



# Repressive Border

# Force Act

## Govt gag for detention centre workers

Peter Mac

Last year the Abbott government passed the Australian Border Force Act, prohibiting “entrusted persons” from unauthorised recording or disclosure of information concerning asylum seeker detention centres.

Last Friday 40 doctors, nurses, teachers, psychologists and other humanitarian workers challenged the government to arrest them after they published an open letter to the Prime Minister concerning conditions in the centres.

The letter states that the government has not dealt with “many issues which constitute a serious threat to the health of those in detention for whom we have a duty of care”, that the law adds to “the wall of secrecy that prevents proper public scrutiny” and that “... standing by and watching sub-standard and harmful care, child abuse and gross violations of human rights is not ethically justifiable.”

Immigration and Border Protection Minister Peter Dutton claims the Border Force Act does not prevent people from discussing the detention centres. However, the Act specifically requires immigration or border protection personnel to make an oath or affirmation to abide by its secrecy provisions, with a penalty of two years imprisonment for offenders.

To gain authorisation to record or disclose information, detention centre workers must go through “appropriate channels”, i.e. they must

seek permission, which the government can simply deny. The only exceptions are when disclosure is authorised by law, or when a court or tribunal orders disclosure.

The open letter signatories acknowledge they’ve already disobeyed the Act by publishing the letter, and they challenge the government to arrest them “... so that these issues may be discussed in open court and in the full view of the Australian public”.

### Concealing nightmare conditions

Last Wednesday Abbott met newly-appointed Border Force Commissioner Roman Quaedvlieg with the bizarre salutation: “May God bless you, may God bless your work, may God bless the country you are helping to protect and prosper”!

Quaedvlieg claims the Border Protection law merely aims to protect classified information and wouldn’t override existing whistleblower legislation. But classified information could mean anything the government wants to keep secret, including information about the abuse of detainees. The Australian Human Rights Commission has reported 44 cases of the sexual abuse of children, including rape, in detention centres between January 2013 and July 2014.

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# Citizenship – Rights jettisoned

Anna Pha

The concept of citizenship takes on a new meaning in the *Citizenship (Allegiance to Australia) Bill 2015*. The Bill requires allegiance to Australia and “Australian values” as a condition of citizenship. Citizenship can be revoked and is conditional for Australians with dual citizenship or eligible for citizenship in another country.

The Bill was introduced to Parliament on June 24. It purports to protect Australia from the threat of terrorism. The minister has the power to extend its scope to members and supporters of organisations such as trade unions, left political groups, peace organisations, environmental groups, etc.

The Bill contains a specific clause outlining its purpose: “... Parliament recognises

that Australian citizenship is a common bond, involving reciprocal rights and obligations, and that citizens may, through certain conduct incompatible with the shared values of the Australian community, demonstrate that they have severed that bond and repudiated their allegiance to Australia.”

The Bill recognises the Macquarie Dictionary (5th edition) definition of “allegiance” – “the obligation of a subject or citizen to their sovereign or government; duty owed to a sovereign or state.”

It introduces three ways in which an Australian can lose their citizenship:

### “Renounces” citizenship

The first way is when “the person renounces their Australian citizenship.” This is not some declaration or decision made

by the citizen. It occurs “if the person acts inconsistently with their allegiance to Australia by engaging in specified terrorist-related conduct.”

- Such conduct includes:
- Serve outside Australia in a foreign army at war with Australia or in a proscribed terrorist organisation\*
- Engage in certain terrorist conduct or
- Are convicted of certain terror related offences\*\*.

The Bill states that “a child of the person may also cease to be an Australian citizen.”

“The minister will declare those organisations that are opposed to Australia or Australia’s values, democratic beliefs, rights and liberties,” Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said in his Second Reading Speech.

The second offence is if a citizen fights

for, or is in the service of, a declared terrorist organisation. A declared terrorist organisation is any organisation as defined by the *Criminal Code* and declared by the minister to apply.

### Terrorism offence

The third is when a citizen is convicted of a specified terrorism offence as prescribed in the *Criminal Code*. Such conduct includes:

- engaging in a terrorist act (act means an action or threat of action)
- providing or receiving training connected with a terrorist act
- directing the activities of or recruiting for a terrorist organisation
- financing terrorism.

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# Guardian

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## Defend the ABC!

The campaign against the editorial independence of the ABC has reached a climax in the fortnight following the appearance of Zaky Mallah on the *Q&A* live-to-air program. Far from subsiding in the course of an ever-quickening news cycle, the shrillness of commentary from Coalition political figures and the corporate press about the controversial exchange between Mallah and parliamentary secretary Steve Ciobo has escalated dramatically. This is despite the announcement of a probe by the Department of Communications and the apologetic findings of an internal ABC investigation.

The latest blast comes from Nationals' Federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce. He is complying with the Coalition's boycott of the program. He puts forward a number of reasons. One is to drive home how inappropriate it was to allow a person of Mallah's supposed reputation to put a question before a national audience. If this were allowed to stand, the minister claimed, "Nazis or Stalinists" might be allowed to appear. Another reason offered is that there is a review currently underway into the "incident". That excuse might sound prim and proper but fails to conceal the hostile agenda being pursued by the Abbott government.

The Murdoch press has been championing the latest offensive, backing the Prime Minister's demand that "heads should roll" and every right-wing accusation made against the ABC. In an editorial on July 1, *The Australian* launched an attack on everything it hates about the broadcaster. Radio National's Fran Kelly gets a swipe along with fellow journalists Paul Bongiorno and Barry Cassidy. The ABC's "green-left" bias is evident in its interest in climate change, same sex marriage and alleged hostility to the US and Israel. The "bias" of the ABC is likened to that of Australian Human Rights Commission President Gillian Triggs. Her "failing" (and that of the ABC, presumably) is to remain focused on the rights of asylum seekers and the human cost of the government's internationally condemned policy of "stopping the boats".

The wild spray would be amusing except that its extremism reflects the attitudes of people with considerable political influence. We've seen this power exercised in recent times. SBS journalist Scott McIntyre lost his job within 24 hours of tweeting a comment critical of extravagant and propagandist ANZAC commemorations. The ABC was obliged to hold an inquiry into the interview by ABC 7:30 host Sarah Ferguson of Federal Treasurer Joe Hockey following last year's budget. She was caned for what most people would regard as her professionalism. Under political pressure, it was deemed "too adversarial".

Now it's the turn of *Q&A*'s executive producer Peter McEvoy to bend over. The ABC's inquiry headed by SBS managing director Shaun Brown and former Channel Nine TV journalist Ray Martin. They found that, given Mallah's background, insufficient precautions were taken to control what he might say. The program was not censored on the bogus issue of the safety of the studio audience. It turns out Mallah had been in the audience on *Q&A* and SBS programs on a number of occasions without any dire consequences. Justice Wood, who handed down judgement in the now famous case involving threats Mallah made against two government officials, said Mallah lacked any genuine intention to take lives.

No amount of abject apologetics will save the editorial independence of the ABC. Obviously, neither will another round of self-censorship following the latest fabricated "crisis". Clearly, conservative forces would rather the "controversy" and "debates" in the media be limited to the narrow differences between the two parties serving capitalist interests. The stage is being set for a final assault on the very existence of a national broadcaster, muzzled or not. The ABC does its work despite funding and staffing cuts. It is by far the most trusted mainstream media source in the country. It is no bastion of "left" political causes. In fact there has been a drift to a more conservative editorial position in recent times but there can be no denying the media landscape would be far more barren without it. It must be vigorously defended.

### PRESS FUND

The Abbott government has managed to persuade only four of the asylum seekers detained on Nauru to start a new life in Cambodia. The bill for the whole exercise apparently came to \$55 million, so it cost Australian taxpayers almost \$14 million to resettle each of the four detainees. You may think that the policy of banning from Australia any asylum seeker who arrives by boat is an outrageous waste of public money. We do too, and we suggest that a far more productive use of your hard-earned cash would be to make a contribution to the Press Fund for the next edition, to help us play our part in bringing this shameful practice to an end. Many thanks to those who contributed this week, as follows:

Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15, Kees Van Loon \$20, J Ayers \$50

This week's total: \$90 Progressive total: \$3,970

# Repressive Border Force Act

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The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has sought information on the allegations, but can't investigate the Nauru and Manus Island detention centres because they're not on Australian territory.

However, if the government prosecutes the open letter signatories, the truth about the centres will be revealed during cross examination. The letter is doubly important because the Border Force Act violates the professional commitment of detention centre workers.

The letter states, "If we witness child abuse in Australia we are legally obliged to report it to child protection authorities. [But] if we witness child abuse in detention centres we can go to prison for attempting to advocate for them effectively."

Australian Lawyers Alliance spokesman Greg Barnes commented: "If, for example, a psychologist ... comes back from [a detention] centre and writes an article for the ABC or a newspaper documenting - in that person's clinical opinion - the long term physical or mental harm that's being meted out to asylum seekers, that person could go to jail."

On the other hand, by obeying

the Act doctors are likely to contravene the Medical Board of Australia's codes of conduct, putting them in a position where they could be sued or charged with professional misconduct.

Psychiatrist Peter Young maintains that under the Act health professionals will not even be able to discuss conditions at the centres with each other, hold peer reviews or conduct clinical supervision.

Dr Andrew Morrison from the Australian Lawyers' Alliance has warned: "The government's new Border Force Act leaves doctors in an impossible position. It is basically asking doctors to choose between themselves and their patients."

Moreover, according to on-line journalist Ben Eltham under the Act "the evidentiary burden falls on the defendant", i.e. those accused of breaking the Act will have to prove their innocence, rather than the government having to prove their guilt.

### The militarisation of immigration

Last Thursday the departments dealing with immigration and customs were merged to form the Department of Immigration and

Border Protection, which will operate the paramilitary, fully-armed Australian Border Force.

Dutton claimed proudly: "... secrecy provisions in the department are in line with partner and like agencies such as the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Defence Force". However, Greg Barnes says the Border Force Act "effectively turns the [former] Department of Immigration into a secret security organisation with police powers".

Despite Australia's ratification of the UN Refugee Convention, the government bans asylum seekers who arrive by boat from entering Australia. Julian Burnside, barrister and human rights activist, claims the secrecy about whatever happens to them in the detention centres resembles the secrecy surrounding US prisoners in Guantánamo Bay.

