advocate for their legal, health and family welfare.

Today, the CNS operates in NSW and ACT taking on average 300 calls per week.

The CNS:

- decreases preventable injuries or deaths in police cell custody
- increases legal and health protections for a person in police cell custody
- increases Aboriginal family and community safety
- reduces Aboriginal incarceration rates
- affords legislated State protection of fair and equitable access to justice to vulnerable Aboriginal people

Quick facts Helping Aboriginal people

- Assists over 15,000 Aboriginal men, women and children every year
- Reduces Aboriginal incarceration rates
- Reduces self harm and preventable deaths in police cell custody
- Increases legal and health

protections for Aboriginal people in custody

- Engages police, lawyers, Aboriginal field officers, and the family in a vulnerable person's welfare in custody
- Increases family and community safety
- Early legal advice protects Aboriginal people from the sometimes heavy-handed use of police powers

Staffing

- Is staffed by experienced criminal lawyers conscious of an Aboriginal person's cultural needs, communication issues and education.

Funding

- The 24-hour phone line costs nearly the same to operate as holding two juveniles in detention for one year.
- Operational costs of \$526,000 per year includes the phone line, a rotating roster of seven lawyers working day and night, and one administration officer.
- From 2007, the CNS was funded through one off annual grants by the Australian government.
- In May 2012, the Australian government discontinued funding for the CNS.
- For one year ALS staff carried the cost of the phone line as an alternative funding source could not be found.
- In June 2013 the Australian government funded the phone line again through a one-off grant.
- In December 2014 the Australian government through the Indigenous Advancement

Strategy funding round rejected our application for future CNS funding.

- Current government funding for the CNS ceases on June 30, 2015

Consequences

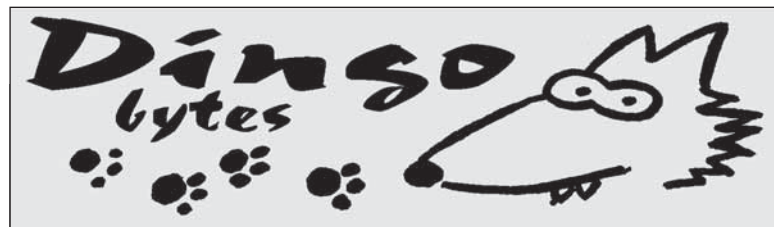
If the phone line is not available, the legislative need for notification and right to advice for Aboriginal People in custody will not be met.

Increased costs will flow to the State through:

- A potential increase in the number of Aboriginal injuries and deaths in police cell custody
- Increased remand prisoner numbers
- Increased defended hearings
- Overloading the Children's Legal Service (CLS) Phone System (provided by Legal Aid NSW) – the level of Aboriginal Juvenile

crime is regrettably high and with no CNS, the Children's Legal Service will have to respond to calls about Aboriginal Young People which they're not currently doing

- Additional Children's Court charges
- Longer Local Court lists because of procedural adjournments – greater costs in relieving and additional Magistrates
- And for Aboriginal people, already so over-represented in the Criminal Justice System, it will mean:
- An increase in incarceration rates
- An increase in preventable self harm or deaths in police cell custody
- An increase in young offenders before the courts
- A decrease in family and community safety. ☹



On July 1 the Senate committee will call pharmaceutical companies and their representatives to a public hearing of tax avoidance inquiry. The top five pharmaceutical companies receive a lot of money from the government through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) – in total \$2.8 billion in public money. Their total Australian sales were \$4.8 billion and they paid \$53 million in tax between them – that is about 1c in tax for every dollar earned in Australia. These companies use tax havens for tax avoidance in the same way tech multinationals Apple, Google and Microsoft do. In 2013, the same pharmaceutical companies paid only \$47.5 million in tax. Canberra-based Medicines Australia, peak body of pharmaceutical companies, could not comment on individual tax cases but said its members provided a lot of jobs and made big investments in development and research. That may be true but proper taxes should be paid as well.

Powerhouse Museum continues to be under threat of being relocated to Greater Western Sydney. The official line is that the new dynamic suburb will benefit from an outstanding addition that the museum will provide. More cynical voices justly point out the present location of the Powerhouse Museum that would be a goldmine for property developers. Queen Victoria Building was very nearly demolished before it was restored to its present glory. The Regent Theatre was not so lucky and was demolished. The sensible decision would be to leave the Museum where it is and build a new one where it is needed in Greater Sydney. There are many exhibits in storage at the moment and a brand-new building would be a proper place for them. Hands off Powerhouse Museum!

If it is such a good thing, why spend so much money advertising it? That's the first thing that comes to mind on hearing that the Abbott government plans to spend the equivalent of \$22,000 a day over two years to advertise its "Jobs for Families" package, the new childcare assistance package. The government is struggling to get support for the package because it is linked to family tax benefit cuts that Labor, Greens and some crossbenchers oppose. "It's outrageous that Scott Morrison [Social Services Minister] would be launching and advertising campaign before coming clean with the details of his package," said Labor families spokeswoman Jenny Macklin... Instead of launching an advertising campaign, Scott Morrison should be explaining to Australian families who will be worse off under his plans for childcare. How many families are going to lose access to childcare altogether?"

Nurses, midwives blocked from Medicare plans

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) has joined the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners, the Australian College of Midwives, and the Australian College of Nursing to ask the federal government to explain why nurses and midwives have been blocked from its plans to deliver a healthier Medicare.

Nurses and midwives have been all but ignored in the government's establishment of two key groups which have been tasked with guiding the process of health reform in Australia through improvements to Medicare and management of people with complex and chronic disease.

Current evidence clearly demonstrates that making better use of health workforce skills is the key to affordable health care into the future; this is the way to improve access to care for consumers, particularly the disadvantaged and those living in rural and remote areas. To achieve this long term strategies from governments are needed.

Despite this knowledge, the contributions that could be made by the largest group of health professionals, ideally placed to inform decision-making around better use of Medicare and improvements in primary health care, have been overlooked.

The government's lack of regard for nurses and midwives and the pivotal roles they play in improving the health of Australians, particularly in the context of primary health care, and the contributions nurses and midwives could make to successful health reform if provided the opportunity, is deeply concerning.

Although nurse practitioners and eligible midwives have access to Medicare, nurses and midwives are not represented at all on the Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce, and the sole nursing representative on the Primary Health Care Advisory Group comes from a narrow sector of the health system. This still leaves a majority of the nursing profession and all midwives without representation.

The disregard for nurses and midwives is particularly disappointing as it follows personal submissions from each of these key nursing and midwifery organisations directly to the Health Minister seeking appropriate representation on these critical expert groups.

If the government wants a proper and thorough reform process, it must include nurses and midwives. Genuine reform will only occur if there's transparent and robust engagement with nurses, midwives and all health professionals – not just doctors, health bureaucrats and health economists.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners, the Australian College of Midwives and the Australian College of Nursing are therefore urgently requesting an explanation from the Minister and immediate rectification of this matter. ☹

Internationalist dedication reco

Vinnie Molina, President of the Communist Party of Australia and Australia Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS), Perth, recently received the Medal of Friendship from the Cuban Council of State. The award ceremony took place in Havana on April 27, 2015. Vinnie has been an active campaigner for the Cuban Five* since their incarceration and a worthy recipient of this honour.

Here the *Guardian* interviews Vinnie and asks his thoughts on his award, on Cuba, the role of the Cuban Friendship Society and the need for solidarity work.

Guardian: Vinnie, you were recently awarded the Cuban Council of State's Medal of Friendship in Havana. Could you give our readers the background to this honour?

Vinnie Molina: Thanks for the opportunity to discuss this event. For me at a personal level, for the Party and other supporters of my solidarity work, like the Australia Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS) and the CFMEU it was a great honour. It was a very emotional moment. The Medal of Friendship is not awarded lightly by the Cuban Council of State. I've been involved in Cuban solidarity since 1996 in different positions in the ACFS in Perth, as President or Secretary.

It has been a continuous 19 or 20 years of work but the award was particularly important and emotional as it was bestowed by Antonio Guerrero, one of the Cuban Five*. We got heavily involved in the Cuban Five campaign through the ACFS, which was established in 1994. ACFS had a particular objective to strengthen the friendship between the people of Cuba and Australia, to break the blockade on Cuba, and for the return of Guantánamo Bay to the legitimate owners – the people of Cuba.

