



# Push for dictatorial powers

Peter Mac

The week before last the Abbott government attempted to force Labor to back legislation that would have allowed it to strip dual national citizens of their Australian citizenship if the government claimed they were guilty of involvement in terrorist activities. The legislation has not yet been revealed, and the government demanded that Labor agree to the legislation without having seen it.

Three weeks ago news broke about Australian navy and security forces boarding an asylum seeker boat on the high seas and bribing its crew to take their passengers back to Indonesia.

These totally new developments demonstrate the Abbott government's willingness to break laws and legal conventions in its insatiable drive for power.

The Indonesian government has pointed out that bribing boat crews to return to Indonesia amounts to people smuggling, deemed a crime under international law. Under Australian law people smuggling can result in a sentence of ten years imprisonment, but the Abbott government is hardly likely to indict itself for this crime.

The demand for "blank cheque" approval of citizenship legislation is equally novel and equally outrageous. The government had already obtained "in principle" agreement (if that's the right expression) with Labor for revoking the Australian citizenship of dual nationals accused of terrorism.

However, when opposition leader Bill Shorten demanded to see the legislation before backing it in Parliament, Abbott tried to force his hand, sneering that "... some people in the Labor Party ... don't take national security as seriously as they should."

The legislation would have involved punishment of an individual solely on the basis of a decision by the Minister for Immigration.

This would violate the legal principle enshrined in Magna Carta, under which no person can be punished unless they have been tried and found guilty, and only then on the basis of evidence.

It would also violate the Australian Constitution, which provides for separation of the powers of the judiciary and the executive government, and only permits the judiciary to try, convict and sentence someone accused of crime.

A leaked cabinet briefing paper argued that the situation requires strong laws giving the government total control, and that any legislation which required a court conviction before revoking their citizenship would be "toothless". The paper was intended to convince doubtful members of cabinet, like communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull, about the overriding need for the citizenship legislation.

Abbott is still talking about revoking the citizenship of dual nationals, but it now appears that the government will depend on extending existing legislation under which any citizen convicted of having fought Australian troops automatically loses their Australian citizenship.

The change in strategy means the government will not achieve its original wide-ranging objective, because as the cabinet briefing paper admitted: "The vast majority of nationals fighting with terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq would retain their citizenship if a conviction was required".

However, the fact remains that the government clearly wanted to be able to punish anyone it accuses of terrorism without having to produce evidence to prove the accusation.

## The road to absolute power

Many commentators now say the government is becoming a fascist dictatorship. Fascist governments typically assume the power to punish individuals whom they accuse of criminal activities, and that certainly appears to have been the government's objective in introducing the citizenship legislation.

Absolutist regimes strive to retain power by whipping up public fear about real or fictitious enemies. They pose as the sole organisation that could defeat them, and take no responsibility whatsoever for having made enemies in the first place.

Abbott's attempt to gain unquestioned support for the citizenship legislation was preceded by his recent nationally televised "Daesh is gonna get you" speech. The briefing paper recommended pressuring Labor by reminding them that "... none of us should give succour to those who would take up arms against our soldiers or do the Australian people harm."

And there are other very disturbing issues, including the government's tendency to lie over its policy initiatives, its obsessive secrecy, its use of repetitive slogans, its attempts at repressing critical media (particularly the ABC), its



cruelty, hypocrisy and militarism. All of those attributes are typical of dictatorships.

The government continues its relentless victimisation of asylum seekers. Proposed new legislation would allow detention centre guards to beat detainees, if necessary to death, in order to prevent escapes or property damage. Other recent legislation makes it a crime to disclose cases of abuse in detention centres, which doctors say imposes an unbearable ethical dilemma.

The government has made it virtually impossible for asylum seekers to access personal and other information and has cut funding for legal aid and interpreting services. Immigration officials recently prevented lawyers from inspecting Christmas Island facilities in a case regarding physical and psychological injuries suffered by a seven-year-old detainee.

The government excuses all these actions on the totally phoney pretext of "stopping the boats".

The Abbott government is not yet a dictatorship, but it's heading rapidly down that road. Under the citizenship legislation the immigration minister would have been able to arbitrarily arrest, imprison and punish any one

he deemed to be a terrorist, without producing evidence and just on his say-so. It would also have set a precedent for similar action in other policy areas.

The leaking of the cabinet briefing paper indicates a high level of concern within cabinet that the new citizenship stripping legislation would have breached the constitution. Nevertheless, it would be a grave mistake to assume that the government would not have been able to enact and implement the legislation, or that it won't try something similar again.

Labor has, after all, followed meekly in the wake of many Liberal policies. For example Labor leader Bill Shorten recently indicated that former Labor governments had erred by not being as ruthless towards asylum seekers as the Howard regime.

So Labor might have approved the citizenship legislation and the courts might have rejected an appeal against it, despite its apparent breaching of the Constitution.

The most reliable way to stop the evil Abbott government from achieving dictatorial powers is to eject it from office at the first possible opportunity. ✪

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## Guardian

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## Act against the TPP

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) is a free trade agreement being negotiated between Australia, the US, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Japan and Vietnam

The TPP negotiations have been rightly widely criticised for their secrecy. The current process means the details of the deal are secret and only become public after it has been signed.

The US wants special rights for foreign investors included in the TPP, which would allow foreign investors to sue governments for millions of dollars if their investments are "harmed" by a change in a law or policy, even if that law or policy is designed to protect public health or the environment. The proposal is known as the Investor-State Dispute Settlement, or ISDS, mechanism.

These disputes are heard by international investment tribunals, which have no independent judges, because arbitrators can also be practising lawyers, and there are no precedents or appeals, so decisions can undermine national laws and court systems.

The big corporations are pushing for the inclusion of these special rights in the TPP, which would allow them to sue governments for damages if their investments have been harmed by a particular law or policy, even if the law or policy protects public health. Philip Morris is already challenging the Australian government over the tobacco plain packaging legislation, using an obscure 1993 Australia-Hong Kong investment treaty.

Last week WikiLeaks released secret documents on TISA (Trade In Services Agreement) negotiations which cover the United States, the European Union and 23 other countries including Turkey, Mexico, Canada, Australia, Pakistan, Taiwan and Israel – which together comprise two-thirds of global GDP. "Services" now account for nearly 80 percent of the US and EU economies and even in developing countries like Pakistan account for 53 percent of the economy. While the proposed TPP has become well known in recent months in the United States and Europe, the TISA is the larger component of the strategy.

The release coincides with TISA meetings at the ministerial level at the OECD in Paris this month.

The TISA WikiLeaks release follows the WikiLeaks publication of the secret draft financial services annex of the TISA negotiations on June 19, 2014 showing the aim is to further deregulate the financial sector, despite widespread consensus that lack of oversight and deregulation were the main sparks that ignited the global financial crisis of 2008. The release confirms the ongoing determination to deregulate. Furthermore, standstill clauses will tie the hands of future governments wishing to implement changes in response to changing environment.

The release is the largest on secret TISA documents and covers numerous previously undisclosed areas. It contains drafts and annexes on issues such as air traffic, maritime, professional services, e-commerce, delivery services, transparency, domestic regulation, as well as several document on the positions of negotiating parties. WikiLeaks has also published detailed expert analysis of the topics covered in its release.

There is pressure to finish the deal in 2015. We must ensure that our health, environmental and other laws are decided through democratic processes, not secretly signed away in a trade agreement.

You can:

- Send a message to the Trade Minister
- Help raise awareness by liking AFTINET on Facebook and following them on Twitter for updates which you can share with your own networks
- Contact your local MP and Senator
- Organise a local or workplace meeting

For more information: [www.aftinet.org.au](http://www.aftinet.org.au)

## PRESS FUND

The uproar over the recent ABC Q&A program was not really about what someone said concerning unproven allegations he was involved in terrorism, it was really about a Liberal MP's reply that he would kick the young man out of the country if he could. The statement proved that proposed legislation allowing a federal minister to impose sentences of de-citizenship and expulsion would violate the right to trial that has been in existence since the sealing of Magna Carta, and that the legislation should not pass. We intend to follow up this crucially important story. However, we really need your support by way of contributions to the Press Fund, so please, if you possibly can, send us something for the next edition. Many thanks to those who contributed this week, as follows:

Ray Hanson \$10, Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$30 Progressive total: \$3,890

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# Offshore processing illegal

**Refugee advocates have called on the parliamentary Labor Party not to support any Coalition legislation aimed at saving offshore processing from a successful High Court challenge.**

The Human Rights Legal Centre's challenge seems to have exposed what so many felt for a long time – that offshore processing is illegal. It certainly has exploded the lie that offshore processing is the responsibility of Nauru and PNG.

The High Court challenge comes at a time when offshore processing is also facing a Constitutional challenge in the Supreme Court of PNG. "The issue of offshore processing will be vigorously debated at the Labor conference in July," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Resolutions will be put to the conference to end offshore processing and close Manus Island and Nauru. The recent ACTU conference unanimously adopted policy to end offshore processing.

"Any support for the Coalition in the present circumstances would not only pre-empt Labor conference discussion, and possible rejection of offshore processing; it would be regarded as explicit support for the corrupt detention system and the corrupt Nauru government.

"The shocking revelations of physical and sexual abuse on Nauru have exposed the horror of the offshore regime that the Coalition is scrambling to legitimise. The detention regime on Nauru is crumbling under the weight of the corrupt government and the scale of abuses being maintained by the Australian government and Transfield."

Ian Rintoul pointed out that even as concerns mounted for the welfare of baby Asha, sent back to Nauru two weeks ago the Coalition government has sent another 40 men, women and children back to the hell of Nauru.

"The parliamentary Labor

Party has an opportunity to break the toxic bi-partisan support for offshore processing that violated human rights and inflicted torture and misery. A number of Labor politicians including leader Bill Shorten have referred to mistakes over asylum seekers that Labor made when it was in government – restarting offshore processing was one of them.

"Labor has an opportunity to rectify one of its most serious mistakes. We urge the Labor leaders to seize that opportunity – don't throw the Liberals a lifeline."

Meanwhile, the Refugee Action Coalition says it is now quite clear that the Coalition government, the architects of Operation Sovereign Borders, did pay the boat crew of a recent asylum boat to take asylum seekers back to Indonesia. The crew says it, the asylum seekers say it, the Indonesian police say it and the long list of government denials says all the public needs to know about who is telling the truth.

In this case, as in every other turn-around, the government is guilty of crimes on the high seas; trafficking defenceless people who were attempting to get to safety in New Zealand and returning them to danger.