Meanwhile the government is implementing "boat turn-back" policies, which include the bribing of boat crews to take refugees back to Indonesia, enraging the Indonesian government. Those who criticise government policy, such as Human Rights commissioner Gillian Triggs, are subjected to vicious personal attacks.

The Abbott government's arrogance, duplicity, obsessive secrecy, callous disregard for human rights, and highly dangerous drift towards dictatorial rule is nowhere more apparent than in immigration policy.

But the Labor opposition, which voted for the Border Force Act, doesn't seem concerned. When asked about its impact last week, ALP leader Bill Shorten didn't seem aware that it was already in operation.

Neither of the two major parties will amend Australia's appalling immigration policies. The Australian public must look elsewhere to achieve that vital objective. ☘

Sydney

### Celebrate Cuba's National Day & its Revolution

Coogee Beach

Sunday July 26 from 12 noon to 3pm

Weather permitting

Look for the Cuban flag

Bring along something Cuban: music, food, stories, photos ...

Contact Maria 0431275434



## APPEAL – Website and computers

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

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

### Website and Computers Appeal

Name/Organisation \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Contribution: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Name on the card \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

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

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

Thank you for your support.

# Corporate takeover of education



Anna Pha

Leaked sections of a Green Paper on Federation reveal that the Abbott government is considering whether to abandon all responsibility for funding schools or to just continue with funding for non-government schools. At the same time, according to the Fairfax media, the leaked paper proposes the means testing of parents sending their children to public schools. Means testing implies the introduction of fees for public schools, with children of lower income parents on lower or no fees.

The secret paper puts forward four options for consideration:

1. The federal government cease funding to all schools – government and non-government.
2. The federal government continue to provide funding for non-government schools but discontinue funding for government schools.
3. Federal government scale back its funding for schools.
4. The federal government become the main funder of schools.

Options three and four are less likely as they are inconsistent with the \$30 billion cut to schools that the government has already announced.

In addition, the government is looking for clear delineation of funding and to retreat from any responsibility for services to the people. It has already shut down hundreds of programs, sacked thousands of public servants and is in the process of privatising government services including Medicare, education and the social security system.

## States take full responsibility

In relation to the first option, the Green Paper states, "The States and Territories would be 'sovereign in their own sphere' and reflect their responsibilities set out in the constitution." This theme of "sovereign in their own sphere" comes through very strongly in the Productivity Commission's discussion paper in relation to its review of industrial relations.

Consideration is given to how the states would find the additional income required. The Green Paper

toys with the concept of states having access to personal income tax raised by the commonwealth. The federal government would set a personal rate (no mention of company tax!) to raise the income it requires and each state could request an additional amount – not necessarily the same amount. That is, apart from a possible increase in the GST.

It could pit state against state competing with different taxation rates. There is also a similar option in the Productivity Commission's discussion document on industrial relations. The PC puts forward the idea that each state sets its own minimum wage rate and other minimum conditions, thus pitting worker against worker in a race to the bottom as states attempt to attract foreign investors.

## Government schools charge fees

Option two would have similar outcomes. This is the model preferred by the Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, himself a former student of a private Catholic school, Saint Ignatius' College in Adelaide.

According to the MySchool website only four percent of students at Saint Ignatius' College have English as a second language and there are no Indigenous students. The school received \$8 million from the federal government and \$1.8 million from the state government in 2013.

"I want to have a direct relationship with the non-government sector," Pyne said. "Having talked to the Prime Minister about this matter many times, it is his view that we have a particular responsibility for non-government schooling that we don't have for government schooling."!!

That says it all. It sums up the government's attitude to the working class, to the most disadvantaged, the "leaners" as Treasurer Joe Hockey calls them. They only care about their own class, the capitalist class.

There is also the alarming proposition that "Each student would receive a funding entitlement, based on their educational needs and their family's capacity to contribute, that would 'follow' them to whichever school they attended."

Translating that into simple English, it is the introduction of means testing and fees into public schools.

"The States and Territories would have the option to 'top-up' funding to government schools, if they wished to do so, to ensure all public school students, regardless of the ability of families to make a contribution, were able to attend for free."

States, already stretched to the hilt with extra responsibilities being dumped on them by the federal government are more likely to opt for fees and means testing.

In conjunction with all of the options, there is an implied notion of what is known as a voucher system. This was developed in detail in the Gonski report. (see *Guardian*, "Privatisation of education: the Gillard-Gonski model", #1564, 12-09-2012)

It is based on a set amount being attached to each student for schooling which can be adjusted for special student needs and the ability of families to make a contribution.

Parents on higher incomes could top up the value of the voucher to enable their children to gain entry to elite private schools. It would effectively put government and

non-government schools on a similar footing in terms of government funding.

## Privatisation

The voucher approach and introduction of fees into government schools is consistent with the aim of complete privatisation of the public education system. Public schools in some states are already well down the path of privatisation.

In all but Tasmania and South Australia, states have been decentralising and schools volunteering for or being selected for greater autonomy.

The principals of these so-called Independent Public Schools have to varying degrees responsibility for hiring staff, financial management of the school, organising internal inspection of staff, providing professional development programs, etc. Many of these responsibilities were previously funded and carried out by the department.

They also have school councils and to all intents and purposes, apart from their name, are little different to private schools. They are ripe for takeover by corporate interests, religious outfits and other groups through the school council.

In Queensland, where there are already 130 Independent Public Schools, the Education Department says on its website, "They have options to pursue creative models of sponsorship and community, industry and infrastructure partnerships."

The government appears committed to continuing with My School; the National Assessment Program (including NAPLAN); the national curriculum; and national principal and teaching standards. These measurements of performance and rankings form the basis of education becoming a commodity and competition between schools on an education market.

As Australian Education Union federal president Correna Haythorpe said, "It is a fundamental right of every Australian to be educated in public schools free of charge and has been since the 19th century.

"Mr Abbott cannot be allowed to get away with abandoning the funding of education or charging hundreds of thousands of parents to send their children to public schools." ❖

# Medicare rebate freeze undermines bulk-billing

Hundreds of thousands of Australians now face being forced to pay out-of-pocket fees for a basic doctor visit, as a result of the Abbott Government's four-year freeze on doctor's Medicare rebates. The freeze commenced on July 1.

The Federal Secretary of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), Lee Thomas, described the rebate freeze as "another damaging version of the much-maligned GP tax".

The ANMF, with over 240,000 members, is the professional and industrial voice for nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing in Australia.

"It's estimated that around five

percent of basic health services for non-concessional, bulk-billing patients will be privately billed, which means that an increasing number of Australians will be forced to pay up-front every time they visit the doctor for everyday consultations which were previously bulk-billed," Thomas said.

"The government may have failed in their attempt at introducing a \$7 GP tax but they have managed to slug people with another out-of-pocket medical expense using this freeze on Medicare rebates.

The co-payment could be far larger than the \$7, as doctors go over to the Australian Medical Association's recommended fees. They are more likely to be \$35 or

more dollars out of pocket.

"Australians already suffer some of the highest out-of-pocket medical expenses in the world and from today the government is making us all pay even more for basic health services.

The freezing of the Medicare rebate over the coming four years will make significant erosions into bulk-billing and leave many families unable to afford the health care they need.

"Nurses and midwives continue to be concerned that under this Government, Australians are being led into a privatised US-style health system, where people only get care if they can afford to pay for it," Thomas said. ❖

## Pete's Corner



Sydney

CPA Port Jackson Branch invites comrades and friends to join us for our

## Port Jackson Discussion Hour

Tuesday July 21 [5.30 – 8pm please note extended time]

**The political and personal importance of solidarity – Screening of PRIDE**

Tuesday August 4

**The public housing crisis**

Tuesday August 18

**Defending workers rights**

Tuesday September 1

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

All classes 5:30 pm  
at 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills  
Enquiries: Hannah 0418 668 098

# "Big stick" policies to punish job-seekers

Anti-Poverty Network SA, along with the Australian Unemployment Union, have started fighting a new wave of attacks against unemployed people. Starting from Wednesday July 1, the government is giving privately-owned employment service providers, which job-seekers are assigned to when they start looking for work, the power to fine the unemployed at least \$55 (10 percent of their income) for missing a "job search" appointment without a valid excuse (to be determined by the employment service provider).

Employment service providers, which have much more regular contact with unemployed people than Centrelink offices, made the news earlier this year when an ABC *Four Corners* episode revealed widespread evidence of corruption and fraud, including \$41 million worth of false claims in the \$1.3 billion per year industry in just the past three years. Repeated government inquiries have found evidence of agencies rorting the system to gain fees for services that were not provided to their clients, with a former senior departmental investigator noting the system's "absolutely vulnerable to exploitation".

Pas Forgione, coordinator of Anti-Poverty Network SA said, "These changes, giving employment services providers even more power over the lives of unemployed people, are part of a pattern of 'big stick' policies that punish job-seekers for not having jobs, policies that assume the unemployed are unemployed because they are not searching hard enough for work. In fact, there are simply not enough jobs to go around. These fines for Newstart recipients will increase hardship for those already on very low incomes, without helping anyone find employment."

These comments were echoed by Owen Bennett, founder of Australian Unemployment Union, who said, "Newstart Allowance (only \$259 per week) is currently \$280 per fortnight below the poverty-line. This is blaming the unemployed for the government's failure to address Australia's unemployment crisis. There are currently 11 job-seekers (including the underemployed) competing for every job vacancy in Australia."

These changes, from an Abbott government that has been consistently hostile to unemployed people and other people on Centrelink payments from the get-go, came into effect on the same day the government's expanded Work For The Dole scheme came into effect: a scheme requiring unemployed people who have been unemployed for more than six months to do unpaid work (work without any increase to their paltry payments, apart from a \$10.40 per week travel allowance) for six months – 25 hours per week for those aged under 30, 15 hours per week for those aged over 30.

Like compulsory Work For The Dole, giving job agencies the power to fine unemployed people for missing their appointments does nothing to reduce the growing gap between the number of jobs, and the number of job-seekers. But these kinds of measures do bolster the nasty, paternalistic narrative that unemployed people have no one to blame but themselves for being unemployed, that if it was not for their individual deficiencies, they would already have jobs.

It is important that poverty and unemployment be defined in individual rather than structural terms – as the fault of job-seekers, rather than of the economic system and government policies – as this allows the real culprits to be let off the hook. Instead of asking why there are roughly



800,000 unemployed people but only roughly 150,000 jobs, we can concentrate on the alleged poor habits of unemployed people – not being able to wake up on time, not being able to budget properly, drinking and smoking too much, becoming "too comfortable" on Newstart (despite it being the lowest unemployment payment in the developed world). Unemployment, to an extent, is useful to capitalists because it increases their bargaining power relative to workers.

