



Waterfront dispute

MUA wins first battle

Len Waster

“What we’ve basically won is the first battle in this war. And we are very hopeful this company [Hutchison Ports Australia – HPA] comes to its senses and recognises there is an enterprise agreement in place ... and it needs to be upheld.”

Paul McAleer, NSW branch secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, delivered this assessment last Thursday night to a gathering of waterside workers, after they had spent a week outside the gates of the Hutchison terminal at Port Botany in Sydney, in solidarity with their sacked co-workers and strongly supported by a community picket.

The workers, their families and their supporters were celebrating a Federal Court ruling that found the multinational port operator had breached its enterprise agreement by failing to use dispute resolution clauses in the agreement and to adequately consult with its workers before sacking them.

The court ordered Hutchinson to rescind its redundancy notices for the near 100 workers it had sacked and to continue paying their wages at least until a full court hearing at end of August.

This does not mean the workers’ jobs are reinstated for good, but their employer does have to sit down with the union that represents them to discuss matters affecting their work and future and negotiate in good faith over its plans to further automate its port operations.

The ruling is an existential win for the maritime workers – it reaffirms that the employer must recognise the union as the workers’ representative organisation, must negotiate with the union on matters affecting the company’s employees and must stick to agreements it has made.

Workers’ right to negotiate and to take action – up to and including the right to strike – to get justice from employers is a right that is hard won and constantly – and increasingly – under challenge.

The MUA is one of the core industry unions in Australia that is strong, with a history of militancy and internationalism among its members, positioned in a strategic sector and with a class conscious, committed leadership from delegate level up.

Hutchison has been trying on the MUA to see how far it could go in sidelining the union while ripping into the workers. But as MUA assistant national secretary Warren Smith said before the sackings, “Hutchison ought to know the MUA is not naïve to its tactics and we are gearing up to fight for the long-haul.”

It is absolutely necessary for maritime industry workers that they maintain their union, the MUA; that they prove time and



Port of Brisbane fight against Hutchinson

Sam Bullock & Jacob Patrick

Members of the CPA Brisbane Branch went to the port of Brisbane to attend the blockade with the MUA, CFMEU, RBTU, ETU and other unions in their protest against Hutchinson Ports Holdings who laid off workers by email and text in a sustained union-busting attack. The waterfront workers have been in high spirits for the last ten days, demanding that they be reinstated and be paid their full entitlements despite the terrible weather and threats from authorities.

Uncle Bob Anderson, Aboriginal elder of Quandamooka nation, did welcome to country to show solidarity with the trade unionists in their struggle. He is a well respected unionist and

communist who has continued to show solidarity for many years.

The workers of various unions formed an honour guard in support of the two remaining dock workers who marched down to the encampment from the docks at knock-off time. Despite terrible storms with wind and hail there was a BBQ and a family friendly atmosphere with children playing along to bands that performed songs of strength and solidarity.

The sacked workers have received letters and support from trade union organisations around the world including the USA, New Zealand, England, South Africa and Spain, as well as letters from other workers from ports around Australia. The unions will maintain their picket until the sacked workers are re-instated and their demands are met.

time again that the workers must be respected and consulted with, not individually behind a closed door, but collectively, through their union.

Even as it has managed to reinforce its role as the workers’ tribune in relation to HPA’s try on, the MUA is close to sealing a new enterprise agreement with one of two other stevedores in Australian ports, HPA rival DP World Australia.

It has taken the MUA more than 18 months to negotiate this agreement, including a point last December where DP World locked out MUA members in Melbourne and Sydney, for taking industrial action that was at the time protected under the Act.

This has all been to get a deal which, if members vote for it, should see more than 1,000

waterside workers get an annual wage increase of 2.6 percent over the next three years, with an extra 0.3 percent increase for reaching certain productivity targets.

Despite the struggle to land even this deal, the MUA and maritime workers have ongoing concern about the impact of automation, which has already cost hundreds of jobs on the wharves, as well as the relentless pressure to remove penalty rates and other conditions through productivity driven enterprise bargaining.

This cartel of multinational corporations seeks to operate with non-union labour, with a casualised workforce, permanent but irregular rosters and stripped down awards.

It is nothing for companies like Hutchison

to close down operations in one country to starve a workforce into submission. In preparation for this fight HPA has allegedly hived off contracts to its rivals as it prepares to construct more highly automated port facilities. In the lead-up to the sackings it threatened workers that it would close down the dock without notice and make them redundant “for no reason” if it wanted.

This pressure on workers is not unique to the waterfront – tens of thousands of jobs are being eliminated across most industry sectors in Australia and throughout the capitalist world generally as growth slows, investment slumps and corporate conglomerates are at each others’ throats for profits and market share, all for which they expect workers to pay the price.

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Guardian

Issue 1698

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Abbott at the abyss

The Coalition's chances of being returned at the next federal election are fading. The polls have turned sour and established columnists are rounding on the Prime Minister. There have been too many scandals and failed "captain's calls" for all but the most rusted on conservatives embedded in the corporate media. Abbott's future as PM is in doubt again and, if the polls are correct, Labor would have romped into office had an election been held last weekend.

How did it come to this? Abbott appeared to be travelling well following the leadership challenge in February and his commitment to be more consultative. Labor was capitulating all along the line, notably on the issue of asylum seeker boat "turn-backs". The prejudicially named Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption was yielding a steady trickle of outrageously one-sided accounts from the war on workers being waged in the workplace.

News from the last-mentioned side-show has capped off a bleak patch for the Coalition as they position themselves to continue to be the team carrying forward the agenda of the transnational corporations. The revelation that the person heading up the Royal Commission, the already controversial Justice Dyson Heydon, had agreed to speak to a fundraiser for the NSW Liberal Party has set back the "wipe out the unions" project for the time being.

Unions are considering boycotting the Royal Commission's proceedings and one, at least, is considering seeking compensation for the huge costs of their forced cooperation. Heydon's comments about opposition leader Bill Shorten's credibility have lost all their usefulness to the government. It's the Royal Commissioner whose credibility is at issue now. Calls for his resignation and for the Royal Commission to be shut down will be difficult to resist.

The Royal Commission bombshell followed on from the scandal surrounding former Parliamentary Speaker Bronwyn Bishop's lavish use of expenses. Jokes and images ridiculing the extremely wasteful use of a helicopter to attend a Liberal Party fundraiser in Victoria forced the reluctant hand of the Coalition. The biased but very useful Howard-era veteran would have to stand aside before the government was essentially laughed out of office.