The incident has also exposed the lie that the Coalition has stopped the boats. Almost two years since the start of Operation Sovereign Borders, asylum boats are still coming. The turn around also revealed that for all the supposed sophistication and military power of Operation Sovereign Borders, it is underpinned by wads of cash.

The media and political furore has focussed on the government's denials and the payment of money to the boat crew – but the real crime is that the government has prevented another boat of asylum seekers gaining the protection and security they need.

"The furore has revealed much hypocrisy – the Coalition's complete lack of scruples, and its willingness to use bribes, but also from Labor," said Ian Rintoul.

"Labor politicians have tried to make political mileage by using the same rhetoric about 'people smuggling' as the Coalition. Rather than demonise boat crews, that provide an indispensable service for asylum seekers, Labor should be attacking the Coalition's turn-around policy and its ban on accepting refugees from Indonesia.

"Abbott says that the Coalition uses turn-arounds, when it is 'safe to do so'. But there is nothing safe about turn-arounds. These boats foundered on a reef off Landuti Island."

He said that by choosing not to use the very obvious orange lifeboats to return asylum seekers to Indonesia, the government had to resort to paying the crew to try to make sure that the boats would head to Indonesia and not attempt to continue to travel to Australia, or New Zealand, as they originally intended. The government has been caught out by its own "cleverness".

"We support the Indonesian government fully investigating the incident," said Rintoul, "The Australian government's cover-up attempt deserves to be exposed. It shamefully continues to use Indonesia as a dumping ground.

"It has tens of thousands of dollars, indeed millions, to arrange turn-backs but has not given a cent to Indonesia to assist with the thousands of Rohingya asylum seekers who recently found safety in Aceh.

"The turn-around policy is just an invitation for asylum seekers to die elsewhere. The real crime of the Abbott government is that it continues to violate human rights and international law by turning asylum boats back to Indonesia." ☺

## 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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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.



# "Jobactive" - Making unemployment "the worst time"

Len Waster

**The Abbott Liberal-National government's introduction of the Jobactive system on July 1 marks the beginning of "the worst time in Australia's post-war history to be unemployed."**

Jobactive intends to make the already harsh conditions imposed by government on the unemployed even harsher. From July 1:

- job seekers under 30 years of age will be forced onto work for the dole schemes after six months – previously it was 12 months;
- those in this age group will need to work for the dole for 25 hours a week for six months a year, rather than 15 hours a week as it is for other age groups;
- failure to attend a fortnightly job search appointment without a "reasonable excuse" will incur a fine of \$50, with higher penalties for further infringements.

## Launched in a jobless economy

These measures come at a time when, ever since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, unemployment and underemployment have steadily grown in Australia and internationally.

Currently, more than 745,000 people are counted as unemployed in Australia, a growth of more than 300,000 since 2008. Of these, nearly 190,000 have been unemployed for more than a year, three times as many as in 2008. Over a million people are underemployed, an increase of more than 400,000 since that time.

This means about 1.8 million people (14.5 percent of the workforce) are actively seeking work – at a time when job vacancies have dwindled to 158,000, compared with 465,000 vacancies in 2008. There are now 11 jobseekers for every job vacancy, the highest job seeker to job vacancy ratio since records began.

Given that current unemployment benefits are \$280 per fortnight below the poverty line and work for the dole (which boosts benefits by \$20 a fortnight) is more than \$400 short of the minimum wage for the

same work, then unemployment is a one-way ticket to poverty for those stranded in the surplus labour pool.

What is more, the conditions in which the unemployed are placed have a direct bearing on the security and condition of the workforce more generally.

A typical instance is that of Southern Downs Shire (Lockyer Valley, Queensland). According to its mayor, the council will help balance its budget by replacing its park management staff with (forced) participants in the Abbott government's Work for the Dole and Green Army programs, where they can "give back to the community" in return for gaining the skills and experience "that can help them find a job"!

## Punitive and privatised

Jobactive is a system of contracted services that will cost \$5.1 billion over its first three years (though the contracts are tendered out for five years!)

The privately-owned employment service providers will have unprecedented power to punish job seekers. This power in itself may be in violation of the Social Security Law, which expressly forbids employment services from making social security compliance decisions.

The history of contracted out employment services – initiated by the Howard Liberal-National government in 1996 by privatising the Commonwealth Employment Service so as to create a "market" out of the unemployed – is one of abuse of the system to maximise contractors' profits.

The unemployed have become the commodity, the raw material out of which the employment service provision corporations generate profits by keeping job seekers "engaged" in job market processes through a largely punitive system of fines, appointments, unpaid work activities, short-term subsidised work and irrelevant training.

Like other privatisations and marketisation processes, often forced on governments through such institutions as the World Trade Organisation



and trade agreements such as the General Agreement on Trades and Services, the "market" in processing the unemployed is increasingly dominated by multinational corporations specialising in taking over government functions and public sector enterprises.

In handing out its employment services contracts the new Jobactive scheme has favoured US companies. In particular, Maximus Corporation (annual revenue \$US1.7 billion), through its wholly owned subsidiary MAX Solutions and Providence Service Corporation (annual revenue \$US1.1 billion), in a joint venture with Mission Australia, have won nearly half the Work for the Dole co-ordinator contracts. They have also won generalised employment services contracts for 38 of the 51 employment service regions in which providers may operate.

MAX Solutions' successes have been associated with its employment at strategic times of senior bureaucrats from the Departments responsible for the programs. A former senior executive, who managed the 2009 tender process which awarded MAX Solutions its dominant market share, was then employed by MAX Solutions a month before tenders for current contracts were opened.

In February 2008, seven months before the start of the 2009 tender

process MAX employed the then director of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations as the company's general manager of strategy performance, to oversee MAX's successful bid for contracts.

## A diversion from real job creation

The Jobactive system is a diversion from the Abbott government's lack of any policy to address the jobs crisis in Australia.

Its only gesture in this direction is that its harsh treatment of the unemployed and its encouragement of long periods of unpaid work for job seekers increases the competition for jobs and suppresses wage growth – this apparently stimulates investment and new jobs, according to neo-liberal economics.

A multitude of unmet social demands in present society need investment and a skilled workforce. These demands – for physical infrastructure and social services and most vitally for the urgently needed transition from a fossil fuel based consumer economy to an environmentally sustainable society are neglected or suppressed by pro-capitalist governments such as come to office in Australia and elsewhere. The Abbott government is just the

most appalling example of this type of government.

## Oppose and resist Jobactive!

The introduction of Jobactive has been greeted with small but significant actions against the scheme. These struggles need to be supported and broadened.

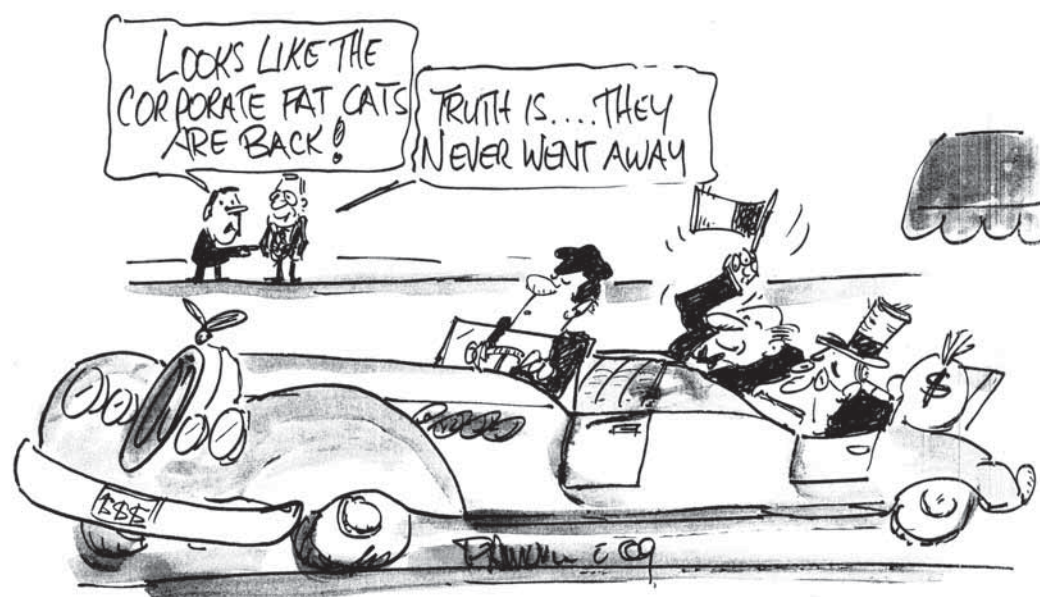
The Unemployed Union of Australia (UUA) is staging demonstrations in Melbourne and Adelaide to launch a "Fight the Fine" campaign, a protest against the punitive fines for the unemployed, which encapsulates much of what is inequitable about Jobactive.

Young Communists have made Jobactive – along with the removal of penalty rates for young workers and high fees for vocational and other courses – priorities for their campaigning.

It is vital that the barriers between the employed and unemployed divisions of the labour force are removed, so the broad labour movement can be united in a strong front against neo-liberal policies of punishment and austerity for workers.

A step in this direction has been the support the National Union of Workers has given the UUA by providing office space and other resources. ✪

## Pete's Corner



Sydney

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Tuesday July 7

**What's wrong with the Talisman Sabre military exercise?**

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Tuesday August 18

**Defending workers rights**

Tuesday September 1

**What's causing the environmental crisis?**

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

Enquiries: Hannah 0418 668 098



# Child detention “at crisis point”

**Detention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children around the nation has reached a crisis point, with the worst rates in Western Australia, Amnesty International says.**

In a report released last week, the human rights group said Aboriginal youth in WA were 52 times more likely than others to be in detention.

Indigenous youth make up about 6% of people aged 10 to 17 in WA, but represent 79% of all young people in detention. Figures for children aged 10 to 13 are even more disturbing, with almost 90% of those in detention Aboriginal.

“Unless the extremely high rate of Aboriginal youth detention is urgently addressed, an increasing number of Aboriginal young people will move into the adult justice system,” the report says.

Amnesty says reasons for the alarming statistics include a failure to support Indigenous community-led programs, police “discrepancies” in dealing with youths, enforcement of bail conditions, mandatory sentencing laws, and inadequate diagnosis and support for people with foetal alcohol spectrum disorders.

The research found that when police made contact with children committing alleged offences, they arrested Indigenous people 66% of the time rather than issuing a caution, compared with only 41% of the time for non-Aboriginal children.

Amnesty International says there is also a lack of adequate non-custodial sentencing options, particularly in regional and remote areas. Amnesty Indigenous rights manager

Tammy Solonec, a Nigena woman from Derby in the Kimberley, has launched a petition to try to convince WA Attorney-General Michael Mischin to scrap mandatory detention for children.