Policies that make life more frustrating and stressful for those on income support payments, of which there are quite a few – keeping

payments very low, the forced quarantining of part of an individual's payments through Income Management, increasing financial penalties for failing to meet one's Centrelink obligations – make the unemployed more desperate to find any work they can to get themselves off payments, regardless of how low-paid, insecure, and unpleasant it might be. Naturally, by increasing competition for jobs, the effect is that wages are driven down. This means that attacks on the unemployed have to be recognised as attacks on workers as well.

And there is plenty of hard evidence that these policies have this

effect – for example, a Productivity Commission study into Work For the Dole during the Howard years, when the scheme affected much smaller numbers of people than it currently does, found the scheme had a two-percent downward impact on wages.

What we need, more than ever, is for those with jobs and those without jobs to unite, to resist the welfare-bashing propaganda from the mainstream media and the federal government, and recognise that when you attack the rights and well-being of those on Centrelink payments, you attack the rights and well-being of employed workers as well. ✪

## Citizenship – Rights jettisoned

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### Minister replaces courts

The *Allegiance to Australia Bill* introduces a new and alarming denial of the right to citizen. The prospect for political intervention in such a right is extremely dangerous.

The definition of terrorist act is wide open: Visit a website, "like" a Facebook page or purchase videos on line, if these suggest an interest in a terrorist organisation or the use or making of weapons. Make a donation to an overseas relief agency which ASIO says is a front for a terrorist organisation. Any of these could fall foul of the Bill and result in loss of citizenship.

The process is shrouded in secrecy with no public accountability, no court appearances where evidence is aired and can be challenged.

The Bill excludes Australians who would be left stateless and could not be deported if they committed similar offences, but Abbott has indicated he is working on this.

The Bill is not clear as to who determines when "conduct [is] incompatible with the shared values of the Australian community". It could be the destruction of

Commonwealth property by peace activists, a trade union picket line blocking supplies or strike action.

It does state that the minister must be informed. If ASIO provides the "information", no strict requirements for a proper security assessment are required before revoking citizenship. Once aware of a situation, the minister must notify the person of their "renunciation" or loss of citizenship.

Dutton says that anyone losing their citizenship would have the right to common law and the Federal and High Courts. That is if they have not already been shipped out of Australia!

The Minister has the power to exempt a person from automatic loss of citizenship "where it is in the public interest to do so." But the minister is not required to apply "the rules of natural justice, nor notify the person of the reasons for the decision."

The loss of citizenship – conviction and punishment – is the result of an Act of Parliament, not a court. This raises important constitutional questions. The Bill applies to people who have dual citizenship or are eligible for citizenship of another country and hence would not be rendered stateless under the legislation. Once

citizenship has been removed, it can never be reinstated.

### Democratic rights jettisoned

The Bill is silent on what happens once citizenship is removed. Will those who are stripped of their citizenship be denied a visa and deported? Will they face long jail sentences where they have also been convicted in the courts for terrorism offences?

Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Steve Ciobo, a panel member on the ABC *Q&A* program on June 22, gave some insight into the government's intentions and total disregard for the rule of law and democratic rights.

Zaky Mallah who had been charged of planning a terrorist attack and acquitted by the Supreme Court after two years in solitary confinement (under Howard's 2003 terror legislation) asked: "What would have happened if my case had been decided by the minister and not the courts?"

Ciobo was quick to respond: "... I would be pleased to be part of a government that would say that you're out of the country as far as I am concerned."

Panellist Dee Madigan intervened: "Don't you think we have courts to decide these things? That's why we have courts," – but Ciobo was having none of that.

"I don't apologise for this point of view," Ciobo making sure the point was clear.

This is not the position of one individual. It is the aim of the terror laws; it is what "Team Australia" is about. If you are not on Team Australia's side, if you do not fit the white, Anglo, Christian, puritanical mould then you are not wanted in Australia.

Commenting on Ciobo's remarks, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said: "I think Steve Ciobo knocked it out of the park and exposed left-wing bias at the ABC."

### "He's the hero of his colleagues."

Over the past 20 years successive governments have introduced a raft of "security" bills.\*\* These bills have received little publicity. The Border Protection (see page 1) and Allegiance to Australia are just the latest in a long series of fascist legislation attacking fundamental democratic rights. At present most of them lie in waiting but they are there to be used.

In almost all cases they have received bipartisan support from Labor and Coalition parties. These bills when taken in their totality amount to a massive assault on democratic rights. The Australian Greens and a few individual independents have consistently opposed them.

Tony Abbott provided an insight to the government's view of "Australian values" at the end of the swearing in of the new Border Force's Commissioner Roman Quaedvlieg: "May God bless you, may God bless your work, may God bless the country you are helping to protect and prosper."

The Bill has been sent to the Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security. It is due to report on August 21, 2015. One of the things that the Committee will be looking at is retrospectivity, such as whether to apply the new law to conduct that took place prior to the Bill's enactment. There is still time to lobby Labor and Independent MPs and Senators. Labor at present is showing signs that it will support the bill.

\* See list on Department of Foreign Affairs website.

\*\* See Section 100.1 of the *Criminal Code* for definition of *terrorist act* and "Terrorism laws take away your rights", *Guardian*, 09-03-2005. ✪

# Greed running riot at Barangaroo



Peter Mac

**The massive development of Barangaroo, the huge former stevedoring area on the east side of Darling Harbour just west of the city's CBD, is a potent symbol of the insatiable greed of big capital.**

When Patrick Stevedores ceased operations at Darling Harbour in the 1990s, the state government held an international contest for the best urban renewal design for the vacant publicly-owned site.

However, the winning entry's sensitive, beautiful low-rise design was unceremoniously dumped by the government, which in 2007 gave consent to a plan involving a much more intensive use of the site.

The plan comprised Headland Park at the northern end, Barangaroo Central, the relatively low-rise "cultural and civic centre" at the centre, and the high-rise commercial area of Barangaroo South.

The plan would also have allowed gambling magnate James Packer to build a huge hotel at the end of a long pier jutting into Darling Harbour, but public uproar forced the government to back down, and Packer was offered a site at the northern end of Barangaroo South.

In 2013 Packer won a licence to build a casino. He then argued that because of the decision to relocate his building he should be allowed to incorporate a casino within the hotel building and increase its height from 168 metres to an astronomical 275 metres. The government meekly agreed.

By May this year the eighth alteration to the 2007 plan (known as Modification 8) was under consideration by the state coalition government. The alterations involved not only increases in the gross floor area of the Barangaroo South buildings, but also changes in the size and location of Packer's hotel casino.

Packer was unhappy with the site allotted to him by the government, and now wants to relocate his building by taking over a public park on the shoreline. Doing so would necessitate relocating the park away from the water's edge, and probably

cutting off the public walkway that was intended to run along Barangaroo's entire shoreline.

## No holds barred

Lend Lease, the Barangaroo South developer, recently won a two-year court battle with the government to increase its profits from the project. The company says the government should accept Modification 8's proposals for gross floor area increases of 54 percent for residential use, 79 percent for hospitality and 18 percent for retail, with a total rise of 7.4 percent over the whole Barangaroo site.

However, Sydney Council has declared that under the 2007 consent plan rules no building may be erected on the public park which Packer wants to take over, and that Modification 8 would provide massive benefits for the developers but no benefit whatsoever for the public.

It also noted that three state planning policies would have to be changed in order to approve Modification 8, which falsely classified roads, laneways and the remnant pier as public space, thereby failing to abide by the concept plan's stipulation that the public area should comprise 50 percent of Barangaroo's total area.

At each stage Lend Lease has argued that the extra accommodation sought represented only a small increase on the previous design amendment. However, the council has argued that because of the cumulative effect of many amendments, the Modification 8 design would be so different from the 2007 plan that it should be treated as a new development.

Others maintain that because the government has already entered into a private agreement with Packer it has a perceived conflict of interest, so Modification 8 should be subjected to a full public inquiry, preferably by an independent Planning Assessment Commission.

But the Minister would not have to abide by the Commission's findings. And in any case, another planning modification has now been lodged.

## Limitless greed

Modification 9 proposes an increase in the gross floor area of buildings in Barangaroo Central by 64,275 square metres and in the Headland Park by 143,000 square metres, as well as amendments to the building block envelopes in Barangaroo South.

The government has announced that the proposed new privately-operated Metro railway will include a station at Barangaroo Central, the design for which is to be radically overhauled, with new tenders called for the development.

Fairfax journalist Mercedes Ruehl commented: "The investment in the new rail infrastructure will mean a change to the existing proposed building envelopes and floor space, even after the master plan doubling the floor area to 12,000 square metres was criticised. Sources close to the negotiations said the changes could be as much as double that number."

Premier Mike Baird isn't worried. He gushed: "The dramatic urban renewal occurring on the western edge of Sydney's CBD is Sydney's own Canary Wharf... [It's] crucial for the state's economic development"

The proposed amendments seem endless and the project's growth limitless. The Barangaroo South office buildings are already rising, jostling for elbow room, and the developers are clamouring for even more space. No affordable housing has been provided under the current proposals.

If built, Packer's 69-storey monstrosity would block out views of the sky from the Sydney Observatory. Together with the other Barangaroo South towers, it would overshadow Balmain and other suburbs during winter mornings, and block out views of the western harbour for existing city residents and visitors.

And now the developers also want the low rise buildings of Barangaroo Central to head for the skies, while Headland Park, much of which actually includes underground structures, is to have a major increase in its gross floor area.

Under Modification 8 the gross floor area over the entire site would be almost twice what it was under the 2006 concept plan, and Modification 9 demands even more.

Opponents of the Barangaroo project have no right to appeal to the Land and Environment Court. The casino proposal may be challenged in court by Packer's rival, Echo Entertainment. But if they fail, and if the government and developers are not kicked out of office and off the site, Barangaroo will become just another windswept, monstrously overdeveloped concrete jungle, with its parks and natural areas a pathetic remnant of what might have been.