The latest display of dysfunction, the PM's scuttling of a conscience vote on same sex marriage for Liberal members of parliament, may well have been the point of no return for Abbott and the Coalition's chances of re-election. The decision to invite the overwhelmingly anti-equal marriage Nationals to the decisive party room meeting was designed to sink the chances of a conscience vote and the passage of an historic bill through the parliament. The proposition to hold a plebiscite or referendum at the end of the next parliament would place more obstacles in the path of the long-overdue change.

As the *Guardian* goes to press, Coalition backbencher Warren Entsch is due to present a bill to parliament to allow same-sex marriage. The efforts of the seemingly unlikely champion of equal marriage appear doomed. So are the wishes of a substantial majority of the Australian population. Make no mistake, this stance of Abbott and the arch-conservatives is not about "leadership", it is about holding back the wishes of the people for change.

In recent times, the issue of same-sex marriage was a useful distraction for the Abbott government. While people were debating the need for legislation, other more sinister projects were unfolding without the attention they deserved. News of the Productivity Commission's draft report on a new "Workplace Relations Framework" - a regime with even fewer rights for workers, sank almost without trace in a day or two. The mother of all multilateral "free" trade agreements, the Trans Pacific Partnership, is still not being discussed publicly despite its grave threat to the very sovereignty of the country.

Abbott's misadventures may also be distractions from troubling plans and decisions being made, largely behind closed doors. Voices decrying many aspects of the corporate agenda and looming dictatorship are not cutting through. They don't yet have a unified vision of the alternative to capitalism, which is destroying the lives of people and the planet they inhabit. The Communist Party of Australia is working to advance this alternative, i.e. socialism, and move us beyond the grim theatre we see playing out in our parliaments and the decay taking place in our communities.

PRESS FUND

While PM Tony Abbott discussed marriage equality (which he opposes) with a colleague recently he revealed he was going to adopt really tricky tactics. And he did, by inviting his ultra-conservative National Party mates to a meeting to formulate a joint policy platform on the issue. But "Tricky Tony" should have learnt from the experiences of "Tricky Dickie", former US President Richard Nixon, whose career crashed after he carried out one trick to many. It's hard to keep track of events now, with cabinet members publicly contradicting each other as they jostle for the top job in expectation of Abbott's imminent departure, but you can help by sending us a Press Fund contribution for the next issue. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

Eric Durston \$10, Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15
This week's total: \$30 Progressive total: \$4,610

Dust Diseases Board axing slammed

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) has joined asbestos disease victims groups in slamming the shock decision of the NSW Baird government to axe that state's Dust Diseases Board.

The union has demanded Premier Mike Baird overturn the sudden dismantling of the Board, which has been the arbiter of compensation claims from people - usually workers - suffering from dust-borne diseases for nearly 90 years.

NSW AMWU state secretary Tim Ayres condemned the Baird government for giving no public warning or consultation over the decision, which was not formally announced but communicated to Dust Diseases Board members by phone.

The change comes as part of a NSW Workers Compensation restructure, with the Tribunal's functions to be taken over by an "expert" advisory committee which employers will also sit on.

"Mike Baird has delivered a kick in the guts to victims of asbestos

exposure and their families," Ayres said. "This is not simply a piece of government bureaucracy. The Board independently ensures that the many victims of one of Australia's worst industrial killers are fairly compensated and cared for."

"To casually announce that the Board will no longer exist shows a callous attitude that is beyond belief."

Ayres predicted that with the number of asbestos-related disease cases continuing to rise that removing the Board would mean longer delays, extra expense - and potentially lower payments.

That would hit hardest the victims of mesothelioma, whose need to promptly settle their claims is urgent as most usually are diagnosed as having only a short time to live.

The Board's legal significance has spread far beyond NSW, as it has made important judgements on industrial diseases issues common to all states including hearing hundreds of claims from asbestos victims in the past 40 years.

Mr Ayres stood at a media conference with the President of the Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia, Barry Robson, and three widows of asbestos victims.

Robson was deeply sceptical about the government's promise not to cut benefits and predicted that the only winners would be law firms and insurance companies.

He predicted the method of calculating benefits would change and was also concerned that household services provided to help victims would be wound back.

It was less than a year ago that a NSW Upper House Inquiry into the Dust Diseases Board, chaired by a Liberal MP, commended the board for performing in "an exemplary manner".

Ayres said: "The government's own committee has found that this is one of the most effective agencies operating out of the NSW government - the Premier needs to immediately reverse this decision." ✪

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To do this effectively in Australia successive governments have tweaked industrial laws to restrict workers' ability to organise and take action in the face of these attacks.

Unions are portrayed as a third party interfering with the employer-employee relationship and gradually what was once normal union organising activity is being treated as criminal.

Corporations increasingly have the power to sue unions for "damages" resulting from union activity and industrial action

beyond enterprise level bargaining is virtually prohibited. Unions have all sorts of restrictions in regard to entry, recruitment and exercise of workers' power against the bosses.

Every action unions take must be considered in terms of the risk it takes in being bankrupted by the employers through the courts.

Through the device of enterprise bargaining employers endlessly demand concessions in the name of "productivity", "flexibility" and "competitiveness".

They increasingly use labour

hire companies, as a way to spread casualisation and to place employees in the situation where they are no longer employed by those they are working for, but merely on assignment from the labour hire company.

This is the world that those workers who have managed to remain unionised and able to continue to take collective action are now operating in.

That they can is a testament to their resilience, their collective strength. ✪

Website and Computers Appeal

The PA has launched a Special Appeal to buy a few computers and develop its website and social media - the latter now being an important way of reaching younger people. As everything, this costs money and our resources are stretched. We still need to raise more to meet our needs. We urge you to dig deep and support our fund-raiser. If you have just received a tax refund, perhaps you could share it with us. Our warmest thanks to the following for their generous contributions this week:

Les Purkis *In Memory of Connie Purkis* \$500

Steve \$10, Keith Headland \$750.

This week's Total: \$1,260 Cumulative Total: \$4,270.

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.



Inquiry told RNs essential in aged care staffing mix

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) this month appeared at the first public hearing of an Upper House inquiry into the role of registered nurses in aged care facilities across the state.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, outlined how essential registered nurses are to ensuring quality of care for high or complex-level residents in aged care settings.

"It is imperative that staffing in aged care settings adequately meet the needs of residents and is of a high skill-mix to deliver the care required, anything less would be an abrogation of our nursing responsibility, as advocates for safe patient care," Holmes said.

The current law stipulates that nursing homes with high-care residents throughout NSW must have a minimum of one registered nurse on duty at all times and a director of nursing appointed.

The intention of this minimum requirement was to ensure a high quality of aged care. If the requirement goes, it will open the door for aged care providers to self-regulate staffing, which could result in the

removal of registered nurses entirely from shifts.