“During my time as a lawyer I’ve watched too many Indigenous kids get locked up – only to spiral into a life of crime and disadvantage,” Ms Solonec said.

“Everyone has a right to be treated equally. But when an Indigenous child is 52 times more likely to be locked up than a non-Aboriginal child, we know the law is not being applied equally.

## “Real solutions”

“This campaign is about real solutions, led and delivered by Aboriginal people.” Ms Solonec said that if children are given a chance instead of being locked up, their lives can be turned around.

“I remember speaking with Sarah [not her real name] from the Fitzroy Valley in WA,” she said. “Her parents split when she was about 10. After this she grew up without a mother, moving between the homes of various family members. She smoked, she drank, and when she was 16 she assaulted someone.

“Sarah was lucky. After the assault she was steered away from trouble when the Aboriginal-led Yiriman Project took her out on country with women Elders.

“She is now employed at a local Aboriginal organisation and is planning to start her own business. Sarah says that her future is promising because of her involvement as

a teenager with the Yiriman Project women’s program.”

Amnesty International secretary general Salil Shetty recently visited Australia for the release of a new report, “A brighter tomorrow: Keeping Indigenous kids in the community and out of detention in Australia”.

He called on the government to support Indigenous-led justice reinvestment programs in response to the soaring overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in detention, who are incarcerated at 24 times the rate of other kids across the country.

“Australia has a long and tragic history of removing Indigenous children from their families and communities,” Mr Shetty said.

“I’m inspired by the innovative work Indigenous communities are doing across Australia to bring up a new generation of young people, but the Australian government needs to catch up and fund the programs that have been shown to work in keeping Indigenous kids out of prison, and making communities safer. It’s a win-win situation for all Australians.”

*The Koori Mail* ✪



**“Australia has a long and tragic history of removing Indigenous children from their families and communities.”**

## Action protects Customs pay

**Following a strong campaign from the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), Customs and the Abbott government have backed down on a plan to immediately cut take home pay by stripping a wide range of allowances from staff, as part of the Customs and Immigration merger on July 1.**

The government had told Customs officers for months that they would have their pay cut when Customs ceases to exist on July 1, with their merger into the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the creation of the Australian Border Force.

Before the union intervention, Customs officers were set to lose allowances worth many thousands of dollars a year because the Customs workplace agreement will cease to exist after June 30.

While the union has welcomed the last minute determinations it has warned that this is only a temporary reprieve, with thousands of Customs staff still set to lose take-home pay under the government’s

requirements for a new enterprise agreement.

Under the Abbott government’s public service bargaining policy, agencies are being forced to remove allowances along with many other workplace rights and conditions.

CPSU national secretary Nadine Flood said: “Customs staff should never have been facing a immediate pay cut. They have endured months of uncertainty, worried how they would pay their bills after July 1.

“Staff are no longer facing an immediate pay cut from day one of Border Force, but they still face a pay cut in a new agreement which must comply with Government’s bargaining policy.

“Our Border Protection members have tough and sometimes dangerous jobs which deserve our thanks and respect, yet the Abbott government is pushing a policy that will dramatically cut their take home pay,” said Ms Flood.

Currently Customs officers can receive allowances for a range of workplace situations including

being at sea, using firearms, meeting high fitness standards, working long hours, unusual shifts and performing dirty and/or dangerous work.

Some of the allowances at risk in the new agreement include:

- Use of Force Allowance: for officers required to maintain specified fitness level so they can carry firearms;
- Marine and Marine Accommodation Allowances: for officers deployed at sea for up to 36 days at a time;
- Dog Detector Unit Allowance: for officers who work with dogs detecting controlled substances.

## Strike action

To highlight their deep dissatisfaction with Abbott government’s failed bargaining policy which seeks to cut allowances and other rights and conditions, CPSU members in Customs and Immigration will be taking 2 hour strike action on July 1. ✪

## TAFE needs guaranteed funding

**The Australian Education Union (AEU) has welcomed the announcement that a federal Labor government would guarantee a proportion of vocational education funding to TAFE.**

The union said Labor’s commitment to work with state and territory governments on a national plan for vocational training that recognised the central role of TAFE was a positive proposal.

“TAFE has always been the backbone of vocational training and education in this nation and it must continue in that position,” said AEU federal TAFE secretary Pat Forward.

“Unfortunately what we have seen from governments is the pursuit of a privatisation agenda that on any measure has been an abject failure.

“TAFEs have had their funding slashed and government funding for private for profit operators has soared. We have seen the proliferation of unscrupulous operators looking to cash in by charging exorbitant fees for poor quality training.

“This broken system is leaving students the victims: without the

skills they need to get secure jobs and saddled with huge debts they will struggle to pay off.

“It is also having huge ramifications for our ability as a nation to provide the high skilled workforce that is required to allow Australia to remain competitive and prosperous.”

Ms Forward said that there needed to be bipartisan support for reforms that would help guarantee the future of TAFE.

“The great concern is that once we lose the experience and capacity of TAFEs we will be unable to rebuild it and students will be left with a sub-standard system.

“We also need immediate action to regulate fees in the VET sector, and to more closely control the massive growth in student debt through VET FEE HELP.”

The union said standards must be improved urgently, including minimum hours for courses, a ban on contracting out training to unregistered third parties, and further restrictions on how private providers are able to market themselves. ✪

Sydney

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Organised by El Salvador Network FMLN Sydney Inc





# Removing the spine from "our ABC"

Bob Briton

The furore over last week's Q&A appearance by Zaky Mallah has not yet died down. The ABC's Monday night panel show, conducted before a live audience, regularly hits the headlines in the days following its broadcast but never like this. The person at the centre of the controversy spent two years in Goulburn jail waiting trial on terrorism charges. He was acquitted. He pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of threatening Commonwealth officers and was sentenced to time already served in prison. That was a decade ago when Mallah was a troubled 19-year-old and typical of a section of the marginalised, alienated Muslim youth in Australia's larger cities finding the "radical" message of fundamentalist groups persuasive.

Since that time, Mallah has used his energies to dissuade others from following his early example. He is scathing of IS and similar groups. He took the opportunity as a member of the Q&A audience to ask government parliamentary secretary Steven Ciobo what would have happened in his case if the Immigration Minister had had the power to strip him of his Australian citizenship. Ciobo said he would be happy to be part of a government that would force Mallah to leave the country. At the end of the exchange, Mallah said that the sort of comment made by the federal member for Moncrieff would encourage young Muslims to go abroad to join IS.

Program presenter Tony Jones quickly ruled the point "out of order" and the program moved on. In the days that followed, conservative politicians tripped over each other in the rush to condemn the "lack of

judgement" of Q&A program management. What was the ABC thinking? How could they have put the panellists and the studio audio audience at risk by allowing somebody like Mallah into the studio? How dare they provide a platform for this supposed "extremist"? ABC managing director Mark Scott was quickly on the airwaves pleading guilty to an "error of judgement" on behalf of the Q&A crew, whose members were obliged to remain silent.

## "Whose side?"

The Prime Minister sensed an opportunity to take public debate away from topics like the bleak economic outlook for the country and the sovereignty-threatening Trans Pacific Partnership. "Heads should roll over this, heads should roll," he said. The phrase was tasteless but probably deliberate given his frequent reference to human heads severed and displayed by IS forces being used by imperialist forces to affect "regime change" in Syria and destabilise the Middle East.

He channelled US President W Bush's sentiment that "you are either on our side or the side of the terrorists." Abbott's question to anybody concerned about the current legislative trend of his government is, apparently, "whose side are you on?". He previously coined the term "team Australia" to indicate people should be taking "sides" in the war being waged on political freedoms.

Some have noted the similarity between the attitude of the Menzies government towards the Communist Party in the 1950s and the current "anti-terrorist" hysteria. Presumably, the ABC is acting in an "un-Australian" manner by allowing comments deemed "out of order" to be presented. More than one commentator has pointed to the hypocrisy regarding

Q&A given the flood of words about western civilisation, tolerance and press freedom in the wake of the shootings at the office of provocative French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

Conservative politicians and their media cheer squad are now talking about a "non-partisan watchdog" to remove editorial control from the national broadcaster which, itself, is meant to be an independent statutory authority. Of course, an ideological battle has raged for a long time over the composition of the board of the ABC. A conservative board will have a heavy impact on what programs survive and what sorts of opinions get an airing. The conservatives have held sway for quite some time but, as the authoritarian agenda is rolled out, more control is needed.

## Ducking for cover

The change in political climate is obvious at the ABC in recent times. In 2010, "terror suspect" David Hicks put a video question to former PM John Howard about the appalling record of his government in connection with Hicks' detention and treatment at Guantánamo. Howard took the question but not before singing the praises of Australian democracy and how somebody with Hicks' background was free to put such a probing (and ultimately unanswered) question to him on national television. There were no embarrassed apologies and no calls for "heads to roll".

Abbott feels no need to play the small "I" liberal card. The limits of "legitimate" debate and political and trade union activity are getting narrower and narrower. The current drive to shut down questioning of the authoritarian capitalist agenda must be defeated before it is too late, before the jailings and the deportations start. ✪



Zaky Mallah on ABC's Q&A.



Hospitality sector employers are among the most vocal about penalty rate cuts. They are making final submissions to the Fair Work Commission calling for cuts to penalty rates and have campaigned vigorously on the issue. However Fair Work ombudsman Natalie James has found that more than 2,700 restaurant, café and catering workers have been underpaid \$1.2 million in wages. The report found just 42 percent of businesses complied with their workforce obligations and 17 percent of 879 "errors" related to weekend penalties. The hospitality sector is not renowned for its generosity to its workforce, many of whom are young and low-skilled employees. The majority of errors related to wage entitlements as employers were paying flat rates for all hours worked, which often is not enough to cover penalties, loading and overtime. More than \$386,000 was recouped in Victoria alone for 698 employees there. "Not only is the hospitality industry actively campaigning to cut weekend and penalty rates, now we find out a huge number of employers are not even paying them in the first place," commented ACTU president Ged Kearney.

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, almost 30,000 people in NSW are homeless, an increase by 20 percent since 2006. Skyrocketing Sydney rents force tenants into arrears, according to Vinnies. Evidence collected by Vinnies shows the housing crisis is now affecting people on low incomes or in casual employment. Vinnies chief executive is greatly concerned with the rise of first-time homelessness. "We are seeing a much greater increase in first-time homelessness of people on low incomes who have a life event that causes financial difficulty and suddenly they are in arrears with their rent with no hope of catching up... What's missing in the debate about the affordability crisis is the human impact. The sharp end is not young people missing out on mortgages, it's families and individuals who are locked out of any sort of housing," he said. State and federal governments seem to be deaf and blind when it comes to public housing or finding any solution for the people in need.