Barangaroo is what happens when greed runs riot under capitalism. ☘



The evidence that Australia paid "people smugglers" to "turn back" their boat continues to mount. Passengers and crew have given consistent reports to Indonesian police that an Australian security official paid each crew member \$5,000 to return to Indonesia with their human cargo of around 65 asylum seekers in late May. The Senate has launched an inquiry into the alleged payment. It remains to be seen whether the government will supply the required documents on what and how any payments were made, who authorised them, whether they are legal under international or domestic law. The Indonesian government is not impressed with this sort of activity and wants a proper explanation as well, not that it can boast about its own human rights record in West Papua or Aceh. As former Liberal Opposition leader John Hewson (now a professor at the ANU) said: "The thing that worried me was that the government said they wanted to break the business model of the people smugglers. But if you start paying them to go back then you change the business model and start giving them an incentive ... It's very odd thinking."

Australia Post employs 36,000 people. The Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) which represents postal workers has called on Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull to sack Australia Post boss Ahmed Fahour after the announcement that \$190 million would be spent to slash 2,000 jobs in response to a diminishing volume of letters. Post claims to be losing money in its mail delivery business. If Australia Post had not sold off its post office buildings and rented them back at exorbitant rates and was not contracting out much of its operations, it might still be making a profit. The union is worried that despite reassurances of no forced redundancies the details of the job cuts were not revealed. "Australia Post does not have the staff to deliver the mail consistently on time now, this plan will make every letter later," said Martin O'Nea, assistant national secretary. "The Australian economy relies on fast, cheap, postal service to move the cheques, documents and parcels to keep business working. Mr Fahour plans to cut thousands of posties and double the price of a stamp. Mr Fahour and his crazy plan must go," Mr O'Nea said.

A report released on July 2 by the Council of Social Service NSW (NCOSS) on the rising cost of living, shows one in seven children in NSW struggles with poverty. NCOSS strongly recommends against raising the GST to 15 per cent or widening it to include food. As it is, 58 per cent of low to middle income families are experiencing housing stress; many parents go without meals themselves to feed their children; cannot afford dental and medical services and generally find it very hard to cope. Extra financial burdens, no matter how small in the eyes of fat-cat politicians, could easily be the tipping point for many more families who are trying to balance their meagre budgets every day.



## Latin America Solidarity Documentary Film Festival Sydney 2015

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# Re-shaping the world: China's strategy in Eurasia

This edited extract from a much longer article by US academic Alfred W McCoy\* provides a very interesting perspective on the strategic policy being pursued by the government of People's China. The full-length article – "The Geopolitics of American Global Decline" – was published on June 08, 2015 by on-line news commentary site TomDispatch ([www.TomDispatch.com](http://www.TomDispatch.com))

**The rise of China as the world's largest economy, represents something new and so threatens to overturn the maritime geopolitics that have shaped world power for the past 400 years. Instead of focusing purely on building a blue-water navy like the British or a global aerospace armada akin to America's, China is reaching deep within [Eurasia] in an attempt to thoroughly reshape the geopolitical fundamentals of global power. It is using a subtle strategy that has so far eluded Washington's power elites.**

After decades of quiet preparation, Beijing has recently begun revealing its grand strategy for global power, move by careful move. Its two-step plan is designed to build a transcontinental infrastructure for the economic integration of Eurasia from within, while mobilising military forces to surgically slice through Washington's encircling containment.

The initial step has involved a breathtaking project to put in place an infrastructure for the continent's economic integration, by laying down an elaborate and enormously expensive network of high-speed, high-volume railroads as well as oil and natural gas pipelines across the vast breadth of Eurasia.

## Shanghai to Madrid

For the first time in history, the rapid transcontinental movement of critical cargo – oil, minerals, and manufactured goods – will be possible on a massive scale, thereby potentially unifying that vast landmass into a single economic zone stretching 6,500 miles from Shanghai to Madrid. In this way, the leadership in Beijing hopes to shift the locus of geopolitical power away from the maritime periphery and deep into the continent's heartland.

Only a few years after the Cold War ended, former National Security Adviser Brzezinski, by then a contrarian sharply critical of the global views of both Republican and Democratic policy elites, began raising warning flags about Washington's inept style of geopolitics.

"Ever since the continents started interacting politically, some five hundred years ago," he wrote in 1998, "Eurasia has been the centre of world power. A power that dominates 'Eurasia' would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions ... rendering the Western Hemisphere and Oceania geopolitically peripheral to the world's central continent."

While such a geopolitical logic has eluded Washington, it's been well understood in Beijing. Indeed, in the last decade China has launched the world's largest burst of infrastructure investment, already a trillion dollars and counting, since Washington started the US Interstate Highway System back in the 1950s. The numbers for the rails and pipelines it's been building are mind numbing.

## Rail integration

Between 2007 and 2014, China crisscrossed its countryside with 9,000 miles of new high-speed rail, more than the rest of the world combined. The system now carries 2.5 million passengers daily at top speeds of 240 miles per hour. By the time the system is complete in 2030, it will have added up to 16,000 miles of high-speed track at a cost of \$300 billion, linking all of China's major cities.

Simultaneously, 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.

On the quicker southern route, containers of high-value manufactured goods, computers, and auto parts started travelling 6,700 miles from Leipzig, Germany, to Chongqing, China, in just 20 days, about half the 35 days such goods now take via ship.

In 2013, Deutsche Bahn AG (German Rail) began preparing a third route between Hamburg and Zhengzhou that has now cut travel time to just 15 days, while Kazakh Rail opened a Chongqing-Duisburg link with similar times. In October 2014, China announced plans for the construction of the world's longest high-speed rail line at a cost of \$230 billion. According to plans, trains will traverse the 4,300 miles between Beijing and Moscow in just two days.

In addition, China is building two spur lines running southwest and due south toward Eurasia's maritime "marginal." In April, President Xi Jinping signed an agreement with Pakistan to spend US\$46 billion on a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Highway, rail links, and pipelines will stretch nearly 2,000 miles from Kashgar in Xinjiang, China's westernmost province, to a joint port facility at Gwadar, Pakistan, opened back in 2007. China has invested more than US\$200 billion in the building of this strategic port at Gwadar on the Arabian Sea, just 370 miles from the Persian Gulf.

Starting in 2011, China also began extending its rail lines through Laos into Southeast Asia at an initial cost of US\$6.2 billion. In the end, a high-speed line is expected to take passengers and goods on a trip of just 10 hours from Kunming to Singapore.

## Pipelines

In this same dynamic decade, China has constructed a comprehensive network of transcontinental gas and oil pipelines to import fuels



from the whole of Eurasia for its population centers – in the north, centre, and southeast. In 2009, after a decade of construction, the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) opened the final stage of the Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline. It stretches 1,400 miles from the Caspian Sea to Xinjiang.

Simultaneously, CNPC collaborated with Turkmenistan to inaugurate the Central Asia-China gas pipeline. Running for 1,200 miles largely parallel to the Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline, it is the first to bring the region's natural gas to China. To bypass the Straits of Malacca controlled by the US Navy, CNPC opened a Sino-Myanmar pipeline in 2013 to carry both Middle Eastern oil and Burmese natural gas 1,500 miles from the Bay of Bengal to China's remote southwestern region.

In May 2014, the company signed a US\$400 billion, 30-year deal with the privatised Russian energy giant Gazprom to deliver 38 billion cubic metres of natural gas annually by 2018 via a still-to-be-completed northern network of pipelines across Siberia and into Manchuria.

Though massive, these projects are just part of an ongoing construction boom that, over the past five years, has woven a cat's cradle of oil and gas lines across Central Asia and south into Iran and Pakistan. The result will soon be an integrated inland energy infrastructure, including Russia's own vast network of pipelines, extending across the whole of Eurasia, from the Atlantic to the South China Sea.

To capitalise such staggering regional growth plans, in October 2014 Beijing announced the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China's leadership sees this institution as a future regional and, in

the end, Eurasian alternative to the US-dominated World Bank.

So far, despite pressure from Washington not to join, 14 key countries, including close US allies like Germany, Great Britain, Australia, and South Korea, have signed on. Simultaneously, China has begun building long-term trade relations with resource-rich areas of Africa, as well as with Australia and Southeast Asia, as part of its plan to economically integrate Eurasia.

## Strategy to neutralise US military

Finally, Beijing has only recently revealed a deftly designed strategy for neutralising the military forces Washington has arrayed around the continent's perimeter. 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.

In May, Beijing escalated its claim to exclusive control over the South China Sea, expanding Longpo Naval Base on Hainan Island for the region's first nuclear submarine facility, accelerating its dredging to create three new atolls that could become military airfields in the disputed Spratley Islands, and formally warning off US Navy overflights. 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 US military containment.

At the same time, Beijing is developing plans to challenge Washington's dominion over space and cyberspace. It expects, for instance, to complete its own global satellite system by 2020, offering the first challenge to Washington's dominion over space since the US launched its system of 26 defense communication satellites back in 1967. Simultaneously, Beijing is building a formidable capacity for cyber warfare.

In a decade or two, should the need arise, 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.

America's current leadership has failed to grasp the significance of a radical global change underway inside the Eurasian land mass.

\*Alfred W. McCoy is professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. ✪

***The result will soon be an integrated inland energy infrastructure, including Russia's own vast network of pipelines, extending across the whole of Eurasia, from the Atlantic to the South China Sea.***

## Timor Leste

# Tomorrow's doctors

Dr Merita (Metha) Monteiro is head of the Department Infectious Diseases at Timor Leste's Ministry of Health. She was one of the first group of Timorese students to study medicine in Cuba, graduating in 2011. Almost 1,000 doctors have been trained on scholarships in Cuba or by Cuban doctors in Timor Leste. Metha was a special guest at the recent national Consultation of Australia-Cuba Friendship Societies. Around 120 people took part in the annual Consultation which was held in Sydney this year from June 6-8. Metha spoke to the *Guardian* about her experiences as a student in Cuba and her work in Timor Leste since graduation.

**Metha:** I was born in Dili in Timor-Leste in 1983. I come from a very simple family. I have 10 brothers and I have lived with my parents up to now. In 2004, I got a scholarship to Cuba. This is an offer from the government of Timor-Leste in collaboration with the Cuban government because, if I'm not wrong, in 2003 our President Xanana Gusmao had a meeting in Malaysia with all the leaders from outside of the country. He met with Fidel Castro there, so they were negotiating how to carry out cooperation in the health sector.

At that time it was decided to send some Cuban doctors to help with the country's health system and also to send some students from Timor-Leste to study medicine in Cuba. So I'm one of those students who went to Cuba then to study medicine. I was in Cuba for around five to six years.