"We have spoken to thousands of aged care nurses and community members with relatives in aged care – we know what is at stake, if the responsibility were to rest entirely on the aged care providers," said Holmes.

The NSWNMA has been calling on the NSW government to preserve registered nurses in aged care facilities with high-care residents, after changes to the Commonwealth *Aged Care Act 1997* (effective from July 1, 2014) impacted upon definitions within the NSW *Public Health Act 2010*.

In June 2014, the NSW government introduced an interim measure to maintain the current requirement until it conducted consultations with the sector via a Steering Committee. A final decision, which rests with the NSW Minister for Health, is due to be made before the end of the year.

Holmes rejected the argument by aged care providers for removing the minimum requirement to allow them "flexibility of staffing", as well as the claim that there are not enough registered nurses to fill positions across the aged care sector.

"Aged care providers who want more 'flexibility' say the current requirement is too limiting, when in fact it's only a minimum – one registered nurse per shift in high-care settings," Holmes said.

"Good providers out there will continue to roster a registered nurse on 24 hours a day, seven days a week because they accept the responsibility of running a sound service.

"We have a moral obligation to make sure decisions to place our elderly in residential aged care facilities are supported by legislation which ensures access to sufficient numbers of registered nurses and appropriately trained and regulated care workers to meet the assessed needs of those elderly residents."

On June 24, the NSWNMA submitted more than 10,000 signatures on a petition which called on the NSW government to retain the legislative requirement for registered nurses and the associated requirements for directors in nursing.

The NSWNMA has vowed to continue lobbying on behalf of registered nurses, enrolled nurses and assistants in nursing in the aged care sector, to ensure residents receive the highest quality care. ✪



Campaign to Save Paid Parental Leave!

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) is contributing to the fight against the Abbott government's "Fairer Paid Parental Leave Bill" – currently before a Senate Committee of Inquiry.

Under the Bill workers will not be better off but instead will see some 80,000 women lose access to the current government scheme. This will reduce the time they can take to care and bond with their newborn and be a big step back from the progress achieved for workers and their families in recent years.

It also re-positions a hard-fought-for workplace entitlement, as a social security payment from the

government. No other form of leave is treated in this way.

While the government has tried to vilify new mothers for combining the government's paid parental leave (PPL) with (where available) employer supported PPL, it's important to know they are NOT double dipping, committing fraud or rorting. They are, in fact, using PPL as it was originally intended.

The government scheme provides 18 weeks' leave at the minimum wage, with payments currently totalling \$11,500. There is no superannuation attached and it essentially replaces the (Howard government's) Baby Bonus for working mums. The reason that the government PPL is so

low is that it was always intended to be a base for unions and employees to negotiate for better employer-supported PPL – with the goal of reaching the 26 weeks (approximately 6 months) as advocated by health professionals and experts, as well as the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation. This system was designed to provide a minimal safety net (the government's PPL) whilst ensuring that parental leave was seen as an industrial right (not a welfare payment) and that unions and employers could negotiate around this (also maintaining the integrity of current employer PPL arrangements).

What's more, a recent govern-

ment supported review of the PPL system found that it was working as intended, with more women accessing better parental leave provisions and returning to work when ready (instead of dropping out of the workforce altogether).

So why is the government trying to wreck the PPL system?

In short, they see an opportunity to claw back funding, whilst at the same time pushing the advances made by unions, workers and employers to bring Australia in line with most OECD countries.

For the government to suddenly turn the tables on women and effectively deny almost half of eligible women access to some, or all, of

the government's PPL – when many have bargained around PPL with the 18 weeks as a base – is both reducing their conditions and downgrading parental leave as an entitlement.

For other women, who are yet to win employer sponsored PPL, this change is a disincentive for their employers to negotiate for improved PPL, potentially leaving these women stranded with what is a substandard scheme. Worst of all, however, is that this change is likely to result in many employers abandoning their current PPL provisions, forcing more women to rely on 18 weeks leave at minimum wage. It is, indeed, a step backwards for all women. ✪

Pete's Corner



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

Tuesday September 1
What is wrong with local council amalgamations

Tuesday September 15
The implications of Russian-Chinese co-operation

Tuesday October 6
Why is there an environmental crisis?

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

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Opposition to the TPP grows

Richard Titelius

On August 3, 2015, a public forum on the Trans Pacific Partnership was organised by Perth Indymedia Radio RTR 92.1 FM at the Defectors Bar in Mt Lawley near Perth. The speakers included Greens Senator Scott Ludlam, ALP Member for Fremantle, Melissa Parke, anti-GMO campaigner Janet Grogan and Dumbartung Aboriginal Gallery CEO Robert Eggington and Selina Eggington.

Robert Eggington gave a searing insight into the history of dispossession of his people and the scars it has left and continues to leave on his Nyoongah people.

These scars manifest themselves in the highest rate of youth suicide in the world and the highest rate of incarceration on the planet – higher than amongst black South Africans and African Americans, the high rates of heart disease and diabetes and the “brutal savage racism that makes the Adam Goodes affair seem like nursery rhymes.”

Selina Eggington spoke of the stories passed to her from her grandmother. She spoke of when the white man first made their way up the Swan River or Derbyl Yerrigan in their barges to occupy the land of which they were the custodians. This caused them to hide at first in Kings Park or Katagarup and then to Brookton to the south east and later to Kellerberin and Tammin. There was resistance by the Aboriginal people in all parts of Australia including WA.

Today this discourse of the dispossession of the Aboriginal people is a metaphor for the way our modern Australian society is under threat as capital attempts to impose an economic system which will erode our democracy, freedom and vitality through so called Free Trade Agreements in the like of the Trans Pacific Partnership and the China and Korean Free Trade Agreements.

Senator Scott Ludlam said that the forum was timely as, although it is now the fourth time that the



Taking power away from the people.

Australian government has threatened to have the final meeting to ratify the TPP Agreement – it has not yet happened. This now gives us the opportunity to become more informed and demand action from the federal government to release the terms of the agreement, which are secret.

Ludlam emphasised that if the Australian people give up on this we surrender our sovereignty.

Melissa Parke continued by saying there was no net benefit to Australia from the proposed TPP and there are no net benefits from any of the so called Free Trade Agreements. The benefits accumulated to big pharma, big tobacco, big food, big miners and big energy. Even the Australian Productivity Commission

– not known for being a hot bed of lefty activism – said of the TPP that, “It was not balanced and reciprocal”.

The European Union has been forced to bow under intense public opposition to release the draft of the TTIP – Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the European Union and the United States. All the countries which make up the TTIP should have the same opportunity to view the draft before the people vote on it.

Parke concluded by saying that these agreements are about taking power away from the people and giving it to the corporations.