"We are not going to sit and be nice little ladies," said Clare Forbes, co-chairwoman of Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children. A group of determined and "outraged" grandmothers took part in the Melbourne action to mark World Refugee Day. Ms Forbes said the members came to Melbourne's City Square rally from as far away as Bendigo. "We are outraged at the thought of children being kept in detention and we are determined not to be silent until children and their families are released from detention," Ms Forbes said. Earlier, about a hundred people gathered outside the Liberal Party's headquarters in the city to demand the closure of the Nauru and Manus Island detention centres.

## Taking Issue – Andy Alcock

# Stop supporting brutal suppression

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) has just knocked back the bid by West Papua to be a member of the group and has elevated Indonesia to be an associate.

This is an incredibly low betrayal of a people who have been occupied by the mass murdering criminals of the Indonesian military (TNI) for over 50 years.

How can the MSG elevate Indonesia and exclude West Papua?

The West Papuans are Melanesians – NOT Asians. Indonesia is Asian – NOT Melanesian.

Did the Indonesian generals threaten to invade the other Melanesian nations if they accepted West Papua into the group in the same manner that they did in Aceh, East Timor and parts of Indonesia itself – the usual genocide and gross human rights abuses. Or did they decide to bribe them? They have A levels in genocide, human rights abuses and corruption.

This betrayal means that the West Papuans have to continue to suffer genocide at the hands of the TNI – the largest force for terrorism and fascism in the SE Asian and the SW regions of the world.

Many would describe the Melanesian leaders who went along with the brazen action of the TNI as gutless wonders.

After 53 years of mass murder and barbarity, the West Papuans deserve better. They have suffered for far too long.

But the US wants West Papuan gold and copper. They are a big earner for the Indonesian government and Australian leaders, along with many others in the west, are too gutless to make a stand for human rights.

All people who truly believe in democracy, human decency, human rights and social justice and who abhor genocide, mass human rights violations and hateful racism must

demonstrate against this very cruel and cowardly betrayal.

- NO AID
  - NO TRADE
  - BOYCOTT INDONESIAN TOURISM
  - NO MILITARY COOPERATION WITH WITH INDONESIA
- Until:
- All TNI war criminals have been brought to justice
  - The TNI has been withdrawn from West Papua
  - All victims of the TNI brutality and corruption have been compensated

It is time that the US and its allies (puppets?) stopped supporting this terrorist and fascist regime.

**Andrew (Andy) Alcock is Information Officer, Australia East Timor Friendship Association SA Inc ✪**



## Justice for the victims of Chile's dictatorship

# The Australian connection

Lorena Pizarro is a prominent human rights activist and member of the Central Committee of the Chilean Communist Party. She is here on behalf of the National Campaign for Truth and Justice for Chile to campaign for the extradition of Adriana Rivas, a woman who lives freely in Australia but has been requested by the Chilean government to be extradited, as she faces serious charges of human rights violations in Chile.

Lorena made public speeches and met Australian parliamentarians and human rights groups during her recent tour of the country.

She took some time out of her schedule to speak with the *Guardian* about the history of persecution and current challenges faced by the Chilean people, and also about her campaign in Australia and how it concerns us all.

**Guardian:** We have noticed there's been quite a transformation in the Chilean government in recent times. The Communist Party has gone from being excluded by the Pinochet\* constitution to now being member of the government. How did this transformation happen?

**Lorena Pizarro:** It has been a long and painful process for the party and its militants. Our party was highly persecuted; a high number of our members were tortured and killed. And that persecution changed at the end of the dictatorship. It was not so much a direct persecution, it was a different kind of persecution in that it was made invisible, and it was marginalised. Not only the Communist Party but also the social movements in Chile were subject to it.

So what the party and the left movements did was that they strengthened their bases, and this is what happened towards the end of the dictatorship. For many years of the period of transition in Chile we had to, as we say in a colloquial saying, "we had to dance with the ugly person".

In the demands for making a democracy, in that transformation of a society, which was trying to heal and overcome the wounds of the dictatorship, we had to rediscover and recuperate all the things we had lost under the dictatorship. That kind of transformed the persecution that was shown towards us by marginalising us.

We saw how many new political leaders still held power and ruled in the old way of the dictatorship. Thus what we saw under democracy was people in power upholding those same dictatorial values, working in conjunction and co-governing under the same system. But the Communist Party and other social movements and left parties continued to work and build from outside the government, within social movements. So what they did in the post-dictatorship period was continue to denounce and speak out that under this transitional government nothing had changed and we were still living in a post-dictatorship era.

What that post-dictatorship period meant was that we continued to live under authoritarian law and rule; under a system that still maintained the violation of human rights. The health and education systems and the labour laws were inherited from the time of the dictatorship. It was still a system of incredible injustice and social marginalisation.

So, as the years went by there was a great movement created in opposition to all this, which meant that in 2011, as a starting point with the education movement, with new and young vocal leaders from within the student movement (including some high profile young women leaders from the Communist Youth, who were leaders of different student federations), a strong movement began that said, "no more, we need to change this country."

That created a new coalition, a new force in the left movement in Chile. And in the right wing the more vocal and radical became even more conservative and close-minded. On the other hand, the strength of the social movements forced the old coalition and government in transition, and pushed for the inclusion of the Communist Party to begin a new process in the country that moves towards real transformation in Chile.

All that meant the creation of a new coalition in Chile, with a new majority, which is based on a government program that looks to end what was inherited from the dictatorship. Also, we seek to end those institutionalised

things we inherited from the dictatorship, and among those are included a real end to the 1978 constitution that is still in effect today. That is how the Communist Party now has a presence not only within government but also within the parliament.

**G:** You mentioned the youth. We have seen the progress of student leaders like Camila Vallejo and Karol Cariola. Is it just a question of outstanding individuals or has there been a process within the party and its youth organisation (*La Jota*) to develop these young leaders?

**LP:** The Communist Party has always had the Communist Youth with a large presence in Chilean society through the youth. Now Camila and Karol are better known for their roles as members of government. But lots of other members of the Communist Youth are also councillors and leaders in other organisations around the country.

That's always been the case, this representation of people coming out of the Communist Youth, but what has happened now is that subjective and objective conditions have aligned. This means that these leaders have been able to come forward with much more of a social backing, backing from a grass roots social movement, because there is a possibility of real change in Chile. I think that this youth represents not just hope for Chile but also around the world.

**G:** In general, is the Communist Party happy with the progress made with the new government in various policy areas? I have noticed the student protests have started again.

**LP:** I think social protest is always important and the Communist Party always supports protest and social movements, regardless of which government is in power.

At the moment there is a national strike of teachers in Chile, and the president of the teacher's federation is member of the Communist Party. They don't agree with some of the legal reforms made to the teaching sector.

I was looking at the news this morning. The education commission, headed by Camilla Vallejo in government, has managed to stop the progress of that law until the government can sit with the teachers and discuss the points that are in dispute.

The Communist Party is part of the government and loyal to the government program, but understands that the government, our government, must fulfil a program that was created in conjunction with popular support. We want that program to be supported from within the government, from within the rank and file, from within the population, and outside support as well.

**G:** You are here speaking chiefly on human rights issues in Chile. What questions are still outstanding from the Pinochet era? Could you tell readers about the Australian connection to all of this?

**LP:** I think that in Chile as well as in a majority of other Latin American countries who have lived under military dictatorship, there were processes of transition from dictatorship to democracy, which meant impunity for those who violated human rights.

When I discuss human rights abuses, I am speaking about those in the military and civilian population who supported those dictatorships. Different countries within the continent as well as the families and human rights groups, we all have had to fight long and hard against that impunity. The only difference being in



Lorena Pizarro.

**"We have the right to hear all of the truth and have all of the justice delivered."**

Argentina: about 12 years ago the president of Argentina, Néstor Kirchner, did away with the impunity laws and there began a real process of ending impunity. I'm speaking of Argentina specifically because that really showed the responsibility of government and state in the fight against impunity to be absolutely necessary.

In Chile the situation is a little more advanced than other countries in the continent. We have imprisoned the head of the secret police, Manuel Contreras, and there are other agents also in prison. There are judicial processes currently underway.

We have the right to hear all of the truth and have all of the justice delivered. This means that the government, the state and whole of society, we all must take charge. We need to ensure that this never happens again.

We have in Chile at this time about 70 agents of the secret police of the dictatorship in prison. I have to say that although they are in prison, the one they are in is a luxury prison. It's a completely different type of prison to that of a common prisoner held for other offences.

I have to say, also, that it wasn't only 70 agents who upheld the brutality of 17 years of the dictatorship; it couldn't have been just 70. Plus these 70 are all from the military, no civilians have been charged. It was the political and financial sector of the right wing that upheld the dictatorship for 17 years, and none of those civilians have been charged. So the debt of the Chilean state towards the population is enormous.

I signalled at the beginning there are some cases being investigated. Amongst those investigations are two current investigations about the execution and disappearance of two parts of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the 1970s. This investigation led to the discovery of an elite brigade – the Lautaro Brigade – within the DINA (Directorate of the National Investigation Agency), the secret police of the dictatorship. It was discovered that one of the agents was responsible for the death of Communist leaders is Adriana Rivas.

Rivas has been living in Australia since 1978. When she visited Chile in 2007, the minister who was heading her investigation ordered her arrest. She was detained for a few months. Then she was bailed under condition that she does not leave the country and she had to sign in with authorities every so often. She broke those bail conditions and escaped Chile via Argentina and returned to Australia.

When the Chilean state realised that somebody has escaped that justice system, they issued a warrant for her arrest via Interpol and they ordered her extradition. An extradition request was sent to the Australian government.

In Australia a large campaign began headed by the National Campaign for Truth and Justice

in Chile, to seek her extradition, and it is not just supported by Chileans but also by other social groups, unions, etc.

I have been invited by the national campaign, to lend my support to the extradition demand, to build a bigger movement, so that this extradition can take place and she can return to Chile to face justice. I could not say no to this great task that means a lot to us.

I have been here since last week; I have been in three cities, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra. I will be meeting with parliamentarians, social organisations, union leaders, speaking at public meetings, trying to gather support and trying to build this campaign for the extradition of Adriana Rivas.

What I have found is a profound respect, lots of like-minded people who respect human rights, who understand that the crimes she committed are serious and who will support our campaign.