When we arrived there we had to do a Spanish course that took nine months. After we graduated from the Spanish course, we started medicine. I started to study medicine in one province in Cuba, Ciego de Avila. I stayed in Morón.

So, in Cuba I've learned a lot and made many friends. I had a Cuban family. Cubans are very friendly, they don't treat you like a foreigner, they treat you as their family. So I have Cuban mothers and fathers and family. Now I miss them so much and I don't know when will I have a chance to meet them again.

One of the things I learned from Cuba is not only how you can treat your patients with medicines, but how you can feel what people feel using your spirit of humanity and spirit of solidarity to do your job to help the people who need it.

The health system in Cuba is very different, it's very good and education is really good. Everyone receives free health care and education is also free.

Everything is different. You can walk around at night. For example, in other countries you might be scared when you walk in the street at night, but in Cuba nothing will happen to you. Sometimes at the weekend, we go out with friends at night and we always returned safely. This is one of the things that made us feel really comfortable in Cuba, as if we are really at home.

**Guardian:** And which school did you attend in Cuba?

**Metha:** I attended Cuba Faculdade de Medicina in Ciego de Avila.

Under the Cuban system we just did theory in the first and second years, but in the third to sixth years we started working with patients in the hospital.

In 2010, we had to come back to Timor-Leste because we'd already completed our



Cuban ambassador Jose Manuel Galego, Dr Metha and Kenia Serrano – ACFS National consultation, Sydney.

course and we had to complete our internship year before graduation.

**Guardian:** Did the Timor-Leste government recognise your Cuban qualification?

**Metha:** Yes. After our internship year, when we graduated we got the certificate from the Cuban school and also we got one from our National University in Dili. And our country recognised the certificates.

After graduation the Ministry of Health sends the graduates to different municipalities. This is in the contract, to work in the villages after graduation. Before there were no doctors there, only in the Referral hospitals in each region and the National Hospital.

After I graduated they sent me to work as a general practitioner in the Viqueque district. I practised medicine there as a doctor for more or less one year attending to patients. I was working closely with the Cuban medical brigades who were working there. After that I was appointed to join the Ministry of Health to participate in the administrative side. I was working for the infectious diseases department in the Ministry of Health. It's called CDC – Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

And now I'm working in the Ministry of Health for two years and in my department we are looking for infectious diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, HIV, sexually-transmitted infections, hepatitis, dengue and also neglected tropical diseases like soil transmitted helminths, like lymphatic filariasis, yaws, and others.

Up to now there are about 1,000 of us who have graduated, and this is a big group. Some of us graduated in Cuba, some from Dili because of the collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education with the Cuban health and educational systems. Now we have a Faculty of Medicine in Timor-Leste.

**Guardian:** So the Cuban doctors set up this Faculty?

**Metha:** Cuban doctors with our people set up the Faculty of Medicine.

**Guardian:** So it is also possible to study medicine in Dili?

**Metha:** Yes.

**Guardian:** Are the doctors who were there before the Cuban program private?

**Metha:** There are some doctors who did not study in Cuba. Some of them studied in Indonesia, in the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, etc. Most of them work with the government, in the public health system, but only two or three of them have their own private clinic.

**Guardian:** And the public system is free?

**Metha:** Yes. In Timor-Leste, in our system, up to now, everything is free. Our government health facilities are free.

So, we've got a facility at the village level, we call it *suco* level, we have facilities at the sub-district level called Community Health Centres (CHC), regional hospitals and one National Hospital.

We have a referral system. So, for example, if the doctor sees a patient at the *suco* level and diagnoses some illness that needs to be followed up by the upper levels then the doctor will refer the patient to the Community Health Centre.

At the CHC a doctor will evaluate the patient. If they can solve the problem, they will keep the patient there. If they think that the patient needs a consultation with a specialist, they will send that patient to the Referral Hospital for care.

If in the Referral Hospital they think they need to send the patient to Dili for some tests because all the equipment is in the National Hospital, then they will send the patient there to be diagnosed and then treated. Also, if they feel they cannot solve the problem, then they refer the patient to countries like Indonesia or Singapore to do some more studies.

In Portuguese they call it *junto ao medico*. It is the meeting of the specialists who study the medical conditions of the patient and evaluate whether the patient really needs to be transferred outside of the country or not. And all this is free.

**Guardian:** And what about medications?

**Metha:** They are also free. For example, if I go to the CHC not feeling well, maybe I have dengue or malaria, they will do the tests and after the results will write a prescription. Then I go to the pharmacy in the Health Centre and get the medication.

**Guardian:** Would you like to comment on the results you have had with your programs to combat non-communicable diseases?

**Metha:** Yes. For example, the malaria program in Timor-Leste has been very successful because we have a very good national strategy to control it and also a vector control program. That's why the number of our malaria incidence is going down. Before we had more than 200 cases per 1,000 of the population but now we have less than one per 1,000 of the population.

**Guardian:** Is there any health education in schools?

**Metha:** Sure, we have our department, it's called Health Promotion. They have a unit for the health education, so they are working closely with the Ministry of Education. They've got a plan to go to every school and tell everything about health to the students. They have a program to give out vitamin A and to give regular albendazol [used to control a variety of parasitic worm infestations]. They are also teaching students to wash their hands properly and giving them information on oral health.

**Guardian:** What importance is placed on preventative and primary care?

**Metha:** We are doing both. We are preventative and also correcting.

One of the things we've learned from Cuba is more prevention rather than corrective because if we prevent illnesses, we won't have to treat them later.

I'm telling you about communicable diseases. But we also have a number of non-communicable diseases that are increasing now like hypertension, diabetes mellitus and other problems with heart attacks, etc.

It's very interesting because, for example, we've got lots of problems with diabetes, which is something the system could prevent. It is one of the non-communicable diseases. ✪

**The health system in Cuba is very different, it's very good and education is really good. Everyone receives free health care and education is also free.**

# As mayors meet, ending racist violence a theme

Marilyn Bechtel

**SAN FRANCISCO:** The agenda of the US Conference of Mayors' (USCM) annual meeting here June 19-22 ran the gamut of issues mayors must deal with every day – water, technology, climate, energy, transportation, law enforcement, jobs, education, housing – to name a few.

But one issue kept resurfacing: how to confront and deal with the virulent racism that remains a current in US life, whether expressed in the killing of nine African Americans engaged in bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Church in Charleston, South Carolina, or killings by police that recently took the lives of Michael Brown, Freddie Gray and others.

Addressing the USCM conference on June 19, President Obama spoke of the shock and heartbreak that followed the events in Charleston. "The nature of this attack – in a place of worship, where congregants invite in a stranger to worship with them, only to be gunned down – adds to the pain," he said. "The apparent motivations of the shooter remind us that racism remains a blight that we have to combat together."

The president took the occasion to renew the administration's call for "common sense" gun safety reforms,

noting that over 11,000 people were killed by gun violence in 2013.

Speaking the next day, Hillary Rodham Clinton, contending for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination next year, underscored Obama's call for action on gun safety. She went on to say racism remains "a deep fault line in America", backing up with statistics her observations about pervasive inequality between African Americans and whites.

"Our problem is not all kooks and Klansmen," she said. "It's also the cruel joke that goes unchallenged ... the offhand comment about not wanting those people in the neighbourhood. Let's be honest: for a lot of well-meaning, open-minded white people, the sight of a young black man in a hoodie still evokes a twinge of fear."

On Sunday, fellow Democratic presidential candidate Martin O'Malley said, "one of the sad triumphs of white racism is the degree to which it has succeeded in subconsciously convincing so many of us, black and white, that somehow black lives don't matter." O'Malley urged gun control legislation and called for the confederate flag to be removed from the South Carolina state capitol grounds.

Similar themes ran through the mayors' deliberations.

At the meeting of the Mayors

and Police Chiefs Task Force, where "community policing" headlined the agenda, Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson of Gary, Indiana – the state's first African American woman mayor – spoke of the need for and the difficulties of building solid relationships between communities and police.

"The other issue I want to raise is the issue of race," she said. "We have to really determine if we have the political will to raise those conversations."

Resolutions to strengthen police-community relations and to combat violent extremism were high on the agenda of the Criminal and Social Justice Committee.

A series of demonstrations, including a Friday "arms are for hugging, not policing" action and a Saturday morning march of several hundred protesters, kept up a relentless drumbeat about the meeting's heavy corporate sponsorship (read Wells Fargo, Walmart, Google and a couple dozen more). Protesters called on the mayors to end racist police brutality, demilitarise the police, and work to solve the crises of gentrification and affordable housing.

Speaking before the march, Jackie Cabasso, North American Coordinator for Mayors for Peace, called the USCM "a real mixed bag. Some good things are going on in there, and some really bad things." Since the mayors are "more diverse, more approachable, more progressive and more subject to citizens' pressures than members of Congress," she said, "It's a good thing we are out here today, telling them what we



**Racism remains "a deep fault line in America".**

think and telling them that arms are for hugging."

Reminding demonstrators that this year marks 70 years since the US atomic bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Cabasso called the bombings "the bedrock of the military industrial complex ... at the centre of a process that goes onto the streets through the widespread availability of guns and translates into wars around the world and the militarisation of the police."

Founded in 1982 by the mayor

of Hiroshima, Mayors for Peace has over 6,700 member cities in 160 countries, over 200 in the US. In the last decade, Mayors for Peace has introduced and the USCM has passed increasingly strong resolutions for worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons.

This year was no exception. This year's resolution calls for worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons and shifting the billions spent on them to meet the needs of cities.

People's World ✪

## Iran

# Union official seized after being invited for interview

**The Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (Codir) is calling for the release of arrested Iranian Teachers' Association general secretary Ismail Abdi.**

Mr Abdi was detained on June 21 as he attempted to travel to neighbouring Armenia en route to the annual Education International trade union conference in Canada.

Border guards prevented him from crossing and confiscated his passport, then told him to report to Evin prison, whose political prisoners' wing is known as Evin University for the number of intellectuals who have been incarcerated there.

Nearly 70 teachers accompanied Abdi to an interview with the authorities, worried that they might arrest him – fears which turned out to be justified.

"The detention of Ismail Abdi cannot be justified on any basis according to the laws of natural justice," said Codir assistant general secretary Jamshid Ahmadi.

"International pressure upon the Iranian government is vital if we are to achieve Mr Abdi's release."