Janet Grogan, GM-Free Campaigner, said that the Agricultural Chapter of the TPP threatens to affect

our food safety, food sovereignty and food security as corporations would be able to dictate to governments what laws they couldn't and shouldn't pass that might be a brake on profits, such as laws that protect organic standards, seed collection and food labelling.

The people of Colombia took to the streets two years ago when their government threatened to make it illegal to save, share and grow your own seeds.

People in the US have also started to mobilise and similar legislation proposed in the US has been called the DARK Act – Deny Americans the Right to Know – and rallies have been held in the US to oppose this undemocratic proposal.

The corporations are trying to bring in a system of production and exchange which sits on top of and outside governments of states and the laws made by popularly elected legislatures and more and more people are becoming aware and resentful of this trend.

Various speakers and activists in attendance advised the forum of initiatives and proposals to resist and oppose the TPP and other undemocratic and unbalanced trade deals. There is much information online such as AFTINET (Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network). Some unions such as the CFMEU are organising an action in Perth on the August 25. ☘

The fight is on for Galilee Basin

Queensland's Galilee Basin breathes life to eastern Australia. It straddles the Great Dividing Range with its catchments feeding inland to Lake Eyre and its deep springs flowing all the way out to the Great Barrier Reef.

In the Basin's grassy, open woodlands, a 400-strong flock of the endangered Southern Black-throated Finch holds tight to one of its last remaining strongholds.

Etched in its rocks and deep in its veins, is the ancient living culture of the Wangan and Jagalingou Traditional Owners.

Right now Indian mining giant Adani is itching to build one of the world's largest coal mines in the Basin. But the Federal Court has just revoked approval of the mine because the government didn't do its homework.

From its massive contribution to global warming right down to the tiny finch it will drive to extinction, the impact will be colossal.

Stanley Tang is an ornithologist and zoologist, PhD candidate.

“Since I was a child, I've been passionate about birds. In 2009 I moved to Townsville to start my

postgraduate studies at James Cook University and the Black-throated Finch became the focus of my PhD. My role is to gather the bird's vital genetic information to provide useful guidelines for its conservation,” Tang said.

“Doing fieldwork, I was out in the bush five days a week, searching for the finch. It was the best part of my research – being out in the wild having close encounters with this beautiful and rare creature. I spent hours sitting next to a dam, waiting for the finches to come for a drink and a bath.

“I knew the birds lived in the Galilee Basin, but I had no idea they had such good numbers until I discovered a flock of about 400 birds in 2013. It was an amazing discovery as other flocks seen in the past few years have numbered only a few dozen, and it gives hope to the conservation outlook of the southern subspecies of the bird.

“After fruitlessly scouring the harsh country of central Queensland for days in search of the endangered Southern Black-throated Finch, the moment I finally heard its familiar descending whistle was one of relief

and thrill. The 400-strong flock of birds that filled the sparse trees took my breath away,” Tang said.

“I want to see a future Australia where the government empowers robust and diverse community-based economies to make significant decisions. I hope, as these communities connect with the natural places that surround them, their decision-making will be underpinned by the love and understanding they share for their local environment.”

The Galilee Basin has the largest known population of the endangered Southern Black-throated Finch. The mine's proponent, Adani, acknowledges that the destruction of nearly 10,000 hectares of habitat will significantly impact the finch and plans to offset the damage are woefully inadequate.

If the mine goes ahead it will be Australia's largest coal mine and one of the biggest in the world. It is expected to produce 60 million tonnes of coal which, if burnt, will contribute 130 million tonnes of carbon each year to global warming, four times New Zealand's annual climate pollution.



The Galilee Basin sits on top of the Great Artesian Basin, one of the largest underground aquifers in the world and much of inland Australia's only reliable water source. The proposed mine would require a whopping 12 billion litres of water every year and could dry up ancient springs and drain sections of the basin. It also has the potential to contaminate groundwater which would have a devastating flow on effect to a wide range of ecosystems in eastern Australia.

The Carmichael Coal Mine poses a huge threat to the Great Barrier Reef with its potential to pollute ecosystems that connect to and

support the Reef, and the coal ships that will pass through the Reef's waters if the mine goes ahead.

The Galilee Basin is a vital living cultural landscape for the Wangan and Jagalingou people – Traditional Owners who did not consent to the coal mine. The mine would have devastating impacts on the environmental and cultural heritage of the Wangan and Jagalingou people.

Add to that Adani's shocking track record of environmental destruction and flouting regulations in India, the proposed mine is a recipe for disaster and should not under any conditions go ahead. ☘

Fossil fuels

A fossilised government

Peter Mac

Several weeks ago Peter Coleman, chief executive of gas corporation Woodside Petroleum, shocked the coal industry when he attacked its environmental impact. He also ridiculed the so-called “clean coal” technology, which involves the collection, liquefaction and disposal of carbon emissions from coal combustion.

A representative of oil giant Total also observed: “Among fossil fuels, gas is the greenest – at any rate the cleanest – energy, especially in the production of electricity.”

The statements highlight the struggle to claim environmental credentials regarding energy generation in the run-up to the Paris climate change conference later this year.

Aware they will eventually be phased out, the coal and gas industries are now fiercely competing for market dominance. The coal industry has been undercutting gas exports in Asian markets, which prompted Coleman’s angry statement.

The coal industry still claims it is the cheapest form of energy production. However, the claim is phoney because it is based on a comparison between energy generated by our elderly coal-fired power stations, which have already amortised their cost of construction, compared with proposed brand new gas or renewable energy power stations which would require rates sufficiently high to repay their construction costs.

The comparison should be made between new coal-fired or renewable power stations, because Australia’s existing coal-fired power stations will all need to be replaced within 15 years. One energy economics firm estimates that the cost of energy from new wind power stations would be less than from new coal-fired

stations, while the cost of solar power energy would be almost equivalent to that of coal and is falling.

Moreover, the extra cost involved in implementing “clean coal” technology would make coal-fired power generation far more expensive than gas or renewable power generation.

On the other hand, claims that gas is “clean” are highly suspect. Combustion of gas certainly produces far fewer carbon emissions than coal – approximately 50 percent – but investigation of coal seam gas wells in the US has revealed extremely disturbing emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas at least 14 times as potent as the carbon dioxide produced by coal combustion.

And in terms of pollution, neither coal nor gas can compete with wind or solar power, which are carbon free.

Government rants as it teeters

Trade minister Andrew Robb is said to have erupted in a “reptile rage” after a court ordered postponement of construction of the vast new \$21 billion Carmichael coal mine in Queensland by Indian mining corporation Adani.

The Commonwealth Bank has now quit as financial advisor for the project, and Britain’s Standard Chartered investment bank has also withdrawn.