**G:** Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?

**LP:** Although I discuss the particular issue of Adriana Rivas' extradition, who is accused of aggravated kidnapping and torture of seven members of the Communist Party, I would like to point out that this issue affects everybody, not just Chileans.

This woman committed violations against people, against human rights. She is currently free. This affects all of us because there is a person living in Australia who has committed these serious crimes, and the defence of human rights should be something that concerns all of us. This is how we link this issue with Australians.

So far, whoever I have met here has been horrified at how Adriana Rivas continues to live free, and how the Australian government, despite one year since the extradition request from the Chilean government, has not answered the request and has not moved to extradite her swiftly.

We are also working with a legal team in Australia. We are getting advice from Dr Christopher Ward who is a specialist in international law. We are working the legal side of this campaign to achieve this extradition. I will be meeting different parliamentarians in Canberra, the Chilean ambassador in Canberra and various human rights organisations and social activists. **The website for this campaign is:** [www.truthandjusticeforchile.com](http://www.truthandjusticeforchile.com)

**\*General Augusto Pinochet was the fascist dictator of Chile between 1973 and 1990. He came to power in a bloody US-backed coup that ousted elected socialist President Salvador Allende. The dictatorship left behind a constitution that made it extremely difficult for left forces to be represented in the national congress.** ✪



# The China syndrome

Mike Whitney

China's meteoric rise has Washington worried, not because China is a threat to its neighbours or to US national security, but because China's influence is expanding across the region. It's creating the institutions it needs to finance its own development (AIIB and New BRICS Bank), it's building the infrastructure needed to connect the continents with state-of-the-art high-speed rail (New Silk Road), and it's attracting allies and trading partners who want to participate in its plan for growth and prosperity. This is why Washington is worried; it's because China has transformed itself into an economic powerhouse that doesn't conform to the neo-liberal model of punitive austerity, pernicious privatisation, and madcap asset inflation. China has slipped out of the empire's orbit and charted its own course, which is why Washington wants to provoke Beijing over its negligible land reclamation activities in the South China Sea. Washington thinks it can succeed militarily where it has failed economically and politically. Case in point; check this out from Bloomberg News:

"The US and Japan are conducting separate military drills with the Philippines near the disputed South China Sea, ... The annual CARAT Philippines joint exercise started Monday off the east coast of Palawan island and will run until June 26, according to US Navy spokesman Arlo Abrahamson. The Philippine and Japanese navies are holding drills around the same island through June 27, Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force said last week.

"The US has backed Southeast Asian nations including the Philippines as tensions escalate with China over territorial claims in the South China Sea, while Japan is providing patrol vessels to the Philippine coast guard. ... The drill includes a sea phase with the littoral combat ship USS *Fort Worth*, diving and salvage ship USNS *Safeguard* and a P-3 Orion surveillance aircraft and at least one Philippine frigate, according to the US Navy ...

"Japan's exercises with the Philippines will take place adjacent to the Spratly Islands, where China has created more than 2,000 acres of land in waters also claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Taiwan and Malaysia. Japan will send a P-3C anti-submarine, maritime surveillance aircraft and 20 personnel." ("US, Japan Join Philippines in Navy Drills Near South China Sea", Bloomberg)

## Show of force

The "show of force" drills are designed to harass and intimidate China. They have no other purpose. The US wants to force China to succumb to its diktats, to abandon its commitment to new institutions, to open its markets to US corporations and Wall Street, and to allow the US a free-hand in writing trade rules. That's what Washington really wants and that's why the moderate Chuck Hagel was dumped for the combative Ashton Carter as Secretary of Defence. US powerbrokers wanted a scrappy taskmaster who'd bloody China's nose and show them who's boss. Carter fit the bill to a "T", an icy bureaucratic leg-breaker who fancies himself the "smartest guy in the room". Peter Lee provides an interesting insight on Carter in a recent blog-post at China Matters. He says:

"... assertive Ash Carter is not playing bad cop to Obama/Kerry's good cop; he's the whole show, which will delight fans of military control of foreign policy everywhere."

We're glad that others are beginning to see that the Pentagon has taken over US foreign policy. Carter is clearly calling the shots in Asia and Europe.

Lee seems to believe that Carter will outlast Obama's time in office if Madame Clinton is elected president. Which is not surprising, since it was Clinton who first introduced "pivot" to the strategic lexicon in a speech she gave in 2010 titled "America's Pacific Century". Clinton's presentation laid out the basic themes that would later become America's "top priority", the rebalancing of US power to the Asia Pacific. Here's an excerpt from the speech that appeared in *Foreign Policy* magazine:

"As the war in Iraq winds down and



China is building the infrastructure needed to connect the continents with state-of-the-art high-speed rail (New Silk Road).

America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point. Over the last 10 years, we have allocated immense resources to those two theatres. In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values. One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment – diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise – in the Asia-Pacific region ...

"Harnessing Asia's growth and dynamism is central to American economic and strategic interests and a key priority for President Obama. Open markets in Asia provide the United States with unprecedented opportunities for investment, trade, and access to cutting-edge technology. ... American firms (need) to tap into the vast and growing consumer base of Asia ...

"The region already generates more than half of global output and nearly half of global trade. As we strive to meet President Obama's goal of doubling exports by 2015, we are looking for opportunities to do even more business in Asia ... and our investment opportunities in Asia's dynamic markets." ("America's Pacific Century", Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 2011)

Repeat: "Harnessing Asia's growth and dynamism is central to American economic and strategic interests. ... Open markets in Asia provide the United States with unprecedented opportunities for investment, trade, and access to cutting-edge technology ... American firms (need) to tap into the vast and growing consumer base of Asia."

## Heading for China

There it is in a nutshell. Having reduced the great American middle class to a lifeless, rotting corpse incapable of sustaining even meagre demand or growth, US elites are packing the boats and heading for China, the shining corporate Valhalla on the hill. Clinton seems to think it should be pretty easy to penetrate these bustling Asian markets provided we back up our crackbrain aspirations with a strong dose of gunboat diplomacy – which is where Boss-man Carter comes in.

It's worth noting that Clinton did not conjure up the pivot on her own, but was briefed on the theory by pivot mastermind Kurt M

Campbell. Campbell is Co-Founder and former CEO of the Centre for a New American Security. According to the Centre for a New American Security website: "From 2009 to 2013, he served as the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, where he is widely credited as being a key architect of the 'pivot to Asia'. In this capacity, Dr Campbell advanced a comprehensive US strategy that took him to every corner of the Asia-Pacific region where he was a tireless advocate for American interests, particularly the promotion of trade and investment."

In a recent video interview with neo-con Robert Kagan, Campbell regurgitates the same rhetoric that appears in Clinton's speech. He opines: "Most of the history of the 21st century is going to be in the Asia Pacific region. ... It is in our best national interest to show that we are going to play a central role in that drama just as we have in the 20th century ... (There is bipartisan) ... recognition that our military presence is our ticket to the big game in the Asia Pacific."

There seems to be a growing consensus that the US military is the right tool for persuading China to cave in, but is it?

## Shooting war

The last thing the Obama administration wants is a shooting war with China, mainly because China has the ability to strike back, and not just militarily either. Let me explain: According to political scientist Pang Zhongying, "The current relationship between China and the US is one that has never existed in the history of international relations. ... The level of interdependence between China and the US is unprecedented in history. Before the 1970s, no one could possibly imagine or predict that these two countries would be interdependent to the extent of today. At that time, interdependence existed only between the US and Europe, or among the G7 at the most. The level of interdependence today did not exist between the US and China."

In other words, the two countries need each other and are bound together in a complex web of economic and financial ties, including China's massive holding of US debt which amounts to an eye watering US\$1.3 trillion. This interdependence means that the US cannot abuse China in the same way it has Russia without putting itself at risk. So, while the US still maintains the dominant position economically and militarily, it can't simply throw caution to the wind by imposing sanctions or escalating

hostilities beyond a certain point without jeopardising its own security. China knows this, which is why it will continue to pursue its own agenda aggressively while deflecting US belligerence and hostility as best as it can.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is still committed to "peaceful development". US antagonism is just one of the many hurdles that China will have to overcome to actualise its plan for integrating the Eurasian landmass into the world's largest and most prosperous trading bloc. Check out this excerpt from Alfred McCoy's seminal piece "The Geopolitics of American Global Decline":

"China's leadership began collaborating with surrounding states on a massive project to integrate the country's national rail network into a transcontinental grid. Starting in 2008, the Germans and Russians joined with the Chinese in launching the Eurasian Land Bridge. Two east-west routes, the old Trans-Siberian in the north and a new southern route along the ancient Silk Road through Kazakhstan are meant to bind all of Eurasia together ...

"In April, President Xi Jinping announced construction of that massive road-rail-pipeline corridor direct from western China to its new port at Gwadar, Pakistan, creating the logistics for future naval deployments in the energy-rich Arabian Sea. ... By building the infrastructure for military bases in the South China and Arabian seas, Beijing is forging the future capacity to surgically and strategically impair U.S. military containment. ...

"In a decade or two ... China will be ready to surgically slice through Washington's continental encirclement at a few strategic points without having to confront the full global might of the US military, potentially rendering the vast American armada of carriers, cruisers, drones, fighters, and submarines redundant. ... If China succeeds in linking its rising industries to the vast natural resources of the Eurasian heartland, then quite possibly ... the empire of the world would be in sight." ("The Geopolitics of American Global Decline", Alfred McCoy, *The Unz Review*.)

There it is, eh? The end of one empire and the beginning of another.

China's leaders aren't going to blow their big chance by getting sucked into a costly and pointless war with the United States. That's ridiculous. They're going to keep plugging away until the Silk Road becomes a reality.

**Counterpunch** ✶



# Confederate flags, monuments ordered down

Susan Webb

**The Confederate flag was ordered down from state capitol grounds and big box store shelves this week following the racist massacre of nine African American worshippers in Charleston, South Carolina, by a white man who identified himself with that flag.**

In response Walmart, Amazon, Sears/Kmart and eBay announced they will stop selling Confederate flag-themed items.

These retail giants have been selling thousands of Confederate-related products for years, evidently not concerned that this might be offensive to millions of shoppers or grist for racists. Now, however, spokespersons for the companies have told reporters they are pulling the items because they "do not want to offend" anyone. The flag, they said, has "become" a symbol of divisiveness and racism.

Meanwhile Republican politicians across the South are moving to distance themselves from what is known as the Confederate battle flag,

and are calling for its removal from state flags and capitols.

The Republican-dominated 170-member South Carolina legislature voted nearly unanimously to take up a bill to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse grounds.