For the campaign for the Five we had an additional big task. In Australia we didn't have a committee for the freedom of the Five and in Perth we decided to organise for it. We felt the freedom of the Five represented the dignity of the Cuban people and people around the world. Following the example of the National Committee for the Freedom of the Five that was set up in the US with many prominent figures, it became like an international family.

So we took the challenge and did whatever was possible. Even WikiLeaks, in one of its leaked US documents, mentions that these people always come and protest in front of the US Consulate in Perth. We were there at every opportunity – rallying, leafleting with placards and giving speeches.

Of course, the work wasn't done just by myself and that's the importance of this award. I received the award on behalf of many good-hearted people, Communists, people without party affiliations, socialists, Labor Party members, Greens, people who just believed the incarceration of the five in different jails in the US for 16 long years was an unjust decision by the system. Its background rests on the hostile policies of the US towards Cuba. The US just couldn't forgive Cuba for the 1959 revolution, for the decision of the people to be truly independent.

G: What was the spark that ignited this activism? What was your very first interest in Cuba and the Cuban revolution?

VM: My background is Latin American and also Communist. Firstly, it derives from my close connection to the Caribbean revolution and to Cuban solidarity. Cuba has shown solidarity with many countries around the world. They have shared their small resources, particularly the human capital that they've been able to create through years of socialist revolution – the doctors and other health professionals, teachers and specialists.

Fidel said once, "To be an internationalist is to pay our own debt to humanity. Whoever is incapable of fighting for others will never be sufficiently capable of fighting for himself or herself." And Cuba has given a lot, including their own blood, their sons and daughters who fought, for example, in Angola and against Apartheid, to free Namibia, and Africa from that horrendous deviation. Also because of my Guatemalan background, a rich country

in natural resources but poor because of being a class society where the entire wealth of the Guatemalan people is concentrated in only a few hands.

I recall Hurricane Mitch that affected Central America quite heavily with a lot of deaths, particularly among poor people. The first country that offered help was Cuba. Fidel Castro sent the Henry Reeves Brigade that was set up to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina that devastated the south of the US – an offer that was rejected by the US government.

Fidel, the visionary that he is, didn't stop at that. He made the historic decision to establish the Latin American School of Medicine where young people from all over the world, including the US, are training to become doctors with a social conscience. Now I'm happy to see the number of doctors working in the mountains of Guatemala where doctors trained under the system can't go because they have to walk and go and look after Indigenous people and no money is to be made.

As Communists we've got a responsibility to look after the socialist revolution in the Americas. Cuba is just one of the handful of socialist countries left in the world. And Cuba continues to be a leading force.

I could talk much more about Cuban solidarity in Australia with the program "Yes I can" or "yo si puedo", teaching Indigenous communities in NSW, for example, with successful results in the communities of Bourke and Wilcannia.

G: Over the years you've been to Cuba many times and it's obvious that what you've seen doesn't disappoint you. What is it in Cuba that you find impressive?

VM: That's an interesting question because Cuba is not perfect. Many things if you view them with Western eyes, don't live up to your expectations. However, the Cuban revolution is very self-critical; they're aware of both the shortcomings and the successes. Every time I visit Cuba I encounter new things happening for the betterment of the Cuban people.

My first visit was in 1997 during the World Youth Festival (I travelled with the Australian delegation). It was a very difficult time, the 'special period' after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with a lot of scarcities. Tourism was one avenue for the Cuban revolution to attract revenue. It was then, in August 1997, that we witnessed how the counter-revolutionary forces based in Miami, encouraged and funded often by the US government, were planting bombs in tourist hotels. An Italian tourist died in one of those bombings while we were there. But I also saw the resilience of the Cuban people to continue to fight for what they fought for in the '50s – for true independence, the right of self-determination to build the sort of society they want, which is not a westernised society.

I've noted in the other trips right up to this latest one in April/May of 2015 that there have been a lot of changes. People continue to be happy and getting happier. There are more goods to buy in the shops. Many people think "Well, that's consumerism" and so on but there are so many needs. To feed 12 million people every day is a challenge – a challenge that is faced by a revolutionary government with a very wise leadership.

I have visited Cuban people in their homes and they have more access to better things. The government is helping them with social programs. They are replacing TVs, fridges with low power consuming models, rice cookers and so on are available. These are very simple things, and one thinks "A rice cooker, so what?", but a rice cooker in a country that has been blockaded for more than 50 years where you can't have access to these things, even if you have the money, is an achievement.

We see a country led by the Communist Party of Cuba, a party that is in close relationship with the masses. The Party trusts the people and the people trust the leader, which is very important. It is a very democratic process where the population is involved.

G: On several of your trips you've travelled with the Southern Cross Brigade from Australia and New Zealand with people that have come from a wide variety of backgrounds. They may not have your particular perspective and they aren't all Communists, by any means. What sort of impressions do they get of Cuba?



Vinnie Molina with Cuban Five hero Gerardo Hernandez and Tamara Hansen from the Canadian Solidarity network.

VM: It's important to invite everyone to travel to Cuba. That's one of the roles of the Southern Cross Brigade – to take people to witness first-hand what the situation is, which will provide a big contrast to what we hear on the news. People come from all walks of life – the Communists, the socialists and people who have nothing to do with politics but are curious about the Cuban situation. I can say that after a few days of being there and having contact with the Cubans, people actually love it.

I know people who have been on two, three and four Brigades. It involves living in the conditions of the International Camp, travelling with a group of people, trying to get involved in a program and developing some discipline. By sharing and meeting new friends, having a drink and talking you learn to love the Cubans because all of them are highly educated. They know about the world. They're informed, which is a big contrast to the situation when you talk to people in the streets in our country. Often people here are misinformed.

The Cubans often speak other languages they are so nice and warm they open their homes to you. In some of the old Southern Cross Brigades we used to spend time with families. You spent days with them – two weeks in the case of the Festival, and they became your family forever. Some people cultivate these relationships, others don't, but the majority keeps in contact with those Cubans. You visit schools, hospitals and hotels without any impediment. You relate to people on the street. There's no control, no objections – you talk to them and you form your own ideas.

When people return to Australia, some get involved with political parties, or become members of the Cuban Society. Hopefully they get involved with the Communist Party. Others don't. The Brigade is highly recommended to really learn about Cuba from a different perspective.

People travel by the invitation of ICAP** and are guests of the people of Cuba. They really look after you. They love you to try to learn and to share – that part is important.

G: You mention people coming back from the Brigade and feeling this desire to work in solidarity but in general, what is the message from Cuba to the people of Australia? It's a very different type of society. What can people learn from Cuba.

VM: People will learn that it's possible to achieve big things with little things. There are

more resources if we learn to use them wisely, to avoid consumerism, to try to leave aside the individualism that is often taught in our schools. Simple things like talking to your neighbour that have been forgotten; the sense of solidarity, which we don't see a lot of nowadays.

I had the advantage of attending May Day rallies in Cuba. They are massive. You see a million people in the square and this year Australian trade unionists participated. Despite rain, the rally began early morning and people carried a massive banner, united in the construction of socialism. For two hours, non-stop, there was a happy celebration, in solidarity with the peoples of the world. Those trade unionists are used to small rallies for May Day in Australia where it is usually no longer a public holiday or no longer takes place on the first of May.

Moreover, Australian workers today are campaigning for equal pay, the right to be employed, penalty rates, and permanent jobs because most people in the western world are now employed in a precarious way unlike in Cuba. Everybody exercises the right to be employed there. Cuban workers have access to holidays. Everybody works five days a week, eight hour days. That's the real sense of the triple eight – eight hours for work, eight for rest and eight for play. That is practised in Cuba.

When you hear things like they are being forced to march, you think "Yes, go and force a million people to go and be happy on that particular day." It's a big celebration – highly recommended not just for trade unionists but for everyone to witness.

G: Did you get a chance to observe changes in the economy and attitudes to gender and sexuality in Cuba?

VM: We had a very extensive program in Cuba. We had the opportunity to attend a conference conducted by Mariela Castro, the daughter of Raúl Castro, and who is the director of Cenex – the centre for sexual education.

This conference was hosted by the CTC – the Cuban workers' trade union central organisation – against discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual preference. LGBTI people in Cuba have achieved many rights because of the hard work and the commitment of the revolution against discrimination. People can have sex change operations for free for health reasons.