Dismissing local residents’ protests and national concern about climate change, Robb snorted that conservation groups “just wanted to kill the project because they don’t like fossil fuels” and that prior approvals had been overturned “on a technicality”. PM Tony Abbott declared angrily that “As a country we must favour projects like this”, and grumbled about the courts being used to “sabotage” similar projects.

The government is now investigating withholding public funding from environmental groups such as The Mackay Conservation Group, which launched the court action against Adani, and withdrawing their tax exempt status.

Last year the NSW Baird coalition government amended the State Environment Planning Policy (SEPP) with regard to new coal seam gas wells after it realised the current policy would require mining corporation AGL to carry out a full environmental impact study for a proposed new project.

The lawyer acting for residents action group Groundswell Gloucester commented, “This is law made on the run to accommodate the proponent’s needs”. The amendment was later scrapped, but according to the Fairfax Press, the government now wants to amend the SEPP, which is supposed to be about protecting the environment, in order “to promote equal weighting to environmental, social and economic considerations”.

The giant South Korean steel producer POSCO also wants to build a massive new mine near Berrima in the pristine NSW southern highlands. Another Korean company plans to remove bodies from a cemetery on land they purchased near Mudgee in NSW, in order to build a vast open cut and underground mine that would operate 24/7 for 25 years. As a resident activist commented bitterly, the company would be “digging up people to dig up farmland to dig up coal to send to Korea”.

Fossilised government

The Abbott government is obsessed with ensuring the dominant position of fossil fuels in energy generation. However, it is desperate not to appear a pariah at the climate change conference, so it



recently announced its intention to reduce Australia’s carbon emissions by between 26 and 28 percent of its 2005 emissions level by 2030.

The figures appear similar to those of the US, which aims for a 28 percent reduction of its 2005 emissions level. However, the US intends to reach its target five years earlier, and should reach a 40 percent reduction by 2030. The government also claims its target is in the middle of those set by the developed nations, but it’s actually near the back. The US, the EEC, the UK, Canada and New Zealand all have more ambitious targets.

There are now 1.4 million solar power systems on Australian roofs, and the average solar system costs less than a third of what it did eight years ago. With the imminent arrival of super-capacity batteries, most

consumers will soon be able to achieve full energy independence. As a result the demand for power from the national electricity grid is falling.

Public pressure is building on the Abbott government to reverse its unconditional support for the coal industry, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu has publicly challenged the government to set a target of 100 percent renewable energy by 2050!

The government’s disastrous opinion poll results reflect public concern about climate change as well as a great many other issues on which the government has taken a thoroughly reactionary position.

Abbott himself is on the way out, but his replacement will certainly not take the decisive action necessary to meet the challenge of climate change. The public must look elsewhere for that. ☘

Hard-working organiser hit with fine

Comrades and supporters of Jimmy O’Connor formed a guard of honour for the CFMEU organiser when he entered the Federal Court in Adelaide last Thursday. Jimmy was sued by the Abbott’s Fair Work Commission (FWBC) for trying to secure employment for a local worker. The CFMEU has been targeted by the FWBC as part of its anti-union, anti-worker drive across the country. The following day, the court handed down a \$12,000 fine on Jimmy and ordered the CFMEU to pay the hefty costs for his prosecution. Outside the court, CFMEU state secretary Aaron Cartledge said the CFMEU would continue to advocate on behalf of its members. “This issue is too important to walk away,” he said. “The CFMEU has always looked after its members and will continue to do so.”



Soldiering on in Athens and helping refugees

Jameela Freitas

Not everyone is anti-migrant. Some see the new arrivals as human beings who have been through hell and deserve compassion and a helping hand. Crippled by the financial crisis, Greece is no heaven, but what it lacks in funds and facilities it makes up for in an abundance of community spirit in Athens, its capital city.

The influx of refugees camped in the parks and squares of Athens has escalated the city's prior homeless crisis, caused by the financial crash and imposed austerity.

British street magazine *The Big Issue* recently reported that there are an estimated 20,000 homeless people in the greater Athens area alone. Greece's own street magazine, *Shedia*, reported that its vendors, who are from all walks of life, have been hit by the country's economic instability. There are many more in need of help.

But with few shelters and a crippled welfare state, Greek social services are struggling to offer support to the homeless people dotting the parks and back alleys of the beautiful city. As many as 2,000 refugees a day are arriving on Greek shores and then swiftly making their way to Athens, straining resources still further.

Big families and scores of young men from war-torn countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan are destitute. They amble in the main squares of Athens and camp in tents in the parks. The Greek government has announced that it is going to move them to a camp outside the city centre, but the site is not yet ready and there is no confirmed opening date.

Meanwhile, the stranded refugees can only wait. They know they are uninvited guests blighting the tourist areas of an already beleaguered country. Most do not intend to stay, but they are hungry, tired and trapped. They are usually waiting for travel documents to be processed or for relatives to send money.

The Salvation Army of Athens has seen first hand the predicament of these families. It supports nearly 1,000 refugees every day, going to the main squares and parks each morning to hand out donated food, bottled water and other essentials. In the evenings, a team of volunteers

prepares hundreds of sandwiches to be distributed to impoverished people throughout the city.

Polis Pantelidis is the Major Regional Officer for the Salvation Army in Athens. He has observed the continuing influx of arrivals and says that the number of tents camped in the parks has doubled within a couple of weeks.

He describes one of the families he met outside their tent in an Athens park:

"I met one mother and six children from Afghanistan who escaped after her husband was murdered by the Taliban. She told me through an interpreter that they have been running from the Taliban for six years, making their way through Iran and Turkey before finally reaching Europe."

Like most refugees camped in Athens, they are penniless and stranded:

"This family has run out of cash and is thinking of applying for asylum in Greece. But they don't want to stay – they want to reach Germany, Austria, Sweden or Switzerland. But until they sort out their documents they may need to stay here for up to two months."

Polis stresses the difficult situation the refugees are in: if they apply for asylum in Greece they are entitled to help from the European Union (EU), but many forfeit this official help for the chance to move on to another country. "They want to move on but they don't have any money, so they face a big dilemma," he explains. "They are trapped here in Greece."

Ten children staying in the camps have been rushed to hospital lately, and this moved the hospital's doctors to get involved with the charities helping the refugees. It worries Polis that what made those children ill was the lack of adequate sanitation, combined with the sweltering 40-degree heat.

"The living conditions are appalling. There are only a handful of portable toilets for hundreds of people. There was also a water tap running non-stop; festering water was passing through the camp and the place was teeming with mosquitoes."

These conditions are not the fault of the refugees, but have been created by the sheer influx of people, which puts stress on the infrastructure of the camp.