Among those speaking out for taking the flag down was Republican state Senator Robert Thurmond, son of US Senator Strom Thurmond, the notorious racist and segregationist who died in 2003. "Our ancestors were literally fighting to keep human beings as slaves, and to continue the unimaginable acts that occur when someone is held against their will," Robert Thurmond said.

Alabama Governor Robert Bentley had four Confederate flags removed from a memorial at the state Capitol.

In Mississippi, the speaker of the state House, Philip Gunn, a Republican, called for taking a Confederate battle cross off the state's flag. (Mississippi is the only state in the country that still directly reproduces a Confederate symbol in its flag. Six

**"We should look for unity and not divisiveness in the symbols of our state."**

other former Confederate states have elements of the Confederacy's flags in their state flags.)

Both of Mississippi's US senators, both Republicans, called for changing the state flag to eliminate the Confederate emblem. Senator Roger Wicker said the flag should be replaced by "one that is more unifying to all Mississippians." This was a reversal of his statement two days earlier that the issue was up to the



state. Wicker chairs the National Republican Senatorial Committee, a major Republican political campaign apparatus. His colleague, Senator Thad Cochran, likewise at first claimed the flag was a state matter, but by the afternoon he conceded that the state should "consider" changing the flag. "The recent debate on the symbolism of our flag, which belongs to all of us, presents the people of our state an opportunity to consider a new banner that represents Mississippi," Cochran said, adding that "we should look for unity and not divisiveness in the symbols of our state." Interestingly, Mississippi's black voters are credited with helping Cochran win a tough 2014 primary against a tea party Republican.

In Tennessee, a number of political leaders are saying a bust of Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate general and Ku Klux Klan founder, should be moved out of the Statehouse.

In Virginia, Governor Terry

McAuliffe, a Democrat, ordered that the Confederate flag no longer appear on licence plates. This is also being raised in Maryland, North Carolina and Tennessee. Of course, the Alabama Confederate Memorial, whose cornerstone was laid by former Confederate president Jefferson Davis in 1886, remains in place on that state's Capitol grounds, and Confederate flags remain in its Old House and Senate chamber.

Tributes to the slaveocracy and its racist legacy persist around the country. Debates are unfolding in many places, not just the South, over government buildings, schools, streets and other public sites named after Confederate leaders, or containing statues honouring them. That includes the US Capitol, where a number of statues of Confederate figures are displayed. "There are few places where those symbols are in more abundance," *The New York Times* notes.

*People's World* ☼

## Mine bosses and AMCU "share Marikana blame"

James Tweedie

**South African miners' union NUM welcomed a report last week into the killing of 44 people at the Marikana mine three years ago. Violence began at the platinum mine in what is now Bokone Bophirima province on August 11, 2012 when owner Lonmin allowed representatives of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) onto the premises to recruit in opposition to the well-established NUM.**

Events culminated in a hilltop Amcu protest on August 16, at which a group of men attacked police with spears and clubs. The police fired on the attackers, killing 34 and wounding 78.

Summarising the report, President Jacob Zuma was critical of both Lonmin and AMCU members. "They sang provocative songs and made inflammatory remarks, which tended to aggravate an already volatile situation," he said.

The NUM welcomed the report's agreement with its testimony that the strike was characterised by high levels of violence and intimidation.

Four miners, two security guards and two police officers were killed over the course of the week prior to the hilltop battle. The dispute began when Lonmin unilaterally raised salaries of one grade of workers. Miners' wages have for decades been negotiated nationally between the NUM and the Chamber of Mines.

AMCU exploited the grievance to poach members from the NUM and foment an unofficial strike on August 9, allowing the company to sack workers.

The report criticised Lonmin for allowing the situation to escalate and not ensuring the safety of its employees, but also blamed AMCU for making inflammatory remarks and failing to control its members.

However, Mr Zuma also criticised the NUM.

"The NUM wrongly advised rock-drill operators that no negotiations with Lonmin were possible until the end of the two-year wage agreement," he said.

Since the tragedy, NUM shop stewards and members have been beaten, murdered and burnt out of their homes.

The release of the report has overshadowed celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, the guiding document for the anti-apartheid Congress movement.

Speaking at a celebration of the anniversary in Kliptown, Mr Zuma said that never again should any wage or political dispute "degenerate into such a shocking loss of life."

And in a clear snipe at ANC breakaway, the Economic Freedom Fighters, he urged political parties not to use the tragedy for "political posturing".

*Morning Star* ☼

## Defence denied pupils' data

Jack White

**The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has been rumbled after trying not once but twice to access school pupils' personal details in order to target them with recruitment propaganda.**

A "Tier 1" request for pupils' most sensitive data was first made on behalf of the MoD last year but was only exposed when the Department for Education (DfE) routinely released details of all requests for access to the National Pupil Database (NPD).

Information requested included the name, exam number, home address, date of birth, ethnicity, primary language, special educational needs, disabilities and absence and exclusion data of pupils and whether their parents were in the armed forces.

The MoD said the application, a long and arduous process, was a mistake and was not made by staff in its recruitment section. "This is not in line with army policy and the request has been halted," said an MoD spokesperson.

But the website Schools Week revealed yesterday that it had seen the NPD application form and ascertained that not only had the MoD's "information superiority" branch made the request in order to

create a recruitment mobile app but had asked about appealing against the DfE's refusal, saying it was "disappointed" by the decision.

"We know that the armed forces visit schools for recruitment purposes so they can avoid the influence of parents and other 'gatekeepers'. This application would allow them to do that more effectively," said independent military monitor Forces Watch.

"The DfE has been working in close collaboration with the MoD, so we are relieved that this request has been refused. It indicates just how inappropriate it was."

The MoD has refused to comment further on the data access request, which was made from Andover, home to the army's headquarters, and to address its claim that the application had been halted.

Data protection expert Tim Turner told Schools Week that the MoD's plan to use the information to "enable us to understand the qualification level [of] an eventual applicant" and to "better focus the information we send them" would breach data protection law.

"They would need consent, which they don't have ... and they would need to tell the young people that the data was being shared, which they haven't." *Morning Star* ☼

The Vietnam of Friendship Organizations (VUFO)

&

The Cuban Institute of Friendship With The People (ICAP)

## VII Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of Solidarity with Cuba

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

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



# US to begin invasion of Syria

Tony Cartalucci

**Unbeknownst to the general public, their elected politicians do not create the policy that binds their national destiny domestically or within the arena of geopolitics. Instead, corporate-financier funded think tanks do – teams of unelected policymakers which transcend elections, and which produce papers that then become the foundation of legislation rubber stamped by “legislators,” as well as the enumerated talking points repeated ad nauseum by the corporate-media.**

Such a policy paper has been recently written by the notorious US policy think-tank, the Brookings Institution, titled, “Deconstructing Syria: Towards a regionalised strategy for a confederal country.” The signed and dated open-conspiracy to divide, destroy, then incrementally occupy a sovereign nation thousands of miles from America’s shores serves as a sobering example of how dangerous and enduring modern imperialism is, even in the 21st century.

The document openly admits that the US has provided billions in arming and training militants fed into the devastating and increasingly regional conflict. It admits that the US maintains – and should expand – operations in Jordan and NATO-member Turkey to provide even more weapons, cash, and fighters to the already catastrophic conflict.

It then recounts the rise of the so-called “Islamic State” (ISIS), but fails to account from where its money and weapons came. It should be obvious to readers that if the United States has committed billions in cash, weapons, and training on multiple fronts to alleged “moderates” who for all intents and purposes do not exist on the battlefield, a state-sponsor of greater magnitude would be required to create and sustain ISIS and Al-Qaeda’s Al Nusra Front who

Brookings admits dominates the “opposition” uncontested.

In reality, ISIS’ supply lines lead right into US operational zones in Turkey and Jordan, because it was ISIS and Al-Qaeda all along that the West planned to use before the 2011 conflict began, and has based its strategy on ever since – including this most recent leg of the campaign.

After arming and funding a literal region-wide army of Al-Qaeda terrorists, the United States now plans to use the resulting chaos to justify what it has sought since the beginning of the conflict when it became clear the Syrian government was not to capitulate or collapse – the establishment of buffer zones now called “safe zones” by Brookings.

These zones once created, will include US armed forces on the ground, literally occupying seized Syrian territory cleared by proxies including Kurdish groups and bands of Al-Qaeda fighters in the north, and foreign terrorist militias operating along the Jordanian-Syrian border in the south. Brookings even admits that many of these zones would be created by extremists, but that “ideological purity” would “no longer be quite as high of a bar”.

The US assumes that once this territory is seized and US troops stationed there, the Syrian Arab Army will not dare attack in fear of provoking a direct US military response against Damascus. The Brookings paper states:

“The idea would be to help moderate elements establish reliable safe zones within Syria once they were able. American, as well as Saudi and Turkish and British and Jordanian and other Arab forces would act in support, not only from the air but eventually on the ground via the presence of special forces as well. The approach would benefit from Syria’s open desert terrain which could allow creation of buffer zones that could be monitored for possible signs of enemy attack through a combination of technologies, patrols, and other

methods that outside special forces could help Syrian local fighters set up.

“Were Assad foolish enough to challenge these zones, even if he somehow forced the withdrawal of the outside special forces, he would be likely to lose his air power in ensuing retaliatory strikes by outside forces, depriving his military of one of its few advantages over ISIL. Thus, he would be unlikely to do this.”

In a single statement, Brookings admits that the government of Syria is not engaged in a war against its own people, but against “ISIL” (ISIS). It is clear that Brookings, politicians, and other strategists across the West are using the threat of ISIS in combination with the threat of direct military intervention as a means of leverage for finally overrunning and seizing Syria entirely.

The entire plan is predicated on America’s ability to first take and hold these “zones” and subsequently mesh them into functioning autonomous regions. Similar attempts at US “nation building” are currently on display in the ravaged failed state that used to be North Africa’s nation of Libya, Syria’s neighbour to the southeast, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and the list goes on extensively.

The folly of this plan both in attempts to use non-existent credibility and military to actually implement it, as well as in terms of those foolish enough to place their trust in a nation that has left a swath of global destruction and failed states in its wake stretching from South Vietnam to Libya and back again, can be described only as monumental.

This strategy can almost certainly be used to finally destroy Syria. It cannot however, be used to do any of the things the US will promise in order to get the various players necessary for it to succeed, to cooperate.

Almost certainly there are measures Syria, its allies Iran and Hezbollah, as well as Russia, China, and all other nations facing the threats of Western hegemony can take to ensure that US forces will not be able to take and hold Syrian territory or ultimately succeed in what is essentially an invasion in slow motion. Already the US has used their own ISIS hordes as a pretext to operate militarily within Syrian territory, which as predicted, has led to this next stage in incremental invasion.