Abdi had already been in

trouble with the Islamic Republic over protests in May by teachers demanding better salaries, improved conditions of service and job security.

During the protests he was summoned to the prison to be informed that a 10-year suspended sentence relating to a two-day strike in January would be applied unless he resigned from the union.

Abdi's arrest came just a day after the five labour affairs staff of the Iranian Labour News Agency (ILNA) were summarily sacked by chief executive Massoud Heydari.

News on Iranian social media indicates that there were major disagreements between ILNA's labour affairs group and the management, especially on editorial interference, gagging orders and pressure for self-censorship.

Ahmadi called on President Hassan Rouhani to "fulfil the promises he made during his 2013 election campaign to act on the legitimate demands of Iranian workers for a decent living wage and the right to form, join and belong to a trade union of their choice."

Morning Star ✪

# Saudi Arabia funding Islamic schools in Canada

**Saudi Arabia has been offering financial support to expand Canadian private Islamic schools with donations worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to secret cables recently released by WikiLeaks.**

The newly published trove of documents reveals conversations between government officials from Riyadh and diplomats at the Saudi embassy in Ottawa from 2012 and 2013. The cables show that two significant donations worth \$211,000 and \$134,000 were made to schools in Ottawa and Mississauga respectively.

The information came from 500,000 leaked Saudi diplomatic cables, which WikiLeaks has begun to release.

The schools admitted to a Canadian newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, that they asked for the donations to help meet growing demand, citing thousands of people on their waiting lists.

There is nothing illegal about making donations to private schools in Canada, but there have been reports that Saudi money can come with strings attached, such as encouragement to teach a more puritanical form of Islam.

Canadian Islamic schools have

denied accepting conditional donations, stating that Saudi Arabia has no influence over what is being taught.

"It's not the way we operate. We are solely Canadian and we have our own way of doing things," the executive director of the Muslim Association of Canada (MAC), Sharaf Sharafeldin, told *The Globe and Mail*.

MAC is in charge of mosques and private Islamic schools, including the popular Olive Grove School in Mississauga, which received the \$134,000 donation.

Before the money was received, a cable was sent from the Saudi embassy in Ottawa to Riyadh, stating: "[MAC] needs support and aid to carry out a development and construction project for phase two at the school. There is no observations or anything against it."

The Olive Grove's popularity has been surging, partly because it is located in the booming Mississauga community near Canada's most populated city, Toronto. According to Sharafeldin, it has 1,200 students on the waiting list.

Following questions from the media, MAC sent a mass email out to parents to dispel fears of

any Saudi influence, stressing "the grant came with no conditions."

The Ottawa Islamic School is also expanding: "[We are] currently building an expansion on its property worth approximately \$4 million, that will meet a lot of shortage for space," principal Mohamed Sheikh Ahmed told the Canadian newspaper.

The cable regarding the Saudi donation to the Ottawa school reveals the discussions surrounding the \$211,000 donation.

"Regarding the provision of financial aid to a number of Islamic institutions, including ... the Ottawa Islamic School in Canada, we would like to inform you that we have disbursed the first payment of that aid by a cheque," that cable said.

Religious schools are fairly popular in Canada, with prospering Muslim, Christian, Sikh, and Jewish ones operating in multicultural communities. However, a lack of public funding makes schools very dependent on donors.

The Canadian government has raised concerns about the influence of Saudi Arabia's funding on various Muslim institutions receiving their donations.

Russia Today (www.rt.com) ✪



## Greece

# The referendum solved nothing

Steve Mavrantonis

**Greek voters rejected the proposal of the European Union in the referendum held on Sunday July 5. The No vote was 61.5 % and the Yes 38.5%. There were however 5.5% of "informal votes" which opted for a different solution. In addition, the sum total of those who did not vote, or voted informally, was 41.3%.**

The direct result of the outcome of the referendum was the resignation of the leader of the conservative opposition leader, A Samaras, and the announcement that the nego-

**By decision of its Central Committee the KKE took a position of voting against both proposals.**

tiations with the European institutions and the IMF will continue. As the *Guardian* goes to press an EU summit meeting has been called in an attempt to finalise an agreement.

The referendum in essence did not solve any of the pressing problems of Greece. The way the referendum questions were set by the Greek government made it impossible for any decision to alter in any meaningful way the present situation.

The Greek people were asked to either accept the new agreement offered by the "three institutions" or Troika – European Commission,

IMF, European Central Bank – by voting Yes, or to reject it and accept the proposal of the Greek government, by voting No.

In essence however the differences between the two proposals were so minor and unworthy that it remains a mystery to a lot of people as to why it was necessary to make use of the referendum provisions of the constitution. The governing party of SYRIZA had its own reasons for wanting to extract a favourable decision by the people, thus making the people "an accessory" to the criminal game played at the expense of all working people.

When the present government was elected, five months ago, it promised the people to end the Memorandums, the policies of austerity, to end unemployment, to restore pensions, wages and stop the control of the economy by the Troika.

None of these promises were fulfilled and the negotiations with the European partners, despite the serious and unacceptable, compromises of the government, had reached a stalemate.

The Greek government was thus looking for a way out of the difficult situation, for an escape route, so the

referendum was conceived as the best way to provide that escape route and shift any responsibility for the consequences of either vote upon the people.

Both proposals the people were asked to vote for were full of anti-people measures, austerity policies, increased taxes and further stagnation of the Greek economy. Both proposals were so bad that the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), stated in Parliament, during the discussion on the referendum, "One (proposal) is a very bad memorandum, an Armageddon for the people, while the other is a very bad memorandum, a guillotine for the people".

## The position of KKE

By decision of its Central Committee the KKE took a position of voting against both proposals and indeed to use its own ballot paper which voted No for both proposals and Yes to the disengagement from the European Union with the people in power.

The government and the Electoral Board decided that any such ballot papers would be counted as "informal". Therefore the high percentage of informal votes, as shown in the official results is the result of all the votes cast by the supporters of the KKE.

The CC of the KKE in its declaration to the people states that the government "mocks" the people "When it invokes respect of the popular will. The will of the people all these years was to get itself rid off the memorandums, the laws implementing



them, while the government with its proposal to the institutions maintains and strengthens them.

"When it speaks of peoples' sovereignty, while the keys of the economy are held by the ruling class, whom the government supports with its policy.

"When it claims that there exists a solution to the benefit of the people inside the EU, that it is possible for this alliance of wolves to change".

It is self evident that the result of the referendum can not change the critical economic and political situation in Greece, when the government expects to go immediately to the

negotiating table with the same representatives of the creditors and sign a new agreement which will prolong poverty, unemployment and insecurity for the Greek people.

Real change can only come about as a result of the persistent, organised class struggle of the people for the unilateral write-off of the foreign debt, which is unserviceable and has been already paid off many times over, the disengagement from the EU and the election of a peoples' government that will nationalise and utilise the country's resources for satisfying the needs of the people. ✪



## Region Briefs

In a response to questions from a Japanese Communist Party member of parliament, the Japanese Defence Ministry confirmed that 64 retired officials from the Defence Ministry and the Self-Defence Forces were working for the country's top 10 weapons manufacturers in 2014. The manufacturers also donated a huge amount of money to the incumbent Liberal Democratic Party of Japan which has embarked on a massive arms build-up. In return the manufacturers were granted 62.5 percent of the military's highly profitable equipment and service procurement in 2013. The largest and second largest manufacturers were Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Mitsubishi Electric that produce military ships, missiles, torpedoes, amongst other things.

Thirty out of 47 Japanese prefectures and 116 local assemblies have released a statement opposing Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's latest assault on Japan's pacifist Constitution. He pushed a series of war-bills through the national parliament. Nagano Prefecture, for instance, in its statement, publicly objected to any war-related bills that might overturn Japan's pacifist constitution.

The ninth session of Vietnam's National Assembly's (NA) closed after holding 30 days of meetings in Hanoi on June 26. The NA Chairman, Nguyen Sinh Hung, hosted a closing ceremony for the meetings and thanked the efforts made by NA deputies. He called on the government to "improve national economic competitiveness, extend international integration and firmly safeguard peace and stability". The session adopted a number of resolutions in areas of workers' insurance, law, and large construction projects and so on.

China and Venezuela drafted a 10-year plan to develop bilateral projects at the fourth technical meeting of the two countries' joint commission, strengthening their comprehensive strategic partnership. Venezuelan Vice President for Planning, Ricardo Menendez said that the goal of the meeting was to find projects that benefited the development of both nations, especially in the area of telecommunications; providing tablets to primary and university students; setting up related factories; and constructing undersea cables in the Caribbean Sea. Wang Jianjun, Secretary of the commission, said that "with mutual efforts we will achieve very successful results". The two countries have signed nearly 400 cooperation agreements.

A number of the Philippine members of parliament criticised President Benigno Aquino III, who violated the country's Constitution, allowing Japanese military to participate in a joint naval military exercise in Philippine territory. Aquino III was questioned regarding the legality of forming a military alliance with Japan. One legislator, Antonio Tinio, said the presence of foreign military in the country was prohibited without approval from the Senate; hence it was illegal for Japanese military to join the exercise. He also criticised the President for undermining the country's independence which produced tensions in the region.

# US blockade continues - Cuba solidarity as well

Keith Headland

**The release from US prisons and return to Cuba of the remaining three of the Cuban Five on December 17 was a great victory. But it still leaves many outstanding issues. These include the criminal US economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba and the illegal occupation of Guantánamo Bay. The priorities of the solidarity movement need to be refined to meet the new situation that Cuba now faces.**

The pressure on the US needs to be maintained as negotiations are taking place between Cuba and the USA. International solidarity and public opinion have played a major role in many of the victories of the left and progressive forces.

The latest announcement is that as from July 20, diplomatic relations will be established between Cuba and the USA, with Cuba insisting that to have normal relations the blockade must be lifted and the Guantánamo Naval Base returned to Cuba.

To adapt to this new situation

a meeting was held on June 22 in Havana to launch the International Committee of Solidarity With Cuba. It has links with ICAP (Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples) and the existing international solidarity movement.