There was a big debate about equal marriage and related matters. It was an interesting discussion, the concept of marriage, and of family. But

gnised



movement.

marriage, should be the union of two people regardless of their sexual orientation. As Communists we don't really encourage marriage because it has been used for the domination and exploitation of women – a relationship of power. However, we live in a capitalist society in Australia, and if people from different sexual orientation wish to get married they should be able to do it like any heterosexual person.

I think that we, including the Communist Party, should continue the solidarity work with Cuba. The historic decisions of December 17, 2014 with the great victory of the Freedom of the Cuban Five and the opening up of the opportunity for the governments of Cuba and the US to sit at the negotiating table and to re-establish diplomatic relations is encouraging.

We have to continue work for the elimination of the US blockade and for the return of Guantánamo Bay to Cuba. It has been under US occupation since the Platt Amendment in the Constitution in 1903 and should be returned to the legitimate owners.

We should also continue to demand the right to self-determination for Cuba, to live in peace, with an economic model chosen by the people of Cuba, which is socialism. Cubans have shown great solidarity without expectation of exchange. Cuba doesn't send doctors anywhere asking for the natural resources of the country – the diamonds or the oil. People do it just because that is the concept of the Cuban revolution – to share the little they have.

*** The Cuban Five are Cuban nationals who were sent to infiltrate US-based Cuban ex-pat terrorist groups. Cuba handed over the information on these groups to the FBI. But instead of arresting the terrorists, the FBI arrested the Cuban Five anti-terrorists on September 12, 1998. They were unjustly charged for espionage and murder, and given long sentences, including life sentences. Since within days of their conviction, up to 350 committees to free the Cuban Five were formed across the world, including in the USA.**

**** ICAP, Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos, (The Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples, ICAP) is an NGO established with the purpose of reaching out to the international community and forming ties of friendship between Cuba and citizens of other countries. ✪**

Save the Long-nosed Potoroo

Steven Katsineris

Where I grew up on Hobart's Eastern Shore our house was bordered by wooded hills and gullies of native bushland. It was a wild and wondrous place to explore and play. And with the varied and abundant wildlife living there every outing was an exciting adventure. While walking on tracks in this forested and grassy area I would frequently see these delightful little creatures, hopping about. Eventually I found out they were Long-nosed Potoroos.

When I was older in my travels camping and bushwalking around other parts of Tasmania I also sometimes saw potoroos, mostly in the mornings or evenings. Usually I'd spot Long-nosed Potoroos hopping across tracks or clearings, but now and again I managed to get very close up and observe them feeding among the undergrowth or out in the open.

Later on I lived for eight years in Dodges Ferry, a small seaside town on the southeast coast of Tasmania with my own family. Our house was in a gully on a hill, a short distance from the seaside. Between our home (and the other houses of the town) and the beach was a wide area of dense bushland, consisting mainly of native grasses, shrubs, Wattle, She Oak and Eucalypt trees with rocky sandstone cliffs. This coastal heath and scrubland area also had some little wetlands and one large lagoon. This spot as well as other similar coastal woodlands around the region was a haven for lots of native wildlife, including Long-nosed Potoroos.

There were many walking tracks winding through these scrubland and woodland areas and at various points linked to several beaches. In the early mornings before work and in the evenings after work I would take long walks with our German Shepherd dog, Sabra along these tracks and on to the deserted beaches. While on these walks I would regularly glimpse Long-nosed Potoroos hop across the walking tracks and into the surrounding dense scrubland. On some occasions to my delight they would stop and forage for food and I'd stand still and quietly watch them up close for a while.

Long-nosed Potoroos make a network of low, well-defined and connected pathways or runways through the thick undergrowth, which they use to move about on. Each morning on my walks I would see fresh diggings, left behind when Long-nosed Potoroos feed on underground roots and fungi, using their strong forepaws. Potoroos spend the daylight hours in grass nests amongst the thick vegetation and feed at dusk or dawn, but rarely venture from cover. They are shy, mostly nocturnal marsupials and for this reason I think many locals would never have seen them or even knew Long-nosed Potoroos inhabited the area. As they are rarely seen in the wild, the indicators of potoroos presence are the runways they make through the undergrowth and the diggings they leave behind when feeding.

The Long-nosed Potoroo is a rabbit-sized small wallaby with a pointed, elongated muzzle. The best description is that it is really like a miniature kangaroo. These cute little animals look a bit like a bandicoot, but they tuck their front feet into their chest and hop the same as wallabies and kangaroos do. They weigh just over a kilo and are from 30-40cm in body length, while the tail is about 25mm long. Long-nosed Potoroos tails are somewhat supple and able to grip so that they can use them to gather nesting material.

They are grey-brown in colour, with paler fur on the belly. In the Tasmanian population, they range in colour from rufous-brown in the west coast to grey-brown on the east coast. Many Long-nosed Potoroos in Tasmania have a white tip at the end of the tail; this is especially common in the southern parts of the state.

Long-nosed Potoroos live in dry areas and wetlands, from dense grassy coastal heath and scrubland to Eucalypt forest. Relatively thick ground cover is the essential requirement of



potoroo habitat, which it needs for protection and so that they can build nests. They also prefer light sandy soils that are easy to dig in for underground fungus and roots that they mainly eat. Long-nosed Potoroos also feed on a range of seeds, bulbs, fruits, grasses, worms and insects.

Various studies have shown that fungi form a major part of Long-nosed Potoroo diet. These fungi live in association with the roots of many Eucalypt and Acacia trees, helping them to absorb more water and nutrients and are essential for some seedling survival. Potoroos therefore improve the health of the forest by helping to disperse a host of beneficial fungi spores as they forage for food. Like other herbivorous marsupials, they also act as nature's fire fighters by keeping the undergrowth down via grazing and turning the leaf litter over.

Long-nosed Potoroos are mainly solitary; they live alone, or with their baby, rather than in groups and come together to mate. Breeding can happen throughout the year, although most births occur from the end of winter to early spring. The gestation period is 38 days, which is the longest of any macropod, despite it being one of the smallest. The Joey spends about four months in the pouch and is weaned at five-six months. Female Potoroos usually produce only one young a year.

Quolls, Dingoes, owls, foxes; feral dogs and cats prey on Long-nosed Potoroos.

Long-nosed Potoroos are found in Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania. The range of the Long-nosed Potoroos on the east coast of the mainland has been considerably reduced to small patchy populations. They are distributed from a small area in southeastern Queensland and northern NSW, to parts of Victoria (the southeast and southwest, including the Grampians, Otways, Wilson's Promontory, East Gippsland and French Island) and southeast South Australia. It is still common and widespread in suitable habitat in Tasmania, especially on the north and east coasts. They are also found on Flinders Island, Bruny Island and Maria Island, where they are fairly common. Though found on King Island, they are rare there.

The Long-nosed Potoroo has been badly affected by the spread of human settlements, the use of fires and other human disturbances. Many are killed on roads that run through or border their territory. But the biggest threat to the survival of the Long-nosed Potoroo is habitat loss and fragmentation, with the clearing of

the bush for grazing and development reducing the woodland and forcing them into smaller isolated pockets.

Left over habitat that has a sparse forest understorey does not provide the necessary shelter that potoroos require. The clearing of scrubland and grassland also exposes the species to increased risk from predators like cats, dogs and foxes. Long-nosed Potoroos are listed as vulnerable in NSW, endangered in Victoria and vulnerable nationally. It is now a wholly protected species.

From my many encounters with Long-nosed Potoroos when travelling about and living in the southeastern coastal region of Tasmania they certainly appear to be abundant and I have often come across them in other parts of the state as well. In recent trips back to Tasmania I've caught sight of quite a few in a variety of places, from woodland to coastal scrubland and rural areas with grassland.

Sadly, I also see lots of dead potoroos on the roads. But, fortunately despite the array of problems they confront, the Long-nosed Potoroo seems at present safe in Tasmania. Its continued existence is significantly helped by the absence of European Foxes and Dingoes and having few feral dogs in the state. My family and I have also occasionally seen Long-nosed Potoroos while bushwalking in the remote parts of far East Gippsland in Victoria.