"They are lovely people – decent, nice and



very polite. The atmosphere in the makeshift camps is family-orientated."

He explains how different groups of refugees are better able to find help with housing and paper work:

"The single young men travel in groups, they don't stay for long like the families do. They stay for one or two days and then they're gone. Some of the Syrians tend to be better organised than the people arriving from Afghanistan. I've heard of Syrians going directly to homes where other Syrians are staying; they pay 100 Euros a month and get help with their travel documents."

However, for the families stuck in the parks, the health authorities in Athens are doing what they can to help. But the little funding they have

is reliant on the EU and people disappear if they are pressured to claim asylum in Greece.

Polis refers back to the Afghan family he met and the dilemma they face when receiving help from authorities:

"We said to that family, the police will help them get documents so they are entitled to help by applying for asylum. There were two boys staying with them who looked like minors; when they heard the police were coming to help the next day, they disappeared."

Charities and NGOs in Athens are trying their best to provide aid but it is a challenging task to help everyone in such a complex and chaotic situation. While the Salvation Army isn't as well known among Greeks as it is in Britain, there are British nationals and others

Get out of this quagmire

Brian Denny

It is very unlikely that those in the labour movement that currently support Britain's membership of the European Union will be claiming that the infamous "Social Europe" agenda can protect workers from Tory attacks including its vicious Trade Union Bill.

That is largely because "Social Europe" has finally succumbed and died a very quiet and strange death.

The EU is now imposing zero-hours contracts, casualisation and poverty pay as well as smashing up collective bargaining across Europe as part of its structural adjustment programme known as austerity.

Even the European TUC (Trade Union Congress), which interestingly campaigned recently for a Yes vote in the Greek referendum for more austerity, openly admits that "cuts in salaries, cuts in public services and weakening collective bargaining rights are all on the agenda."

Obviously the alleged benefits of "Social Europe" have failed to materialise as over one million British manufacturing jobs have disappeared since 1997 alone. In Germany, the number of jobless has passed five million and French unemployment has ballooned.

Greek unemployment has reached catastrophic levels and the country faces a future

of permanent austerity with little or no workers' rights.

It has been estimated that over a million people in Britain are now on zero-hours contracts, which allow employers to use and abuse workers without any obligation to even guarantee minimum working hours.

But the increasing use of agency workers simply reflects the EU's neo-liberal employment model which promotes labour market "flexibility," while allegedly providing minimum protections to soften the blow, so-called "flexicurity" – the made-up word by which this model is sold.

Humpty-Dumpty would have been proud of such gobbledegook.

This agenda openly calls for wages to reflect productivity, which means cutting wages even further allegedly to compete with the "core" high-investment economies of France and Germany.

This has sparked unprecedented levels of unemployment, particularly in so-called "peripheral" countries such as Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal and the Baltic states.

The fact that wholesale suspension of trade union collective bargaining is a condition of EU "bailouts" – i.e. where EU taxpayers' money is handed directly to EU banks that actually own the debt – also demonstrates that trade union rights are an obstacle to EU

plans for restructuring labour markets, not an aspiration.

The European Commission, IMF and the European Central Bank now directly intervene in national wage negotiations in Ireland, Greece and Romania in order to weaken collective bargaining. And it's working – for instance previously in Romania 98 percent of workers were covered by collective agreements; today that figure is around 20 percent.

So why hasn't the much-lauded European Union Agency Work Regulations (AWR) defended vulnerable workers?

Well, mainly because the overwhelming effect – and point – of the AWR is actually to normalise and institutionalise casualised labour.

Moreover while the regulations are meant to ensure agency workers enjoy the same basic pay and conditions as permanent workers, any such rights only kick in after 12 weeks on the same temporary assignment.

And as if that is not enough there is a "flat-pack" solution for employers to avoid the AWR altogether – the so-called infamous "Swedish derogation," which is being used aggressively by agencies and users of agency work to keep down pay.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady has said: "Swedish derogation contracts are just one more example of a new growing type

of employment that offers no job security, poor career progression and often low pay."

The EU directive even demands that member states end "unjustified" or "disproportionate" restrictions on agency work such as the ban on agency workers in the public sector in France and Spain.

The ethereal nature of the so-called "Social Europe" agenda is underlined by the fact much of this legislation is "soft law," i.e. there is little policing of such policies. For instance no member state has ever been prosecuted for not implementing the Working Time Directive.

A number of rulings by the European Court of Justice also highlight just how the EU single market batters down minimum trade union standards won at a national level.

Moreover EU rules demanding the complete free movement of capital, goods, services and labour have had a profound impact on all trade unions operating within the EU.

Following the accession of eastern European states to the EU, migrant labour has been rapidly moving west while capital and manufacturing jobs are moving east.

While western European countries have been experiencing a large influx of migrant labour, eastern European states are suffering population falls and an inevitable brain drain, leading to a loss of skilled labour and young people as well as an uncertain

A reason for hope in war-torn DR Congo

Fergus Simpson

The ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been the deadliest since the Second World War. More than five million people have died – mainly of starvation and disease – and marauding militia groups have raped and abused hundreds of thousands of women and children.

Deep in the east of the country, where the war began in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, one surgeon in a small and underfunded hospital is giving women and children a reason for hope.

In 1999, Dr Denis Mukwege founded Panzi Hospital, in Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province, to provide medical care and support to rape victims. He has received several international awards and been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for helping to treat over 30,000 survivors of sexual violence. Dr Mukwege explained:

“The perpetrators of these crimes destroy life at its entry point. The women can no longer have children. Often they get infected with AIDS and will spread the disease. Their men are humiliated. So the perpetrators destroy the entire social fabric of their enemies, their communities, their future generations, without even killing the woman.”

In October 2012, Dr Mukwege, a fierce critic of the Congolese government and armed rebels, was almost killed by four unidentified assailants. The assailants held members of his family hostage and waited for him to return to his home in Bukavu. He managed to escape by diving to the ground as the first shots were fired. Sadly, his security guard, who was a close friend, was killed. Dr Mukwege is now forced to live permanently within the grounds of Panzi Hospital under 24-hour protection by UN peacekeepers.

In transit

Panzi hospital sits on the side of a dirt track teeming with people and motorbikes on the outskirts of Bukavu. In stark contrast to the sprawling town that surrounds it, the hospital is well organised and scrupulously maintained. It provides general medical care to the population of South Kivu, but specialises in treating patients with specific conflict-related health problems.

Maison Dorcas, a transit house at the back of the hospital, is dedicated to providing long-term support to survivors of sexual violence, including training in literacy and numeracy, small business management and other livelihood skills, along with continual psychological care, such as group therapy and individual counselling sessions. It also works with local women's groups and co-operatives to offer family mediation and micro credit.