The aim is not only to focus on Cuba but on Latin America. The International Committee recognises the need to expand the views and activities of the committee in line with its internationalist character. The meeting adopted a number of events that should be supported. These include:

- The 17th\* of each month be set aside to take part in solidarity actions worldwide. These should be broad including emails to, and demonstrations outside the appropriate embassies or business offices.
- Support the struggle of the Venezuelan people to defend the Bolivarian revolution against attempts of sabotage and disruption to affect regime change
- Support the Palestinian people in their struggle to end the occupation

- Solidarity with Ecuador against right-wing coup attempts
- The end of colonialism, for the independence of Puerto Rico from US domination, and the Malvinas from Britain
- Support for the peace process in Colombia
- To support the Chilean people in their struggles.

From November 22-25, 2015, the biennial conference has been organised in Guantánamo with the theme "Against Foreign Military Bases and For Peace". One hundred and sixty delegates representing 22 countries attended the conference in 2013. The slogan then was "Guantánamo, more than just a military base". For many people outside of Cuba, Guantánamo is known only as a base, as propagated by the mass media, but it is much more than that. It is a city and a province.

**\*December 17, 2014 is the date that President Raul Castro and President Obama announced that the two nations were going to establish diplomatic relations. ✪**

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### Insight into our history

I hope that many Australians saw the programme *Secret River* on ABC. Even though it was at times difficult to watch, especially the last episode, it gave a genuine insight into the profound atrocities and ordeals inflicted upon Australia's Indigenous peoples by colonialism.

Those watching would have gotten some measure of understanding and appreciation of the cruel nature of the subjugation,

dispossession, displacement and destruction of the First Peoples' way of life, society and culture. The present plight of the Aboriginal people is a direct result of the past gross suffering and blatant denial of their inalienable rights by the imposed settler state.

It is vitally important that we recognise this sordid history of inhumanity if we are to move forward and make some amends for what terrible, callous wrongs the European invasion perpetrated.

Many Europeans believe that the superiority of their ideas, culture and values enabled them to dominate the world, but as was rightly shown in *Secret River*, the truth is different, that the force of superior weapons, the use of organised violence and sheer brutality won the conflicts that gave rise to the western colonial settler states (Australia, USA, Canada, NZ, Israel and others).

And real harmony will only come

about when past and present injustices are fairly and properly resolved.

Steven Katsineris  
Vic

### Housing affordability

With regards to state and territory governments resuming their former role in the construction of public housing ("Housing crisis and 'good jobs'", *Guardian* 17-06-2015). If improved housing affordability is to be achieved, the pernicious Goods and Services Tax must be abolished.

The GST penalises consumers for buying goods and services, including those associated with housing construction. On the other hand, Land Value Taxation (LVT) is a form of revenue collection that is, in fact, not a tax, because it involves collecting the rental value of land sites. Collecting land rental values for public

revenue is merely returning to the community a value created by community co-operation as embodied by public services.

The Henry Review recommendation to replace stamp duty with LVT was a step in the right direction on the grounds of both equity and efficiency and by also recommending an expanded role for Land Value Taxation to be applied to all types of land.

J Ayres

### Mere "Christian" values

Once again so-called Christian values are being pushed down the throats of public school children. Year 7 girls in a Victorian public school were given booklets titled "Science & Facts" which claimed among other things that "girls are needier than guys in a relationship and always want to be close".

The message was essentially the old one – girls have to dress modestly, be chaste and virginal. It was by sheer luck that one of the mothers got hold of the booklet and raised questions about its message.

I believe an Education Department spokesman said the materials were "completely inappropriate and in breach of department policy" and "totally out of step with department approach to sexuality and relationship education".

I have only one question: why these materials are in a public school and why it was left to a schoolgirl's mother and not the Department of Education to question the girls' exposure to this tripe? Should children not be protected from some screwed up notions of what is right or wrong according to some religious dogmas? Will flat-earth believers be welcomed in schools as well?

Mati English  
Sydney

# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

## Capitalism: burning fossil fuels and controlling food



Oxfam has released a new report titled *Let Them Eat Coal* accusing the most developed nations of continuing to burn coal at unsustainable rates. Coal is still the world's largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. The report says the developed nations' continued use of coal "is driving planetary destruction on a massive scale and pushing off investments in the solutions necessary to right humanity's course in the coming years and decades".

According to the report's summary, each existing or new coal power station in the world should be seen "as a weapon of climate destruction – fuelling ruinous weather patterns, devastating harvests, driving food price rises and ultimately leaving more people facing hunger. With these climate impacts falling disproportionately on the most vulnerable and least food-secure people, the burning of coal is further exacerbating inequality."

Oxfam is particularly concerned at the effect climate change is having on the fight against hunger. Oxfam's concern is backed up by Professor Olivier de Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, who says: "Climate disruptions are already affecting many poor communities in the global South, and coal-fired power stations are contributing, every day, to make this worse. They increasingly look like weapons of destruction aimed at those who suffer the impacts of changing rainfall patterns as well as of extreme weather events."

Oxfam says that the financial costs associated with the damage done by the ongoing mining and burning of coal by the G7 countries (the US, the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan) far outweigh the aid and assistance money they spend on rural development or agriculture across the African continent.

Using available and trusted climate and

financial models, Oxfam estimates that coal emissions fuelled by G7-sponsored or financed projects will be responsible for total climate change-related costs in Africa of approximately US\$43 billion per year by the 2080s and US\$84 billion per year by the end of the century. Those figures, says the international aid group, represent 60 times what G7 countries give Africa in agricultural and rural development aid and more than three times what G7 countries give Africa in total bilateral aid.

"The G7's coal habit is racking up costs for Africa and other developing regions," said Celine Charveriat, Oxfam International's director of advocacy and campaigns. "It's time G7 leaders wake up to the hunger their own energy systems are causing to the world's poorest people on the frontline of climate change. The G7 leaders must stop using emissions growth in developing countries as an excuse for inaction and begin leading the world away from fossil fuels by starting with their own addiction to coal."

"This will make significant additional cuts in their emissions, create jobs and be a major step towards a safer, sustainable and prosperous future for us all."

Globally, there is a growing move away from fossil fuels even as the coal, oil, and gas industries do everything in their power to retain the destructive – yet profitable – status quo.

Oxfam International last year announced it was pulling out of the Leadership Council of the much ballyhooed New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, a "public-private initiative" that has been championed by US President Barack Obama, among others, as a means to combat poverty in Africa by bolstering "sustained, inclusive, agriculture-led" growth with the goal of raising "50 million people out of poverty over the next 10 years". So what's wrong with it?

According to smallscale farmers, unions, workers, and food sovereignty groups the New Alliance policies "facilitate the grabbing of land and other natural resources, further marginalise small-scale producers, and undermine the right to adequate food and nutrition" – all in the interest of courting large multi-nationals.

Under the New Alliance, ten African governments – Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tanzania – have "committed to develop or revise policies that will facilitate responsible private investment in agriculture in support of smallholder farmers." However, private investment is after profit and profit does not come from smallholder farmers but from agribusiness.

The big capitalist corporations have long striven to gain control of the world's energy resources. Not so well known is another equally important thrust of their corporate greed: control over the world's food and water. Under the specious claim of delivering "aid to Africa," western governments are backing an initiative that is effectively enabling the corporate takeover of African nations by some of the world's biggest food and agriculture companies.

Although the New Alliance is supposedly there to support smallholder farmers, a precondition being sought by transnational corporations as a requirement for operating in Africa is the criminalising of the saving and swapping of seeds. Acceding to the transnationals' demands will destroy African farmers' seed security and make them dependent on buying new seeds every year from corporations like Monsanto. A dream situation for the transnationals.

Already, a bill to criminalise seed saving is being pushed through the parliament of Ghana. Also far from helping smallholder farmers,

under commitments made by the governments of Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal and Tanzania, small farmers are being forced off their property as 1.8 million hectares of the countries' most desirable farmland has been offered to foreign investors, amounting to little more than a corporate land-grab.

And in Tanzania, under another New Alliance initiative, more than 1,300 people are liable to lose their land as the government works to recategorise village land to make it available for a Swedish-owned EcoEnergy sugarcane plantation.

Josaphat Mshighati, head of programs and policy for ActionAid Tanzania, told US web magazine *Common Dreams* that instead of increasing food security, farmers are losing access to the land in exchange for jobs laboring at an industrial agriculture plantation, whose sole crop is being raised for export.

"It is a form of colonialism," Mshighati said. "Smallholder farmers are turned into labourers serving in big, private agriculture investments and some of them totally lose their access to productive land. Hence, they become much more dependent."

Further, he added that African governments including Tanzania are "being pushed to change their seed policies to allow for 'more modern seeds' that will definitely be supplied by big private companies. Thus, the indigenous seeds will perish in few years and all farmers will have to rely on seeds from the western companies."

Doug Hertzler, senior policy analyst with ActionAid USA, also told *Common Dreams*: "Unfortunately G7 governments' policies seem to be more about increasing corporate profits through access to African land and labour, and opening markets to sell patented seeds and pesticides rather than realising the right to food."

Well, duh! ☹️



Sunday July 12 –  
Saturday July 18

Kevin McCloud's long-running series about people in Britain building fancy houses, *Grand Designs* (ABC Sundays from 12 July at 7.40pm), is often interesting and occasionally inspiring but most of the time it is devoted to showing that the well-to-do live in better houses than the rest of us. Well, duh!

To give McCloud his due, he did do a very interesting episode about a housing co-op, but most of the lavish homes, astonishing conversions and breathtaking restorations he deals with are only possible because the owners have incomes most of us can only dream about.

In the first episode of series 12, a GP and his wife decide to build a new home at the bottom of their garden (as you do). Problem is, right from the start they can't agree on any aspect of the design – even the basic shape.

This week's "cult movie" on SBS is a 2012 American comedy film, *Safety Not Guaranteed* (SBS2 Wednesday 15 July at 8.30pm). The film is directed by Colin Trevorrow and was inspired by a 1997 *Backwoods Home Magazine* classified ad – itself written as a joke filler by a *Backwoods* employee – ostensibly placed by a person asking for someone to accompany him in time travel. It was screened at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival where it won the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award. So they thought the script was above average.

The critical consensus on *Rotten Tomatoes* states: "*Safety Not Guaranteed*'s ostensibly modest ambitions are outmatched by the movie's strong performances, beguiling charm, and heartfelt story."

Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* wrote that the story's shenanigans are "harnessed to a plaintive underlying theme about the fading dreams of those aspiring professionals in their 20s and 30s." Popular critic Roger Ebert praised the film

for the quality of the dialogue, characters with depth and dimension, as well as singling out Mark Duplass for his "balanced performance".