Fortunately, Victorian National Parks rangers have undertaken vigorous measures to control foxes and wild dogs in East Gippsland and elsewhere in the state in an effort to protect the remaining Long-nosed Potoroo populations. This has reduced the predation pressure on the potoroos and as a result of the decrease in fox and dog numbers there has been an increase in Long-nosed Potoroo numbers.

Hopefully more can be done to reduce Long-nosed Potoroo fatalities on the roads and from being killed by foxes, wild dogs and feral cats. And let's do more to preserve enough of its remnant native bushland from clearing, so that these threatened potoroos continue to exist and thrive in the wild. As is the case with much of Australia's native wildlife, our actions most often determine the outcome of a species chance of survival. It would be appalling to neglect what needs to be done to properly protect what's left of the Long-nosed Potoroo's habitat and save this precious and endearing small marsupial from disappearing. ✪

Dark plots in the Middle East

Conn Hallinan

A quiet meeting this past March in Saudi Arabia, and a recent anonymous leak from the Israeli military, set the stage for what may be a new and wider war in the Middle East.

Gathering in the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh were Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, newly crowned Saudi King Salman, and the organiser of the get-together, the emir of Qatar. The meeting was an opportunity for Turkey and the Saudis to bury a hatchet over Ankara's support – which Riyadh opposes – for the Muslim Brotherhood, and to agree to cooperate in overthrowing the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad.

Taking aim at Assad

The pact prioritised the defeat of the Damascus regime over the threat posed by the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, and aims to checkmate Iranian influence in the region. However, the Turks and the Saudis are not quite on the same page when it comes to Iran: Turkey sees future business opportunities when the sanctions against Tehran end, while Riyadh sees Iran as nothing but a major regional rival.

The Turkish-Saudi axis means that Turkish weapons, bomb-making supplies, and intelligence, accompanied by lots of Saudi money, are openly flowing to extremist groups like the Al-Qaeda associated Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham, both now united in the so-called "Army of Conquest."

The new alliance has created a certain amount of friction with the United States, which would also like to overthrow Assad but for the time being is focused on attacking the Islamic State and on inking a nuclear agreement with Iran. This could change, however, because the

Obama administration is divided on how deeply it wants to get entangled in Syria. If Washington decides to supply anti-aircraft weapons to the Army of Conquest, it will mean the United States has thrown in its lot with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, and that the "war on terror" is taking a back seat to regime change in Syria.

Not that the Americans are overly concerned about aiding and abetting Islamic extremists. While the US is bombing the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the Obama administration is also training Syrians to overthrow Assad, which objectively puts them in the extremist camp vis-à-vis the Damascus regime. Washington is also aiding the Saudis' war on the Houthis in Yemen. Yet the Houthis are the most effective Yemeni opponents of the Islamic State and the group called Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, against which the United States is waging a drone war.

The Turkish-Saudi alliance seems to have already made a difference in the Syrian civil war. After some initial successes last year against divided opponents, the Syrian government has suffered some sharp defeats in the past few months and appears to be regrouping to defend its base of support in the coastal regions and the cities of Homs, Hama, and Damascus. While the Syrian government has lost over half of the country to the insurgents, it still controls up to 60 percent of the population.

Turkey has long been a major conduit for weapons, supplies, and fighters for the anti-Assad forces, and Saudi Arabia and most of its allies in the Gulf Coordination Council, representing the monarchies of the Middle East, have funnelled money to the insurgents. But Saudi Arabia has always viewed the Muslim Brotherhood – which has a significant presence in Syria and in



Turkey's President Erdogan meeting with King Salman of Saudi Arabia in March 2015.

countries throughout the region – as a threat to its own monarchy.

The fact that Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party is an offshoot of the Brotherhood has caused friction with the Saudis. For instance, while Turkey denounced the military coup against the elected Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, Saudi Arabia essentially bankrolled the takeover and continues to bail Cairo out of economic trouble.

But all that was water under the bridge when it came to getting rid of Assad. The Turks and the Saudis have established a joint command centre in the newly conquered Syrian province of Idlib and have begun pulling the kaleidoscope of Assad opponents into a cohesive force.

A war on Hezbollah?

Three years of civil war has whittled the Syrian Army from 250,000 in 2011 to around 125,000 today, but Damascus is bolstered by Lebanon's Hezbollah fighters. The Lebanese Shiite organisation that fought Israel to a draw in 2006 is among the Assad regime's most competent forces.

Which is where the Israeli leak comes in.

The timing of the story – published on May 12 in *The New York Times* – was certainly odd, as was the prominence given a story based entirely on unnamed "senior Israeli officials." If the source was obscured, the message was clear: "We will hit Hezbollah hard, while making every effort to limit civilian casualties as much as we can," one official said. But "we do not intend to stand by helplessly in the face of rocket attacks."

The essence of the article was that Hezbollah is using civilians as shields in southern Lebanon, and the Israelis intended to blast the group regardless of whether civilians are present or not.

This is hardly breaking news. The Israeli military made exactly the same claim in its 2008-09 "Cast Lead" attack on Gaza and again in last year's "Protective Edge" assault on the same embattled strip. It is currently under investigation by the United Nations for possible war crimes involving the targeting of civilians.

Nor is it the first time Israel has said the same thing about Hezbollah in Lebanon. In his *Salon* article entitled "The 'hiding among civilians' myth," Beirut-based writer and photographer Mitch Prothero found that "This claim [of hiding among civilians] is almost always false." Indeed, says Prothero, Hezbollah fighters avoid mingling with civilians

because they know "they will sooner or later be betrayed by collaborators – as so many Palestinian militants have been."

But why is the Israeli military talking about a war with Lebanon? The border is quiet. There have been a few incidents, but nothing major. Hezbollah has made it clear that it has no intention of starting a war, though it warns Tel Aviv that it's quite capable of fighting one. The most likely answer is that the Israelis are coordinating their actions with Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Tel Aviv has essentially formed a de facto alliance with Riyadh to block a nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 – the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany. Israel is also supporting Saudi Arabia's attack on Yemen and has an informal agreement with Riyadh and Ankara to back the anti-Assad forces in Syria.

Israel is taking wounded Nusra Front fighters across the southern Syrian border for medical treatment. It's also bombed Syrian forces in the Golan Heights. In one incident, it killed several Hezbollah members and an Iranian general advising the Syrian government.

The realm of uncertainty

The Saudis have pushed the argument that Syria, Iraq, and Yemen are really about Iranian expansionism and the age-old clash between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Hezbollah is indeed a Shiite organization, and the majority of Iraqis are also members of the sect. Assad's regime is closely associated with the Alawites, an offshoot of Shiism, and the Houthis in Yemen are a variety of the sect as well.

However, the wars in the Middle East are about secular power, not divine authority – although sectarian division is a useful recruiting device. As for "Iranian aggression," it was the Sunni-dominated regime of Saddam Hussein, bankrolled by Saudi Arabia and supported by the United States, that started the modern round of Sunni-Shiite bloodletting when Iraq invaded Iran in 1981.

If the Israeli Army attacks southern Lebanon, Hezbollah will be forced to bring some of its troops home from Syria, thus weakening the Syrian Army at a time when it's already hard pressed by newly united rebel forces. In short, it would be a two-front war that would tie down Hezbollah, smash up southern Lebanon, and lead to the possible collapse of the Assad regime.

As Carl von Clausewitz, the great Prussian theoretician of modern war, once noted, however, war is the realm of uncertainty. All that one can really determine is who fires the first shot. That the Israelis can pulverise scores of villages in southern Lebanon and kill lots of Shiites, there is no question. They've done it before.

But a ground invasion may be very expensive, and the idea that they could "defeat" Hezbollah is a pipe dream. Shiites make up 40 percent of Lebanon's ethnic mélange and dominate the country's south. Hezbollah has support among other communities as well, in part because they successfully resisted the 1982-2000 Israeli occupation and bloodied Tel Aviv in the 2006 invasion.

An Israeli attack on Hezbollah, however, would almost certainly re-ignite Lebanon's civil war, while bolstering the power of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. The Turks might think that Al-Qaeda is no threat to them, but recent history should give them pause.

Creating something like the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan and the anti-Gaddafi forces in Libya is not terribly difficult. Controlling them is altogether another matter.

"It always seems to blow back"

"Every power in the Middle East has tried to harness the power of the Islamists to their own end," says Joshua Landis, director of Middle Eastern Studies at Oklahoma University, but "it always seems to blow back."