The plague of rape in eastern DRC is starting to receive some of the international attention that it deserves, but the traumas experienced by mothers and babies are less well known.

The plague of rape in eastern DRC is starting to receive some of the international attention that it deserves, but the traumas experienced by mothers and babies are less well known.



Panzi Hospital.

Dr Mukwege told me: “In South Kivu province, babies are at high risk of contracting neonatal infections. This leads to premature deaths and discourages mothers from using family planning, which causes the number of pregnancies to increase along with the rate of maternal mortality.”

BirthLink, a British charity working to improve neonatal care in developing countries, has formed a partnership with US NGO Global Strategies to introduce and implement high-impact, cost-effective interventions at Panzi Hospital to decrease the mortality of newborns. This includes donating equipment to provide respiratory support, nutrition and lactation, alongside training and educating Congolese doctors and nurses to regulate temperature and prevent infection. These simple measures can halve a premature baby's chance of dying.

Kathy Mellor, BirthLink's founder, explained that ‘these are really not complex or expensive solutions. These are basic principles of care that can significantly reduce the number of babies that die each year from preventable and treatable conditions.’

Some babies at Panzi are born as a result of rape and are at high risk of developing HIV. Transmission from mother to baby can be prevented but requires a course of antiretroviral drugs immediately after birth. The majority of these mothers live in dire socio-economic conditions and can rarely pay their bill once treatment is complete.

Faida arrived at Panzi Hospital in April 2014. “Whilst I was pregnant I became very sick. I went into labour prematurely, so I came to Panzi to have an abortion. After the operation, I asked, ‘Where is my aborted baby?’ And then they told me that I had had a preterm baby and that it was in the neonatal unit. They said

that the baby was alive and getting quite well, but she could be in the neonatal unit for a long time. I couldn't believe it, my baby survived after only 26 weeks' gestation!”

Both Faida and her baby Joyce were discharged from hospital four months later. Faida returned to Panzi this July to show the doctors at Panzi and the BirthLink team her healthy, happy and giggling baby. If it weren't for the compassion, care and expertise available at Panzi, Joyce wouldn't be alive today.

Reintegration

I met a 13-year-old girl who was abducted by three soldiers and raped in the forest. She didn't realise that she was pregnant until she gave birth two months prematurely. She was terrified and found it difficult to love her baby; it having been born in hate and violence. She couldn't produce milk and her baby was beginning to starve. But after receiving treatment at Panzi Hospital, both mother and baby survived. They now live together in the Maison Dorcas compound, learning the necessary skills for reintegration into the community.

Although there are other hospitals in South Kivu, Panzi offers the most up-to-date medical care and has many facilities, such as the neonatal department and Maison Dorcas recovery centre, unavailable elsewhere in the region. Christine Amisi, Co-ordinator of Panzi Hospital's Fistula Project, explained: “Many small and sick babies from other hospitals in the region are now transferred to the neonatal unit at Panzi for treatment. We are currently receiving more cases than we can deal with.”

A core challenge for the future will be to introduce and maintain the same high quality of care available at Panzi across DRC more generally.

The DRC has earned the unfortunate sobriquet of “rape capital of the world”. Dr Mukwege has dedicated his life to trying to change this dark reality. He recognises that a healthy society is one in which women and adolescent girls, newborns and children survive and thrive. And this is an intelligent investment: the United Nations estimates that improved care around the time of birth and for small and sick newborns could save almost three million lives (mothers and babies) each year at an additional cost of just US\$1.15 per person in 75 countries.

In troubled regions like eastern Congo, this has the potential not only to radically improve the lives of mothers and babies, but also to maximise human capital and contribute toward the wider development agenda. And with a courageous leader like Dr Mukwege on their side, the women of eastern DRC can at least hope for an opportunity to heal and eventually be reintegrated into their communities and families.

New Internationalist ✳



in Athens who do know of their work and who are helping the Greek Salvationists.

The humanitarian emergency continues to worsen in a part of the world usually the preserve of affluent and history-aficionado tourists. Athens, the ancient birthplace of democracy, or demokratia – “rule by the people” – is today being held together by its inhabitants and their grassroots organisations.

While state and international government organisations are letting them down, ordinary people are making personal sacrifices to help preserve the dignity of their fellow humans in need. They do this regardless of their religion, where they're from or what forced them to flee their homes.

New Internationalist ✳

future of that classic imperialist outcome – underdevelopment.

In more developed member states, wages have been under pressure in a process known as “social dumping,” as cheap foreign labour replaces the indigenous workforce and trade union bargaining power is severely weakened.

Even the pro-EU Irish Congress of Trade Unions is demanding measures to protect unskilled workers where social dumping is threatening jobs.

“It is an iron law of economics that an abundant supply of labour pushes down its cost. It is insulting people's intelligence to pretend otherwise,” it said in a statement.

The ludicrous promises of “Social Europe” made 30 years ago are being replaced by the realities of “anti-social Europe” with attacks on workers' rights across Europe driven by EU institutions.

Ultimately, destroying the concept of a permanent job with rights and replacing it with precarious employment while exploiting a reserve army of cheap labour is the core structural adjustment strategy of the EU.

It's time to face up to the fact that “Social Europe” was just the sleeping gas used to put a generation of trade unionists in slumber and it's time to wake up. Vote against anti-social Europe, vote to get out.

Morning Star ✳

Medical nightmares

Cynthia Peters

When I asked my Canadian friend to guess how much the bill came to for my daughter's three-night stay at a major Boston hospital, he aimed high. He's no dummy. He knows how expensive the US health care system is. "\$2,000?" he said.

"That's funny," I replied. "Try again."

"\$5,000?" he guessed incredulously. I couldn't make him keep guessing. It would have been boring to wait until he got to the correct amount, which was \$71,000.

Our family is lucky to have good health insurance and a decent income, so my daughter's injury did not cause financial ruin as health episodes do for many families in the US. (In 2014, the financial advice company, NerdWallet, found that medical bills were the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the US.) Even good insurance, though, doesn't cover you for certain irrationalities in the US health care system. Before my daughter went to the Boston hospital, she had made three trips – twice in an ambulance and once in a taxi – to the emergency room of her local hospital in western Massachusetts. The first time, she was experiencing the "worst headache of her life." They sent her back to school and told her to take Advil and see her doctor at the university health clinic. A couple days later, she experienced left-side body numbness and took a taxi to the ER. This time they sent her home with instructions to see a neurologist, and they gave her the phone numbers of two that had practices nearby. One of these neurologists had a permanent "out-to-lunch" message on the machine. At least that is what the message said every time I called. The other sent you straight into a voice mail labyrinth, the upshot of which was that if you were a new patient you needed to fax about 10 different documents to them and then they would call you to make an appointment.