An increase in non-NATO peacekeeping forces in Syria could ultimately unhinge Western plans altogether. The presence of Iranian, Lebanese, Yemeni, Afghan, and other forces across Syria, particularly bordering “zones” the US attempts to create, may offer the US the prospect of a multinational confrontation it has neither the political will, nor the resources to undertake.

The ability of Syria and its allies to create a sufficient deterrence against US aggression in Syria, while cutting off the logistical lines the US is using to supply ISIS and other terrorist groups operating in Syria and Iraq will ultimately determine Syria’s survival.

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**Similar attempts at US “nation building” are currently on display in the ravaged failed state that used to be North Africa’s nation of Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and the list goes on extensively.**



## Region Briefs

Three thousand people surrounded Japan’s parliament building to protest Prime Minister Abe’s decision that extended the current length of parliament session to 95 days. Abe believed the extended session would help him to push a series of war-related bills through parliament. The protesters demanded Abe step down as Prime Minister and withdraw the bills. Abe was criticised for being a dictator, dragging Japan into armed conflicts. Opposition leaders questioned Abe’s ability of making right decisions for Japan’s military. The Japanese Communist Party Chair Kazuo Shii believes that the extended session would not help the bills to pass through parliament.

A 53-year-old preserved vegetable factory female owner in China’s Zhejiang province closed her business in order to better protect local environment, after she attended a village environmental protection meeting, organised by a local Party committee. The owner, Xuan Aifeng, was in the vegetable processing business for life. She cheaply sold her newly upgraded equipment as well as the factory to a non-polluting business. She then became a street cleaner, although her factory passed the country’s environmental protection check. Her decision lost her around AU\$150,000 in total not including this year’s revenue.

China’s State Council recently released guidelines, giving support and favourable policies to college graduates, veterans and domestic migrant workers. The guidelines would relieve poverty in rural areas and are part of a nationwide campaign that boosts employment and entrepreneurship. It lowers tax and administration fees, as well as subsidises loans. According to Vice Minister of Human Resources and Social Security, Xin Changxing, “the campaign would boost massive entrepreneurship and innovation as people who returned to rural hometowns had already accumulated certain capital, specific ability and work experiences”.

The Communist Party of Vietnam’s General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong attended a celebration to mark the country’s 90th Revolutionary Press Day. Former leader Ho Chi Minh organised and published the first issue of the *Thanh nien* (Young People) in 1925, as part of preparations establishing a political party to lead the revolution. The Secretary wrote to the newspaper that a more developed society needed the press even more. The newspaper, as an effective tool, has a great honour and social responsibility, spreading Marxism-Leninism and promoting social development. Vietnam’s revolutionary press has been on the people and the Party’s side all along for socialism and national independence. The Secretary noted that the press promoted Vietnam to the world and helped inform people of regional and global issues.

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

## Carbon tax and price hikes

It seems the carbon tax has been used as a big fig leaf for large price hikes.

I, like many Australians, have been waiting to see how much my energy bills would decrease after July 1, (repeal of carbon tax). My provider is AGL for electricity and gas.

On July 1, AGL increased their rates by around 10% and on the same date decreased the rates for my gas by 4.8% and my electricity by 7.8% because of the repeal of the carbon tax.

Wanting to be an informed consumer I asked them why there had been a 10% increase. The Consumer Advocacy person at AGL couldn't quite explain but made a stab at it by suggesting infrastructure and maybe gas pipelines were being built but he couldn't be sure. Interestingly, last year on July 1, 2013 AGL rates went up around 5%.

AGL, and I assume other energy providers, have for some time now been collecting a significant percentage on our bills to supposedly cover the increased cost to them resulting from the carbon tax. This is despite the fact that the carbon tax was

described as a useless tax which did not raise revenue and by implication was not significant impost on business costs.

AGL and other energy companies appear to be making hay while the sun shines.

Has anyone else noticed a similar upward trend in their energy bills?

Dorothy Costa  
Sydney

## Real face of Israel

All the Zionist parties in Israel have the same agenda; that is the same aims and policies of dispossession, repressing and getting rid of the Palestinians and continuing to strengthen and build the Zionist state of Israel. The different Zionist factions, right or "centralist"

or "left" Zionist just use different tactics to achieve that purpose.

So whatever Zionist party is in power the situation of the Palestinians will be unchanged, they will continue to suffer the same level of brutal oppression. It's just that some Zionist parties will be more subtle than others and pay lip service to "peace talks" and the "two state solution" while continuing the occupation and building more settlements. Whereas, Netanyahu is more blatant and open about it and this will mean the world will see Israel more clearly, without the illusions of peace partner it has tried to maintain over the years. This will accelerate the isolation of Israel and the eventual falling apart of the Zionist, colonial settler state project.

Netanyahu is just one leader of a bad bunch of Zionist fascists, but at

least he is more honest about Israel's treatment and intentions towards the Palestinians. He is the most unashamed, and therefore best able to expose the real character of Israel to the world.

Jericho shopkeeper Mahmoud Rweished, 28, said he wanted Netanyahu to win and explained his attitude stating, "You might find this strange, but actually Netanyahu is the ugly face of Israel, I want the world to see only this face of Israel. Any other face is fake and unreal" (*The Australian* 19-03-2015). I think this statement expresses well the true situation in Israel and the bearing Israeli elections have for the Palestinian people.

Steven Katsineris  
Vic

# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

## Cracks in the image and the business of war



Followers of the Shugden form of Buddhism claim the Dalai Lama's "aggressive persecution campaign" against them has resulted in suffering and human rights abuses.

The Dalai Lama, a spent force within Tibet, still parades around the Western world on behalf of US imperialism posing as the champion of love and tolerance (not to mention peace), much as the US itself poses as the champion of democracy and justice (not to mention peace). His regime was based on slavery and the complete domination of the state by the church, but; when the Chinese Revolution finally reached Tibet, this bastion of Feudalism went into the rubbish bin of history where it belonged. The Dalai Lama fled abroad, to embrace a new career as a propaganda tool on behalf of imperialism's continuing Cold War against the People's Republic of China and socialism generally.

As long as he remains useful to the West, he is assured of constant media coverage and continued financial support. Typically, his recent visit to Australia was given widespread media coverage. By contrast, there was a near total blackout on reporting the protests against his visit organised by the Dorje Shugden Buddhist sect. Followers of the Shugden form of Buddhism claim the Dalai Lama's "aggressive persecution campaign" against them has resulted in suffering and human rights abuses. A protest rally against the Dalai Lama's religious discrimination would surely be newsworthy. But apparently not.

Spokesperson for the International Shugden Community (ISC), Nicholas Pitts, said "The Dalai Lama preaches about respecting all religions but shamelessly encourages his followers

to shun people of our faith. Religious freedom should apply to all traditions whether he likes them or not."

Mr Pitts said that signs refusing entry and services to people of Shugden faith have gone up in shop windows, restaurants and medical facilities in Tibetan exile communities. Apparently those exile communities are run much as the Dalai Lama was wont to run Tibet.

The protesters called on the Dalai Lama: To allow anyone who wishes to practise Dorje Shugden the freedom to do so; To stop completely the discrimination against Shugden practitioners; To allow all Shugden monks and nuns who have been expelled to return to their monasteries and nunneries, and to receive the same spiritual and material rights as non-Shugden practitioners; and To write to all Tibetan communities throughout the world telling them that they should apply practically the above three points.

Unfortunately for them, reporting the Dalai Lama for practising religious discrimination does not fit in with imperialism's carefully constructed image of him as the embodiment of love and goodwill and tolerance.

Faithful to his masters, the Dalai Lama never speaks out to condemn the US – or any other imperialist country – for waging war and devastating peaceful communities.

War is the most profitable business that capitalism can envisage. For the rest of us it means destruction, suffering and loss. But for capitalism that destruction means an unparalleled marketing opportunity, to replace what

has been destroyed. The bigger and more prolonged the war, the more that has to be replaced. The more that has to be replaced, the more profit to be made.

George W Bush enunciated the doctrine of "continuous war", the capitalists' dream state. He didn't devise the concept; he was simply the mouthpiece for capitalism's most greedy and aggressive elements. But while capitalists are responsible for war, they do not do the actual fighting. No, for that they rely on the stock of "cannon fodder" that is the bulk of the population: ordinary workers, especially those for whom capitalism has no jobs. Not that they can ask them to fight for capitalists' profits, of course. So they don't. They use a vast array of persuasion and disinformation techniques to fool young Americans into willingly fighting for them – for "freedom", against "terrorism", even "for peace".

However, while the capitalists might be pleased with the benefits to them of continuous war, the social cost for the American people is extreme. The US has become one of the most militarised (and militarist) countries in the world. It has over a million and a quarter troops on active duty at any one time, but almost half of them are drawn from just five of the USA's 50 states. According to *The Los Angeles Times*, the US military "is gradually becoming a separate warrior class ... that is becoming increasingly distinct from the public it is charged with protecting."

Worse still is the effect on those troops of the bestial brutality that they experience and

inflict in the course of their military service. They are fed hype about "defending freedom", but they are sent to wage total war against civilian populations that are demonised, indiscriminately identified as "the enemy" to be exterminated. Just like the young German soldiers in Hitler's army, US soldiers are sent on "missions" to kill women and children, to burn people alive, to massacre families, to destroy communities and reduce populations to lives of horror and suffering.

Not surprisingly, as Paul Buchheit – editor and main author of *American Wars: Illusions and Realities* – reports, "Over a third of American troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with some sort of mental disorder, more often than not the youngest soldiers, little more than children. Veterans are much more likely than other citizens to be unemployed, or, much worse, to commit suicide. And tens of thousands of homeless veterans are walking the streets."

Buchheit concludes, "War does not bring freedom. It is an invitation to young men and women to begin a journey into their own personal worlds of terror."

But, as we said earlier, it produces enormous profits for those capitalists who have a share in it. For the rest, however, it means a colossal waste of resources, the distortion – even the ruin – of national economies, and condemns the mass of the people to impoverishment and suffering.

No wonder the capitalists that profit from war have to lie about it. ☹



Film review by Bill Meyer

# The Yes Men Are Revolting

The third film about the prankster activists who call themselves The Yes Men, has been released. The title for the film, *The Yes Men Are Revolting* is an obvious pun meaning not that they are disgusting, but rather fighting for social change.

Their issues are many, including climate change, homophobia, racism and injustice everywhere, and they use the powerful tools of humour, satire, pranks and hoaxes to bring new people to the struggle. Their first two films focused more on the actual ingenious pranks that embarrassed corporations and government agencies into changing some of their anti-people policies.