The Afghan Mujahedeen created the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, the US invasion of Iraq spawned the Islamic State, and Libya has collapsed into a safe haven for radical Islamic groups. Erdogan may think the Justice and Development Party's Islamic credentials will shield Turkey from a Syrian ricochet, but many of these groups consider Erdogan an apostate for playing democratic politics in secular institutions.

Indeed, up to 5,000 Turkish young people have volunteered to fight in Syria and Iraq. Eventually they will take the skills and ideology they learned on the battlefield back to Turkey, and Erdogan may come to regret his fixation with overthrowing Assad.

While it's hard to imagine a Middle East more chaotic than it is today, if the Army of Conquest succeeds in overthrowing the Assad government, and Israel attacks Lebanon, "chaos" will be an understatement.

People's World ☼

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The road to end George Osborne

Luke James

Two massive marches drawing hundreds of thousands of people last week started an uprising against austerity and disastrous Osbornomics – which includes plans for rolling protests at the Tory conference.

The London People's Assembly's End Austerity Now demonstration started in the City before descending on Parliament Square, while Glasgow's rally took place in George Square.

Singer Charlotte Church led the capital's anti-cuts chorus alongside Labour leadership candidate Jeremy Corbyn and Unite union leader Len McCluskey.

Organisers predict that the post-election protests could be the biggest since a TUC demonstration in 2011 saw 500,000 people take to the streets.

More than 250 coaches were booked to bring people from across Britain for the rallies. People's Assembly national secretary Sam Fairbairn said: "I think we're looking at least 100,000 and possibly upwards of 200,000."

"David Cameron thinks because he's got a slim majority in Parliament it means that he won't be faced with any kind of opposition."

"Well today we show him this is his opposition."

And the *Star* can reveal that resistance to Tory cuts won't end when the final speaker leaves the stage. The People's Assembly is planning an unprecedented four-day protest outside the Tory conference in Manchester later this year, with details for a national demonstration to be staged on October 4 set to be announced.

That will be followed by three more protests on specific issues, such as the privatisation of the NHS and Britain's housing crisis. "Each day we'll have a different themed protest depending on what they're going to be discussing at the conference," Mr Fairbairn explained. "That's going to sustain the momentum from today's demonstration."

There are also set to be People's Assemblies across the country, and a housing conference on October 10.

The anti-austerity demonstration comes after official figures showed that Chancellor George Osborne is

set to borrow three times more than he planned this year.

Mr Osborne is on course to borrow £75 billion instead of £20 billion, according to the Office for National Statistics. TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said it showed the Tory had been forced to "bail out his failed economic plan."

But she warned: "Rather than learning from his mistakes, the Chancellor is about to embark upon a fresh round of savage cuts."

In her speech at the protest, Green MP Caroline Lucas called on MPs from all parties to oppose his plans.

She said: "It's time for all of us who oppose the government's self-defeating austerity program to work together."

"So my challenge here today to all MPs who call themselves progressive, and especially to those in the Labour Party, is this: Vote against further austerity, protect our public services, and defy your leadership by voting down the savage welfare cap." *Morning Star* ✪



"It's time for all of us who oppose the government's self-defeating austerity program to work together."

To Mother Emanuel's Denmark Vesey: your fight goes on

John Wojcik

Fighting off racist attacks is nothing new for the 199-year-old Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. – lovingly referred to by many in Charleston as "Mother Emanuel."

The church which was the scene of hateful slaughter on Wednesday night has a long history of resisting slavery and racism and of fighting for justice.

Mother Emanuel was founded by Morris Brown, a black pastor in 1816. People in white-run Methodist and Episcopal churches down South didn't care to worship too much with black people – thus, the separate churches.

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at Mother Emanuel in 1962.

In 1969 Coretta Scott King led a march of hospital workers demanding better pay – a march that

began on the front steps of Mother Emanuel.

In its early years though, one of the leaders of the church was Denmark Vesey, a former slave who had been able to buy his freedom with the \$1,500 winnings from a Charleston lottery.

In 1822, however, the church was burned to the ground by the white landed aristocrats because it was seen as a hotbed of support for what was on its way to becoming one of the biggest slave revolts ever in the pre-Civil War South.

Vesey was the lead planner of a slave revolt that was to begin on the night of June 16, 1822 as the clock ticked past the 12th hour and into June 17, the next day. (Was that timing lost on Mr Roof as, on the June 17, 2015, he murdered nine people in that church after having been welcomed by them into their prayer service?)

Had the elaborately-planned

slave revolt of June 17, 1822 actually occurred, including the mass escape to Haiti which had already freed its slaves, it would have been one of the biggest slave revolts in the history of the pre-Civil War South. The plans leaked out, however, and the revolt was quashed.

The timing of the mass murder this week may not have been lost on the killer but the reasons Vesey had for planning a slave revolt were totally lost on the judge who sentenced him to death.

The judge who ordered his execution is reported to have said: "It is difficult to imagine what infatuation could have prompted you to attempt an episode so wild and visionary. You were a free man, comely, wealthy and enjoyed every comfort compatible with your station. You had, therefore, much to risk and little to gain."

Today, in the streets of Charleston and in the newspapers, columns, radio shows, TV shows and on line, the name of Vesey is coming up again. No one remembers the name of the judge who ordered his execution. But Vesey's name they remember. Many invoking his name today are understanding better than they did before why it was that he organised that slave revolt.

A community organiser outside the church in Charleston on the night of the killings put it this way: "I'm sick and tired of people telling me that I shouldn't be angry. I am angry."

People's World ✪



Region Briefs

Standing Committee members of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee held a meeting recently in Beijing, discussing the country's 13th Five-Year-Plan (2016-2020). Thirteen members spoke at the meeting, covering the topics from progressive and stable economic growth, higher education promotion, better protection of environment and ethnic minorities, to the further improvement of living standards of people who live in China's western regions. China started to implement its Five-Year-Plans in 1953, making strategies and plans for social-economic development, setting growth targets and defining policies.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping held a 2016-2020 poverty relief symposium in an impoverished area which used to be an important revolutionary base. The leader stressed that the key for economic development nationwide was poverty relief in underdeveloped rural areas. He said that "the heaviest and most arduous task for building a well-off society in an all-round way lies in rural areas, especially the impoverished ones." He called on the Party and governments at all levels to strive for a scientific poverty relief plan. China plans to build an "all-round well-off society" by 2020; specific requirements include GDP, college enrolment rate, income per capita, number of doctors per 1,000 people and so on.

The Osaka High Court of Japan ruled that it was illegal to kick worker unions' offices out of the municipal government office building. Soon after the city's Mayor was elected in 2011, he notified the unions that he would not allow them to use offices in the city hall from 2012. However, the unions launched a lawsuit, claiming the notification was an unfair labour practice. The court judged the notification illegal and asked the government to pay A\$26,250 to the unions.

Vietnam's Hanoi Confederation of Labour (HCL) and the Tokyo Trade Union Council recently organised a seminar in Hanoi, sharing experiences in activities and planning. The President of HCL explained how the organisation improved workers' mental and physical wellbeing to the 13 Japanese delegates, while the delegates hoped to foster trade union cooperation between the two countries and two cities.

Vietnam's Politburo member and secretary of the Hanoi Party's Committee, Pham Quang Nghi, recently led a delegation to Cuba and received a warm welcome from the First Secretary of the Communist Party and President of Cuba, Raul Castro, and Vice President of the Cuban State Council, Lazara Mercedes Lopez Acea. The President expressed his wish to increase experience sharing of building socialism and socio-economic cooperation between the two countries, while Secretary Pham confirmed the friendship between the two countries and stressed that Vietnam was keen to further elevate economic and political cooperation with Cuba.

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Together we are strong

Back in July 2013 my day started out with the power going off on the construction site I was working on. I'll never forget that day because it ended with a phone call from my boss Paul Maione telling me the company had gone bust and that my workmates and I were out of a job.

But that wasn't the worst of it. In the next few days I found out that

my employer Q Structures owed me \$63,000 in entitlements – and that's just what they owed me!

They'd also failed to pay my superannuation for a year.

I didn't think this could happen. I thought it was illegal.

My union, the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, tried to get my hard-earned money back but the current laws let the company off the hook.

That's why today I am in Canberra with the CFMEU to ask our politicians to stop this from happening. Why were we in a situation where we lost wages and super and yet nothing happened to our boss?