Also on SBS that night is the 2009 German movie *The Door* (SBS2 Wednesday 15 July at 10:05pm), about an artist in despair after being responsible for the death of his young daughter who discovers a door that provides a passage back in time, and the opportunity to change the past and avert the tragedy. However all is not as it seems (it never is in this kind of story, is it?). Based on a novel by Akif Pirincci, the film stars Mads Mikkelsen, Jessica Schwarz and Valeria Eisenbart.

Mads Mikkelsen is generally described as giving a "tour de force performance" in this sci-fi thriller.

The emptiness of most "abstract art", its purely transient appeal, is exemplified in the US art market by the nonsensical sums paid for "art works" by chimpanzees, children and any number of "artists" who have discovered how to work the system.

Born in 2000, Marla Olmstead had her first gallery show in Binghamton, New York, at the age of four! Her father is an amateur painter, and for all her enthusiasm, she is clearly taking instruction from her parents.

Marla's "work" has been displayed around the United States and her paintings fetch as much as \$25,000 each. However, as *My Kid Could Paint That* shows (SBS 2 Thursday, 16 July at 8.30pm), more perspicacious observers have debated the validity of reviews comparing her daubs to Picasso and Pollock, and a few have even asked if Marla's parents are pushing their child for their own benefit. Surely not!

Only in America. Historical novels and TV series that play fast and loose with historical fact for dramatic purposes are common. They should not, in good conscience however, represent themselves as being "true historical mysteries", which is what *Arthur & George* does (ABC Friday July 17 at 8:30pm).

This three-part series purports to be an account of how the celebrated author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, overcame his writer's block after the death of his wife, by throwing himself into proving that racism and corruption had led to the wrong man (George Edalji) being convicted for The Great Wyrley Outrages.

The story might be "based on real events" but it is adapted from a novel by Julian Barnes that is not intended to be strictly historically accurate,



Martin Clunes as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – *Arthur & George* (ABC Friday July 17 at 8:30pm).

and the TV series introduces even greater departures from the truth, such as the murder of a blacksmith and the death of a dog walker at the non-existent Rugely Falls.

And to provide a tidy conclusion to the drama, the suicide of Conan Doyle's chief suspect, Royden Sharp, is invented. Which leaves us no option but to judge it purely as fiction. And as fiction, it is more than a bit stodgy.

An interesting side-light is that in fact the police may have had the right man all along. Eighty years after Edalji's release, a June 1907 memo by then Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone was discovered. It revealed that Gladstone had been privately told by one of the Edalji's defence lawyers of the suppression of a letter damaging to the defense's case. The letter by Edalji, which his brother Horace had supplied as a specimen of Edalji's handwriting, consisted of obscenities similar to the ones Edalji was accused of sending.

Modern capitalist society has so many features that are unfair, anti-people, and devoid of humanity that it is no wonder that some people choose to "opt out" and try to make an alternative lifestyle free of the iniquities of that profit-driven system.

Attempts to create the "simple life" usually founder on the need to retain modern health care and similar advantages of science and technology. It is clearly easier to set up a commune or retreat to log cabin in the woods than to try to change the social system completely. Nevertheless, that is the path to genuine liberation from the coils of capitalism.

However, in this week's episode of *Where The Wild Men Are With Ben Fogle* (SBS 2 Saturday 18 July at 8.30pm) we meet up with a family in New Zealand trying to live as hunter-gatherers in the wilderness. ☺

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# POLITICS

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"TRAINING COURSES" SERVING BIG MONEY**  
Pat Ford, Federal TAFE Secretary, Australian Education Union;  
Damien Oliver, Dr, Research Analyst, University Sydney Business School;

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# Confederate flag, like the swastika, has no place in our future

Victor Grossman

**BERLIN:** Unlike the swastika, which was banned in Germany and elsewhere after the defeat of fascism in World War II, the Confederate flag was not banned in the US after the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War.

Flags and banners and even logos and gestures have always possessed great potency in world history, sometimes positive, often horrifyingly negative. Long insistence on the seemingly undefeatable Confederate "Stars and Bars" is one nasty example now at the centre of attention.

Indeed flags, like the black-red-gold of Germans strivings for a republic, the revolutionary French tricolour, England's imperial Union Jack, the Stars and Stripes or the LGBT rainbow colours, with all their so very different messages – have lifted hearts or caused despair for centuries, too often accompanied by the always-red colour of blood. Symbols on the flags have had the same effect; the Christian cross, the Muslim half-moon, the six-pointed Jewish Magen David and the hammer and sickle are striking examples, bad or good, depending on where you are standing.

Sometimes a motion was enough: fingers touching the body four times to form a cross, a two-fingered V for victory, upheld fists of many Communist fighters – or a defiantly poking middle finger.

Most notorious and most tragic, however, have been the Confederate flag in the US and, in all of Europe and beyond, the fascist outstretched fascist arm salute to Hitler and the related Nazi swastika.

After the defeat of the Confederacy its banner was not forbidden. Those who display it claim that the display is protected by the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. Attempts to have it not banned but simply dropped from use by southern states and by racists, inside and outside the USA were never successful.

Only now, after photos of the nine-fold killer in the Mother Emanuel Church with his flag became public, some governors and politicians in South Carolina, Alabama and other states finally find it necessary to drop it from official use – and hope the matter ends there.

As for the Nazi symbols, more than 50 million deaths caused by the Hitler-led killers demanded a more stringent reaction; the Hitler salute and the swastika were prohibited after 1945 in Germany and Austria, at first by the occupying powers, later by government law.

They also became criminal offences in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and the salute is illegal in Switzerland and Sweden "if used for propagating Nazi ideology."

In Germany any form of Nazi salute and any display of the swastika can be punished with up to three years in prison. Symbols like that of Hitler's special SS killer troops, a pair of Nordic runes like sharply angular S-letters, or the so-called wolf hook, a crossed line with a diagonal prong at either end, each facing a different direction, are also taboo; so are tricks like extending the arm as in a Hitler salute but with only three fingers. There has been no end

of ingenuity in thinking up variants to circumvent such laws. With some judges this has occasionally been successful; usually it has not and often led to some new trick, like numbering the letters of the alphabet; 1 equals A, 8 equals H, thus 18 meant "Adolf Hitler," 88 stood for "Heil Hitler." This, too, is now forbidden. Special clothing has often been used by pro-Nazis for identification; not only black or camouflage dress and brutal boots but, for some years, jackets and other clothing of a company called Thor Steinar. Sold in special shops which barely disguised their pro-Nazi views, often "improved" with slogans or logos which could be altered if outlawed, this meant that a Thor Steinar jacket meant the wearer was a pro-Nazi, and often a brutal thug!

Until 2014, in Saxony's capital, Dresden, there were nine delegates of the neo-Nazi party, the NPD, in the state legislature. Once all nine appeared in Thor Steinar jackets. They were ordered to remove them or leave, and the clothing was henceforth forbidden there (and in other legislatures).

They are no longer represented in the legislature, but there are still more than enough neo-Nazis, with or without such jackets. They have been most numerous in or near Dresden. And new homes for asylum-seekers burn just as readily as southern churches for African-Americans.

Swastika bans were enacted in both the East German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic, with one major difference. When the Communist Party of Germany was forbidden in the Federal Republic (the West) in 1956 its symbols were also taboo, but were difficult to outlaw since the hammer and sickle were also the official insignia of the USSR. Diplomatic relations prevented nonsense in this regard.

But five years earlier, in 1951, the FDJ, the Free German Youth, a pro-Communist youth organisation, which till then existed in all of Germany, was forbidden in the West. Its rising sun logo with the letters FDJ was also forbidden. Young people were actually arrested for wearing its blue shirt with this logo on its sleeve.

A new problem arose with the annexation-called "unification" – of the GDR. The FDJ had been disbanded but one small left-wing group refused to recognise the demise of either the GDR or the FDJ and wore the blue shirt with logo at demonstrations. Since it had never been forbidden in the East it could not be considered legally taboo there – or could it? Must a person change his shirt on the subway train crossing from East to West Berlin? The lawyers are still arguing.

This was part of unceasing media and classroom attempts to equate Nazi Germany with the GDR, denouncing every last detail and every achievement of the GDR and thus hinder any hopes of a socialist future, especially among the younger generation. This policy of deception has often proved very successful; it is closely allied with pressures and propaganda aimed at a left-wing Greece or at Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and, ever since 1959, at Cuba.

While slogans, flags and other signals, good or bad, often have such importance that



*The homes of immigrants seeking asylum in Germany burn just as hot as the churches of African-Americans worshipping in the US.*

they cannot be ignored, the Confederate rag in Columbia, South Carolina, simply reflects all that lies behind it.

The super-wealthy too often succeed in embroidering their "proud heritage," fooling white working people into believing that their future lies with their white rulers rather than with an even poorer group at the bottom of the heap, and which, if they can keep it there, lets them believe they are somehow "up there with those on top". This deception and fears, since America was born, of losing a presumed advantage, have always made progress difficult or impossible.

This, of course, is what is behind "Stars and Bars," "Dixie" – incantations, Calhoun Streets and Robert E Lee statues – and the former lynchings and present-day mass incarceration, police bullying and murder of African-Americans.

In Germany, while those trying to out-trick bans on swastikas and Hitler salutes go marching through the streets in nearly every city, and are of great potential danger, an even greater menace, far broader, is a deception similar to that in the US.

There are relatively few Jews now, but far more people of Muslim faith. Now, due to terrible wars caused by the very same people who want to squeeze the entire economy and make more billions, there are hundreds

of thousands of refugees of war and hunger searching for asylum, even at great risk in the stormy waters of the Mediterranean. It is again Dresden where we see most dramatically how the anger of worried, dissatisfied and disoriented people can be misdirected with "Deutschland for the Deutsche" slogans that are no less vicious than slogans against minorities or immigrants in the US.

The homes of immigrants seeking asylum in Germany burn just as hot as the churches of African-Americans worshipping in the US.

Far in the background one finds the people and the institutions that benefit from the toleration and promotion of racist symbols like the swastika in Germany and the Confederate flag in the US.

The individuals involved, with their money stowed away in places like the Cayman Islands or Luxembourg, can be found enjoying time on their yachts, flying their luxurious jets or living in their countless mansions – enjoying and living off the profits of the weapons and other industries that are of little benefit to anyone other than themselves. For the overwhelming majority of the human race, however, there really is no benefit to be gained from provocative and racist flags and slogans.

People's World ✪



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