Releasing fake public statements in the name of the United Nations, Chamber of Commerce, or WTO, is not only daring but oftentimes brilliant political theatre. Their newest release is much more personal and realistic about the actual ups and downs of the activist world, but still retains some incredibly funny segments.

They pull off miraculous results, creating a room full of defence contractors holding hands in a circle, dancing and singing to an Indian drummer; and getting the Chamber of Commerce to change their policies and drop a lawsuit against them, to name just a couple.

I had a chance to chat with the director Laura Nix, who besides directing, went to college in Oregon with Yes Man Mike and was around when they first met. Mike is from Albany and the other Yes Man Andy is from Tucson.

I asked her what role comedy plays in the struggle. "Humour is the Trojan horse. It's a way to get in to a place you might not ordinarily be allowed. This way you get people watching a film on climate change who might never watch a film on climate change."

Besides drawing in new converts, "the actions themselves give people a chance to look at the issues in a different way because of the humour. People are all of a sudden pulled into a pretty complex political debate, even people who are normally allergic to politics."

"Humour is kind of an equaliser and our way to reach a mainstream audience. And also to remind people already politically engaged that we do this for love and for fun. We talk about 'the struggle' but there's an incredible amount of energy you can get from doing this kind of political work. And doing something that's fun and being around a lot of people

who believe in that, can be incredibly energising."

The director explained why they chose to make another feature documentary rather than a TV series. "The reason we chose the feature film medium, is that cinema is one of the last places that forces you to sit and think about nothing else for an hour and a half. It allows for a different kind of emergence and feeling. We wanted this film to have an emotional comment as well, not just the jokes. We want viewers to be able to feel more what it's like to be an activist and go on this journey with the Yes Men and experience what it's like for them to succeed as well as fail

"Failure was actually a big inspiration for making this film. The truth is that being an activist you often feel like you're failing. After that big rally or whatever, you didn't really end climate change or poverty or racism and you wonder all the time if this is worth it. We all wonder about that, but over time, things do add up and these social movements are capable of making changes. We have to have patience and to think about it in the long view. We are hoping you see that side of them and it gives the audience another way to identify with them."

Mike Bonanno, who gives new meaning to the term "straight man" in a comedy team, partnered with Andy Bichlbaum back in 1996. He claims, when he first opened the door to greet Andy, "it was like looking into a fun-house mirror." Andy felt they were each other's half when they first met and they have been inseparable since – until Mike went off and got married, moved to Europe and had three children.

It put a bit of a strain on their relationship, and their comedic activist teamwork. The film addresses many of the new stresses facing the funny guys. Andy comes out gay in the movie, and in one scene he bravely reveals his sexuality to a group of Ugandan climate activists, a country that recently tried to pass a bill in Parliament to kill homosexuals.

I asked Mike why they decided to get more personal in their movies. "We're a bit older now, at a time where we can have a better perspective and look back at what happened. And now we have more pressures, dealing with capitalism, supporting a family, it's a good moment to reflect, a way to speak to people more engagingly."

I asked if their growing public image makes it more difficult to pull pranks. Mike explained, "Even in the case of being exposed, it sort of works well for the Yes Men. The



Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno.

scene with the Chamber of Commerce worked well because we were exposed." They eventually forced the Chamber to drop their lawsuit, and assumed the Chamber didn't want to have to reveal their expense account. As for growing exposure, "for now it's not become a big deal. And besides, there are other people in our team who are sometimes going up and doing the work in front of the camera. We have sort of a training crew."

Andy's homosexuality is one of the themes in this film, first fearing it might possibly jeopardise the comedy teams work. Mike stated, "I assumed that 'coming out' was something you did once in your life, then you're 'out' and people know you're gay. But it's actually something you have to do over and over again in different contexts." Referring to Andy's Uganda revelation, he emphasised, "It was a political statement, a form of activism, because it's a place where homosexuality is made invisible because it's such a repressive system. ... So coming out there was a kind of solidarity with the people who are actually 'out' there risking their lives defending gay rights."

Most of their pranks expose corporate wrongdoing and the failures of capitalism. I asked Mike how he thought we would move on to a better system, he replied, "Hopefully, the easy way. Capitalism will fall apart. Because there's an end game. You have to take those principles that drive capitalism, and put a lid on them."

He's referring to the endless drive for increased profit. "It's inevitable that it's going to happen, and for now we have to put pressure on governments to steer the ship in a different direction."

**Due to technical difficulties Worth Watching will not appear this week.**

People's World

## DANGEROUS ALLIES ?

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## POLITICS IN THE PUB

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### 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;

July 23

### BIG PHARMA DRIVING OVER DIAGNOSIS AND OVER MEDICATION – A TOXIC INFLUENCE ON MEDICAL PRACTICE

Yola Lucire, Dr, Forensic and Medico-Legal Psychiatry, Sydney;  
Barbara Mintze, Professor, University of British Columbia, Canada;

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# Fighting for the future of the BBC

Michelle Stanistreet

“Payback time” screamed the *Sun* newspaper on the announcement of John Whittingdale’s new job as Culture Secretary.

There was unalloyed glee among the right-wing press, which found selective quotes to show the “hard-line critic” of the BBC would be weighing in to “sort out” the corporation for its anti-Tory bias. The *Daily Mail* said the appointment was a “shot across the bows at the BBC ahead of the charter renewal.”

*Sun on Sunday* columnist and former Conservative MP Louise Mensch continued her regular BBC baiting by challenging BBC head of news James Harding, who had robustly rejected accusations of political bias.

The corporation’s charter and the future of the licence fee are now being decided. So we can fully expect the open season for BBC-bashing to gather momentum.

In fact, Whittingdale, as chair of the culture, media and sport select committee, said he saw “no realistic alternative” to the licence fee in the short term and that it should be amended to cover catch-up television as soon as possible. But that will not stop Nigel Farage, Tory backbenchers and the many enemies of the BBC having a pop at every opportunity.

Rupert Murdoch will be doing all in his power, on the pages of his national papers and behind the scenes, to do down his rival broadcaster. We know how he works. The Leveson Inquiry uncovered the unfettered access he had to the prime minister and the many text messages between his lobbyist and the Culture, Media and Sport Department during the £8 billion bid by his company, News Corp, to buy the 61 percent share of BSkyB that it did not already own (dropped once the phone-hacking scandal broke).

With the Conservative Party now in power, Murdoch may well have another go at making a bid. Apparently, Frederic Michel – his former lobbyist who called the former culture secretary Jeremy Hunt “Daddy” in text messages because they both had children born at the same private

*The BBC’s coverage of Margaret Thatcher’s funeral came under fire, but it turned out it received 268 complaints that its coverage was biased in favour of Thatcher and 227 claiming it was biased against her.*

hospital – is back working for James Murdoch in Europe.

Despite the right-wing press’s best efforts, the BBC remains one of the most-trusted and liked British institutions. One of the reasons it is trusted is because it plays a major role in presenting balanced, impartial news coverage which does not depend on the personal prejudices and foibles of media moguls or commercial pressure to appease shareholders.

The Tories think it is full of “pinkos” (even though James Harding was a former editor of the *Times* and Cameron poached the BBC’s Craig Oliver as his communications chief). The Labour government had its spats and said it was biased against the government. There were accusations of pro-Israel bias during last summer’s bombings of Gaza. The BBC’s coverage of Margaret Thatcher’s funeral came under fire, but it turned out it received



268 complaints that its coverage was biased in favour of Thatcher and 227 claiming it was biased against her. So its opponents span the political spectrum and no-one would suggest the BBC is unimpeachable.

But what’s the alternative? Can we leave the coverage of news to the free market and the highest bidders? How would democracy be served if our diet of news and current affairs coverage was determined and presented by the shock-jocks of Fox News or was in the hands of media moguls such as Silvio Berlusconi? Anybody remember News Bunny, mascot of Kelvin MacKenzie’s short-lived L!VE TV?

At the BBC the standard of journalism is high and its staff, despite the pressures caused by job cuts and poor management, are firmly committed to the public service ethos. Very many of them are union members and adhere to the NUJ’s (National Union of Journalists) code of conduct.

The BBC is by far the biggest investor in news. Ofcom (communications regulator) allowed ITV local news to be reduced by a third in the new 10-year broadcast licences for ITV, STV, UTV and Channel 5. From local radio to the World Service, listeners are assured of quality journalism, reported from their front door to the darkest and most dangerous corners of the globe.

Organisationally it is by no means perfect. The way its management has behaved has made it easy meat for its detractors. The NUJ will be supporting the BBC and will lobby for a properly funded licence fee deal, but we will also be calling for reform.

The BBC has had its budget cut by more than a quarter under the so-called delivering quality first program, and because its former director-general agreed – in a behind-doors deal – to freeze the licence fee until 2017. *Panorama*, its flagship current affairs program, no longer has dedicated reporters.

We will argue for more funding, but for quality journalism and programming – not for executive pay. Even BBC Trust head Rona Fairchild acknowledges her organisation is a dead duck – the model of governance under the Trust is clearly toast. There needs to be much

more accountability and transparency in any successor. We cannot allow the scenes seen at the public accounts committee – when the BBC and BBC Trust nabobs passed the buck and dissembled to a man and woman – to happen again. We need to have NUJ members on the board.

How could the IT program Digital Media Initiative spend £100,000 to no avail until Tony Hall, director general, pulled the plug?

The BBC also needs to make better progress on diversity and equality. An NUJ survey discovered men are getting paid more than women – even when they are doing the same jobs – and a House of Lords inquiry into women in broadcasting came to the conclusion there are “simply not enough women.” There are still too few BME and disabled people in front of and behind the screen.

That is why the NUJ and its colleagues in the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU) are launching a campaign to fight for the future of the BBC. The corporation plays a huge role in our nations’ cultural lives. It has its orchestras – can you imagine a broadcasting organisation run by the likes of Richard Desmond running the Proms? It produces high-quality drama. It hosts the Open University. It provides award-winning children’s programs at a time when advertising rules have made commercial stations less keen to commission them.

It is also a major trainer for all broadcasters. It sets the benchmark for the commercial sector to follow.

The FEU is looking to form an alliance with other supporters of the BBC to defend well-funded, well-managed public service broadcasting. We will be opposing moves by the BBC to privatise production as a sop to the government during charter negotiations.

On Wednesday June 10 the FEU held a lobby of Parliament. At 6:30pm there was a public meeting hosted by Broadcast Magazine in the House of Commons, Committee Room 10.

Michelle Stanistreet is the National Union of Journalists general secretary. *Morning Star* ✪

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