If I stole \$63,000 from someone, I'd probably go to jail. Instead, the Abbott government wants people in the union to go to jail for fighting against abuses like this.

Abbott wants to introduce the Australian Building Construction Commission which will weaken our

ability to get justice when dodgy employers like mine leave us high and dry.

I'm here to tell my story because I know there are countless others like me. And we all need to stand up and speak out.

If you're reading my story and it sounds familiar, support the CFMEU in protecting our rights by signing our petition against the ABCC.

www.standupspeakoutcomehome.org.au

Together we can make sure that no worker is left high and dry by their dodgy boss.

Enzo Scala
Construction Worker

Unchecked power to use force

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre earlier this month launched a campaign to block a government bill which would give detention

centre guards unchecked power to use force against asylum seekers.

A Senate Committee report recommended passing the Bill, meaning it could come before the Senate as early as June 15.

Labor Senators tabled a dissenting report, arguing for more legislative clarity around the use force, while Greens Senators recommended the Bill be rejected outright.

If passed, the so-called *Migration Amendment (Maintaining the Good Order of Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill* would effectively give detention guards the power to use force against asylum seekers in any circumstance they see fit, essentially without impunity – even to end a peaceful protest.

Not even prison officers are given this much power to use force.

Former Victorian Supreme Court Judge Stephen Charles SC told the Senate Committee in April that the proposed laws would essentially

hand guards the authority to “beat asylum seekers in detention centres to death”.

With many families locked up in detention, including 231 children, this unchecked power is incredibly concerning.

This bill is particularly insidious when considered alongside recently introduced laws that allow the government to throw detention centre whistle-blowers in jail for two years.

It's clear that the government is methodically and deliberately building a culture of secrecy and unchecked power within detention centres.

We're asking our supporters to urgently contact Labor and cross-bench Senators and urge them to vote down this horrific Bill.

To support the campaign to block the Use of Force Bill, go to www.asrc.org.au/useofforce

Serina McDuff
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

Culture & Life

by R W Parenteau

Worshippers of the Almighty Invisible Hand

In the religion cleverly mislabelled as neo-liberal economics, it is an article of faith that clearly assigned property rights, along with fully flexible prices, will allow the Invisible Hand – aka the glorious God of all neo-liberal economists and their faithful believers – to direct resources to their most efficient and valuable use.

Economies bestowed with these two virtues of private property and unfettered markets are bound to travel the path of glory and redemption – the God-given glory of a strong, sustainable growth path, with the redemption of all economic resources being fully employed at all times, barring the possible exception of random shocks to supply, like wars and pestilence.

The fact that in our actual historical experience, economies have often failed to travel on a path that even vaguely resembles full employment growth, often for long periods of time (see Japan since 1989, or the eurozone since 2008) is not so hard to explain under the theology of neo-liberal economics. The road to heaven cannot possibly be travelled by the less than virtuous. Failure to achieve a full employment growth path is always, and everywhere, a clear indication of sinful behaviour. It is a self-inflicted wound, revealing a disgusting lack of discipline and devotion.

Stagnation, recessions and depressions are all the wages of sin – the sin of failing to assign property rights clearly, or the sin of failing to allow prices to be fully flexible, or the sin of allowing governments to spend money in ways (and in magnitudes) that private individuals would not voluntarily choose on their own. Not surprisingly, the IMF recipe for the repair of underperforming or imperilled economies almost always calls for gallons of deregulation, generous helpings of structural reform, and a slicing and dicing of government budgets so that God, the Almighty Invisible Hand, can do his good work on this fallen Earth.

While it is, of course, mere common sense that, for example, a drop in consumer demand for orange juice will lead to a decline in the price of oranges relative to, say, Tesla cars, it takes a true believer in neo-liberal theology to expect that a decline in the relative price

of oranges will lead to an equal and offsetting increase in the demand for Tesla cars. In addition, it takes even greater faith to believe that migrant workers in Florida orange groves will nearly instantaneously and almost costlessly move to California, to be retrained by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk in electrical vehicle production, such that there will be little or no reduction in employment or household income flows when the price of oranges actually falls.

Helping hands

The yawning gap between these canonical Bible stories of faith-based economics and our lived experience in real-world economies is so large, however, that it strains credulity, even among the most faithful. And so the high priests of neo-liberal economics have admitted that God may not always be paying close attention to the workings of this world, at least in the marketplace.

The Almighty Invisible Hand is sometimes engaged elsewhere – perhaps off creating some adjacent galaxy, or maybe just temporarily waylaid by an overdue manicure appointment, or otherwise overwhelmed with the many tasks that come with being the Deity. In that case, the God worshipped by the neo-liberals needs nothing more than a few human helping hands.

These helping hands can only be found at central banks, where neo-liberal economists from the right monasteries with the right names (MIT, Stanford, Harvard, Princeton, etc) find ample and well-rewarded employment as they toil away to perform that most holy act of relative price adjustment. The Archimedean lever these faithful servants wield to move the fallen and sinful economies of the world is unbelievably simple. When carefully prescribed and defended property rights and flexible prices in free markets fail, from time to time, to deliver full employment growth, real interest rates will surely do the trick.

Armed with the ability to influence real interest rates – or the price of borrowing money relative to the price of consumer goods and services – central banks have all they need to shepherd economies back on to



full-employment growth paths. This magical relative price, the real interest rate, will elicit just enough investment activity by the business sector to match just the amount of saving that households would want to set aside at full-employment income levels. Voilà!

Inspect nearly any newspaper column or blog post by the “New Keynesian” economist Paul Krugman, or any speech by European Central Bank President (and former Goldman Sachs employee) Mario Draghi, and you will be struck by the deep veneration these high priests of the Neo-liberal Order hold for the power of real interest rates to produce what should otherwise be God-given outcomes. The only problem is that in reality, rather than in liturgy, manipulating the real interest rate has failed to elicit the expected investment response from the private sector.

Sad captains

Why has the visible hand of central bank clergy proven so inept? Since the free-market revolution spearheaded by Lady Thatcher and Honorary Knight Ronald Reagan, companies have been encouraged to be run solely for the benefit of their shareholders and, rather conveniently, for their shareholding CEOs and CFOs. Under the guise of maximising shareholder value über alles, companies have been cutting the share of profits that they reinvest in tangible plant and equipment. Instead, their aim has been to extract the largest profits they can, and redistribute that income through share repurchases and special dividend payouts. By encouraging the maximisation of free cash flow, and paying that cash out to shareholders and corporate management teams, the “natural” engine of exponential growth in capitalist economies has, in other words, been gutted.

Rather than behaving like the captains of industry who previously guided technological innovation and pushed labour productivity ever higher with the proper reinvestment of profits, what we have is the modern equivalent of buccaneers on the high seas of commerce, with all the extracting, extorting and capturing of wealth that entails. Judging by the historically low levels of business investment spending

relative to GDP in mature markets like Japan, Britain, the eurozone and the US, there may in fact be no level of real interest rates set by central banks that is low enough to stimulate sufficient private investment for anything resembling a full-employment growth path to be achieved.

In addition, a well-established canon of high-church neo-liberal economics is that, due to the infinite grace offered by the Invisible Hand, all producers of goods and services will be paid nothing less than what their contribution to the value of these products is worth. If this article of neo-liberal faith were true, we should observe that the real (that is, inflation-adjusted) wage paid to labour moves virtually in tandem with labour productivity (that is, the output produced per hour of labour effort). But such faith is frequently misplaced.

For example, in the US, real wages were decoupled from productivity in the mid- to late-1970s, a decade of profit squeeze and stagflation and increased momentum against organised labour. Globalisation has further eroded this linkage, as transnational firms developed the capability to source labour from the most desperate corners of the world. If the Invisible Hand were ever virtuous in rewarding “each according to their contribution”, this may have been only a temporary indulgence or oversight, especially once firms discovered the joys and benefits of relocating production to countries where labour standards were considerably looser, or altogether absent.

Neo-liberal economics is little more than a faith-based discipline meant to justify the extractive activities of the heads of this religious cult. Over the past three decades, the carnage wrought by this faith-based economics has become plain for all to see – all except the most faithful, who continue to blindly chant their TINA mantra – There Is No Alternative. It is well past time to abandon this pseudo-religious charade and to replace the tinny TINA chant with AWIP – Another World Is Possible; and indeed, we are here to build it.

New Internationalist ✪

Film Review by Richard Titelius

The Emperor's New Clothes

Since the global financial crisis of 2008 there has been increasing scrutiny of the capitalist mode of production and its negative effects on society. There have been many books, television shows – including Russell Brand's own YouTube news series, *The Trews* – songs, plays and movies, most notably Michael Moore's, *Capitalism – A Love Story* (2010), whose approach *New Clothes* director Michael Winterbottom, (*Welcome to Sarajevo* 1997, *The Road to Guantánamo* 2002, *Wonderland* 1999 and *Jude* 1996) follows very closely.

However, Russell Brand, an English comedy actor (*Get Him to the Greek* 2010, *Arthur* 2011 and *St Trinians* 2007) turned political activist is not as patient as Michael Moore with the antagonists of this film which are mostly the greedy bankers of the English financial system and their political collaborators, the Conservative Party, led by Prime Minister David Cameron.

While some critics would dismiss Russell Brand as an opportunist and someone who will not want to shake the system too hard that he benefits so well from, these critics are playing the man instead of the message. It is the message that is simple to understand, unequivocal and unrelenting from the beginning of the film to the end: "Inequality is getting greater, the rich are getting richer and everyone else is struggling. Is that fair?" he asks a group of primary school children in the Essex town of Grays where Brand grew up. They play out a series of scenes demonstrating the huge gaps in income inequality in England.

Brand continues his tour de force of the GFC with an examination of how the bankers made hundreds of billions of dollars in the lead-up to the crash of 2008 and how the taxpayers gave them billions to pay off their debts. This put many ordinary people into debt which gave Tory leader David Cameron in the lead up to the 2015 election, (which he won) a grotesque licence to spin a yarn about everyone being in this together. There would be closures, cutbacks, and other belt tightening measures, which included having a Value Added Tax at 20% (the English version of the GST of which ours is 10%) while the rich can put their money in offshore tax havens such as the Cayman Islands.

Brand names the rich bankers and financiers throughout the film and turns up at their mansions and in the lobbies of their banks and trawling the streets of London with a loud-hailer and billboard advising them to

stay away from these rich people as they are crafty.

While none of the rich bankers who caused the crash and milked the government for assistance after the GFC saw the inside of a cell, more than 1,700 poor and working class people were rounded up in August 2011 following rioting and looting in England due to social unrest. Many of these people were jailed for the crimes of theft of food and simple household items for which riot squad would turn up at their homes in numbers, with television cameras in tow to, smash down their doors and arrest them.

So great are the differences in income levels of people in England that in a typical bank in London it would take 300 years for the lowest paid worker to earn what their bosses earn in a year.

Emperor's New Clothes may seem like all doom and gloom and cause viewers, as one Australian critic lamented, "To keep the depression hotline on speed dial!"

But as Brand remarks early in the movie, "Every crisis is an opportunity for change – to change the system and to change direction."

To see how the capitalist system tries to dupe ordinary people he wheels out one of its greatest apologists for particularly harsh and well deserved scrutiny – Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who in her ascension to 10 Downing Street had the gall to quote from St Francis of Assisi.

Brand provides other archival footage of her attempts to break the union movement in England during the 1980s who she referred to as, "The enemy within." There is also her telling quote to try to break the collective resolve of the working class and mould them into compliant uncritical slaves: "There is no such thing as society, there are only individuals."

He shows how collective solutions work by taking his message to the streets and includes throughout the movie ultimately successful attempts by a group of public housing tenants to stop their flats being sold to private enterprise. This would have squeezed them all out at the ridiculously high rents that were then going to be charged.

The movie does not only follow the travails of the English working class but also goes to the other side of the Atlantic to follow up a fairer system of public housing in New York City and also to a slum part of a city in South Africa with two busloads of people wearing the



masks of the 80 richest people in the world.

One cannot let pass the outstanding work of director Winterbottom who has used clever cinematographic techniques to draw the viewer to the screen and keep their attention there. This includes the use of close ups of the movie's subjects, seamless editing, good continuity and excellent choice of soundtrack including Casetteboy's "Cameron's Conference Rap" parody, the clip which has been included in the film.

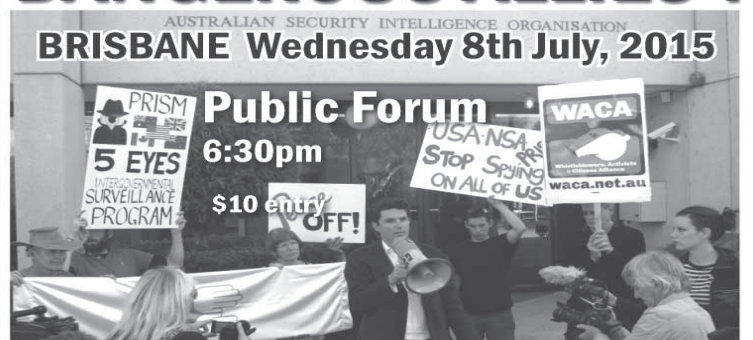
By the end of the movie Brand is in full flight calling for taxation reform including a 90% tax rate for the richest 1% which he mockingly includes himself amongst and therefore, "We don't have to rush that one through." Critics of Brand also point to his apparent back-flip on voting in the 2015 UK general elections. To those people he replied, "Ultimately what I feel is that by not removing the Tories through an unwillingness to participate in the 'masquerade of democracy', I was implicitly expecting the most vulnerable people in society to pay the price on my behalf while I pondered alternatives in luxury." More a backhander than a back flip.

What we choose to do with the film's message is up to us individually and collectively.

While Russell Brand does not advocate socialism as a collective solution, there are references to Marx in the movie and the movie speaks the truth about (the unequal) power relations in our society and how to pursue social and political change.

Miss it at your peril!
Rob Gowland is on leave

DANGEROUS ALLIES ?



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Senator Scott Ludlam Australian Greens
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POLITICS IN THE PUB

June 25

THE REALITY AND RHETORIC OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN AUSTRALIA, WHO BENEFITS AND WHO LOSES?

Bill Mitchell, Professor, Director, Centre for Full Employment and Equity, Newcastle University;

John Buchanan, Professor, School of Business, Uni of Sydney;

July 2

A HUMAN RIGHTS ACT FOR AUSTRALIA – WHY WE NEED ONE

Chris Holley, Campaign Manager, Amnesty International;
Chris Graham, editor, *New Matilda*;

July 9

INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Wendy Bacon, Dr, Professor Emeritus, UTS;
Chris Graham, editor, *New Matilda*;

July 16

THE BAIRD GOVERNMENT'S DESTRUCTION OF TAFE: SERVING PUBLIC GOOD BY COMMERCIALY RUN "TRAINING COURSES" SERVING BIG MONEY

Pat Ford, Federal TAFE Secretary, Australian Education Union;
Damien Oliver, Dr, Research Analyst, University Sydney Business School;

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From slavery to self-reliance

Stella Paul

HuligeAmma, a Dalit woman in her mid-40s, bends over a sewing machine, carefully running the needle over the hem of a shirt. Sitting nearby is Roopa, her 22-year-old daughter, who reads an amusing message on her cell-phone and laughs heartily.

The pair lead a simple yet contented life – they subsist on half a dollar a day, stitch their own clothes and participate in schemes to educate their community in the Bellary district of the southwest Indian state of Karnataka.

But not so very long ago, both women were slaves. They have fought an exhausting battle to get to where they are today, pushing against two evils that lurk in this mineral-rich state: the practice of sexual slavery in Hindu temples, and forced labour in the illegal mines that dot Bellary District, home to 25 percent of India's iron ore reserves.

Finally free of the yoke of dual slavery, they are determined to preserve their hard-won existence, humble though it may be. Still, they will never forget the wretchedness that once defined their daily lives, nor the entrenched religious and economic systems in India that paved the way for their destitution and bondage.

From temple to mine

"I was 12 years old when my parents offered me to the Goddess Yellamma [worshipped in the Hindu pantheon as the "goddess of the fallen"], and told me I was now a "devadasi", HuligeAmma tells Inter Press Service (IPS). "I had no idea what it meant. All I knew was that I would not marry a man because I now belonged to the Goddess."

While her initial impressions were not far from the truth, HuligeAmma could not have known then, as an innocent adolescent, what

horrors her years of servitude would hold.

The devadasi tradition – the practice of dedicating predominantly lower-caste girls to serve a particular deity or temple – has a centuries-long history in South India.

While these women once occupied a high status in society, the fall of Indian kingdoms to British rule rendered temples penniless and left many devadasis without the structures that had once supported them. Pushed into poverty but unable to find other work, bound as they were to the gods, devadasis in many states across India's southern belt essentially became prostitutes, resulting in the government issuing a ban on the entire system of temple slavery in 1988.

Still, the practice continues and as women like HuligeAmma will testify, it remains as degrading and brutal as it was in the 1980s.

She tells IPS that as she grew older a stream of men would visit her in the night, demanding sexual favours. Powerless to refuse, she gave birth to five children by five different men – none of whom assumed any responsibility for her or the child.

After the last child was born, driven nearly mad with hunger and despair, HuligeAmma broke away from the temple and fled to Hospet, a town close to the World Heritage site of Hampi in northern Karnataka.

It did not take her long to find work in an open-cast mine, one of dozens of similar, illicit units that operated throughout the district from 2004 to 2011. For six years, from dawn until dusk, HuligeAmma extracted iron ore by using a hammer to create holes in the open pit through which the iron could be "blasted" out.

She was unaware at the time that this back-breaking labour constituted the nucleus of a massive illegal mining operation in Karnataka state which saw the extraction and export of 29.2 million tonnes of

iron ore between 2006 and 2011. All she knew was that she and Roopa, who worked alongside her as a child labourer, earned no more than 50 rupees apiece (about \$0.70) each day.

In a bid to crack down on the criminal trade, police often raided the mines and arrested the workers, who had to pay bribes of 200-300 rupees (roughly \$4-6) to secure their release.

In a strange echo of the devadasi system, this cycle kept them indebted to the mine operators.

In 2009, when she could no longer tolerate the crushing workload or the constant sexual advances from fellow workers, contractors and truckers, who saw the former temple slave as "fair game" HuligeAmma threw herself on the mercy of a local non-governmental organisation, Sakhi Trust, which has proved instrumental in lifting both her and her daughter out of the abyss.

Today all her children are back in school and Roopa works as a youth coordinator with Sakhi Trust. They live in Nagenhalli, a Dalit village where HuligeAmma works as a seamstress, teaching dressmaking skills to young girls in the community.

Unsustainable system

The story may have ended happily for HuligeAmma and Roopa, but for many of India's roughly 200 million Dalits, there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

Once considered "untouchables" in the Indian caste system, Dalits – literally "the broken" – are a diverse and divided group, encompassing everyone from so-called "casteless" communities to other marginalised peoples. Under this vast umbrella exists a further hierarchy, with some communities, like the Madiga Dalits (sometimes called "scavengers"), often discriminated against by their kin.

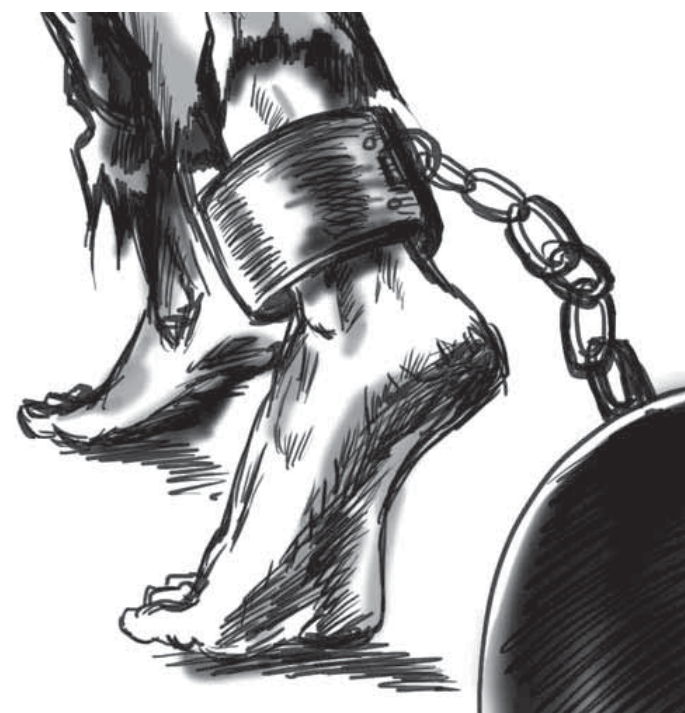
Historically, Madigas have made shoes, cleaned drains and skinned animals – tasks considered beneath the dignity of all other groups in Hindu society.

Most of the devadasis in South India hail from this community, according to Bhagya Lakshmi, social activist and director of the Sakhi Trust. In Karnataka alone, there are an estimated 23,000 temple slaves, of whom over 90 percent are Dalit women.

Lakshmi, who has worked alongside the Madiga people for nearly two decades, says that Madiga women grow up knowing little else besides oppression and discrimination.

The devadasi system, she adds, is nothing more than institutionalised, caste-based violence, which sets Dalit women on a course that almost guarantees further exploitation, including unpaid labour or unequal wages.

For instance, even in an



illegal mine, a non-Dalit worker gets between 350 and 400 rupees (between \$5-6) a day, while a Dalit is paid no more than 100 rupees, reveals Minjamma, a Madiga woman who worked in a mine for seven years.

Yet it is Dalit women who made up the bulk of the labourers entrapped in the massive iron trade.

"Walk into any Dalit home in this region and you will not meet a single woman or child who has never worked in a mine as a 'coolie' [labourer]," Manjula, a former mine-worker turned anti-slavery activist from the Mariyammanahalli village in Bellary District, tells IPS.

Herself the daughter and granddaughter of devadasis, who spent her childhood years working in a mine, Manjula believes the systems of forced labour and temple slavery are connected in a matrix of exploitation across India's southern states, a linkage that is deepened further by the caste system.

She, like most official sources, is unclear on the exact number of Dalits forced into the iron ore extraction racket, but is confident that it ran into "several thousands".

Destroying lives and livelihoods

Annually, India accounts for 7 percent of global iron ore production, and ranks fourth in terms of the quantity produced after Brazil, China and Australia. Every year, India produces about 281 million tonnes of iron ore, according to a 2011 Supreme Court report.

Karnataka is home to over 9 billion tonnes of India's total estimated reserves of 25.2 billion tonnes of iron ore, making it a crucial player in the country's export industry. Bellary District alone houses an estimated 1 billion tonnes of iron ore reserves. Between April 2006 and July 2010, 228 unlicensed miners exported 29.2 million tonnes of iron ore, causing the state losses worth US\$16 million.

With a population of 2.5 million people relying primarily on agriculture, fisheries and livestock farming for their livelihoods, Bellary District has suffered significant environmental impacts from illicit mining operations.

Groundwater supplies have been poisoned, with sources in and around mining areas showing high iron and manganese content, as well as an excessive concentration of fluoride – all of which are the enemies of farming families who live off the land.

Research suggests that 9.93% of the region's 68,234 hectares of forest have been lost in the mining boom, while the dust generated through the processes of excavating, blasting and grading iron has coated vegetation in surrounding areas in a thick film of particulate matter, stifling photosynthesis.

Although the Supreme Court ordered the cessation of all unregistered mining activity in 2011, following an extensive report on the environmental, economic and social impacts, rich industrialists continue to flout the law.

Still, an official ban has made it easier to crack down on the practice. Today, from the ashes of two crumbling systems – unlawful mining operations and religiously sanctioned sexual abuse – some of India's poorest women are pointing the way towards a sustainable future.

From servitude to self-reliance

Their first order of business is to educate themselves and their children, secure alternative livelihoods and deal with the basic issue of sanitation – currently, there is just one toilet for every 90 people in Bellary District.

The literacy rate among Dalit communities in South India has been found to be as low as 10 percent in some areas, but Madiga women are making a massive push to turn the tide. With the help of the Sakhi Trust, 600 Dalit girls who might have missed out on schooling altogether have been enrolled since 2011.

Today, Lakshmi Devi Harijana, hailing from the village of Danapura, has become the first Madiga woman in the region to teach in a college, while a further 25 women from her village have earned their university degrees.

To them, these changes are nothing short of revolutionary. *Third World Resurgence* ✪

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