How is this health care system supposed to be effective or even navigable for the ordinary person?

The third time she went to the ER, she called 911 because the left side of her body was weak. The first responder was a state trooper who came into her tiny dorm room and promptly asked to search her boyfriend's backpack. "I smelled pot in the elevator," he said, irrelevantly. He

then forced her boyfriend out of the room, removing her one comfort at the time.

You're not supposed to have to fend off aggressive armed police in your dorm room when you are having a medical emergency, but through a combination of remaining calm and being white, my daughter and her boyfriend tolerated/survived the state trooper until the EMTs arrived. I spoke with the EMTs on the phone: "Please don't take her back to the same hospital. They have released her twice without doing any imaging. Please take her to another hospital more equipped to take care of her."

"Sorry," they said. "She is showing stroke symptoms. We are required by law to take her to the closest hospital."

At the hospital, she was shaken up. The nurses and doctors determined she was not having a stroke and told her to sit and wait. When the weird seizure symptoms returned, she got up to tell them. "Do you suffer from anxiety?" they asked. "Try not to be so emotional."

On the advice of her primary care physician, my partner and I sped out to western Massachusetts, collected her from the ER where they were about to release her again, and we took her to a major Boston hospital, where they diagnosed her with a bleed on her brain and admitted her to the neuro ICU.

About a week after she was released, my partner fell off the truck at work and fractured his skull, and we were right back in the neuro ICU of the same hospital. This one was a worker's comp claim, so all his expenses would be covered, but under Massachusetts law, he was only paid at 60 percent of his salary while he was out of work. My workplace has a generous benefits package by most standards, but I had to take vacation time to take care of him. Once that was up, I could take unpaid leave (under the Family Medical Leave Act).

To people in other developed countries, this probably sounds like insanity, but in the US, this puts our family at the top of the heap in terms of the social safety net. Many workers have fewer protections than we do. One quarter of the US workforce gets no paid vacation time. Almost 40% of private sector workers get no paid sick time. And only 41% are eligible for leave under the FMLA.

So, here we are – one family member just out of the hospital and



In 2014, the financial advice company, NerdWallet, found that medical bills were the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the US.

recovering at home, and another family member facing extreme pain and a several-month recovery. You might think, with our professional, salaried jobs, our good health insurance, and our benefits, we'd be able to focus on healing. But no. Everything was a fight.

They released my partner from the hospital after two days even though his pain was still very intense. "Call first thing tomorrow morning," they said, "and get an appointment at the pain clinic."

Sounds like a great idea, but there was literally no appointment at the pain clinic for six weeks. I am a trained organiser with a big mouth and a middle-class white person's sense of entitlement, and I spent hours on the phone working it from every angle, and even I could not find a single appointment at a pain clinic

anywhere in the Boston metropolitan area. So when his pain was intolerable, we went back to the E.R., which we had to do two more times.

Each time, I said, "Look, it's not just his head that hurts. He also wrenched his back during the fall. So he's in two kinds of very severe pain." Every single time I raised this concern, they said, "We're only focused on his head right now."

Okay, I get it. His head ranked higher on the concern-metre than a soft-tissue back injury, but pain is pain, and when you're in it times two, and you're in a hospital for chris-sakes, with medical professionals in every direction, why not give him some relief for the second-ranked injury as well?

Why? Well, because it's just too much to ask. The specialist in charge of his care was a neurosurgeon, who

once, and I kid you not, said it for me real slow: "N-e-u-r-o," he enunciated carefully. "That means the b-r-a-i-n."

"Yes," I wanted to say back, "And this is a p-e-r-s-o-n."

But the US health care system is not really set up to deal with p-e-r-s-o-n-s. It's designed to turn a profit. As more and more care is referred to specialists and as lucrative procedures take precedence over appointments for patients with chronic conditions, doctors and hospitals make enormous profits while patients suffer from lack of care.

And our social safety net is not really meant to keep us safe. It is designed to keep us disciplined and on edge – grateful for the crumbs and relieved not to be bankrupt.

teleSur ☘

Tories "disaster for workers"

Paddy McGuffin

BRITAIN: The Tories' first 100 days in government have been disastrous for workers' rights, trade union leaders say. Prime Minister David Cameron is expected to hail what he sees as the main achievements made since the general election on May 7 when he returns from a family holiday in Portugal.

His all-blue administration, which marks its 100th day, has made reforms to strike laws a priority.

But TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said he was intent on tipping the balance too far in

favour of employers, with protests expected to mount over the coming months.

"This government has set its sights firmly on undermining the right to strike with the publication of the Trade Union Bill," she said.

"Measures like allowing employers to use agency workers to cover the jobs of striking workers and requiring workers to give 14 days' notice of what they plan to post on Facebook during a strike will shift the balance of power in the workplace too far in the favour of the employers.

"Together, the government's trade union proposals will mean

workers can't defend their jobs or pay or stand up for decent services and safety at work."

Joining the criticism, Unite general secretary Len McCluskey said the first 100 days had shown how "divisive" the Conservatives were.

"Democratic governments do not plunge their citizens into such powerlessness. Yet this first full Tory government in 19 years embarks on an angry, regressive program, not one element of which answers the big questions of the age."

Morning Star ☘

Sydney
Say NO to the TPP!
Sunday August 23, 12 noon, Martin Place
(cnr Castlereagh St)



We are winning this debate, and together we can stop the TPP. Negotiations collapsed again on July 31, but another meeting is planned for late August or in September.

Tripping up claimants

Ruth Hunt

BRITAIN: Despite claiming to be “disability confident,” the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions), Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) and the right-wing media are largely responsible for the hostility and suspicion that now surrounds those with disabilities. The FIS, which started operating in 2014, has wide-ranging powers to spy on and investigate claimants. Increasingly these are people with serious disabilities and the end result can be catastrophic and include loss of life.

As welfare rights expert Nick Dilworth says: “With all the propaganda and vile rhetoric of today, it’s all too easy to wag the finger at these people and blame them for daring to venture out of their homes. The DWP throws the rule book at innocent people and neglects to question how it was all-too-often the DWP that failed to apply the benefits properly in the first place.

“Undeniably benefits were awarded without proper verification checks being carried out. Claimants would often provide details of their doctors but the DWP wouldn’t always follow through as they should’ve done, and would confirm awards without carrying out the checks.

“Then the game changed and (now it’s) is all about getting people off disability benefits. It was government policy which created the welfare wilderness, a recompense for making someone redundant after years of hard work. They were dumped on benefits with little scrutiny.”

A DWP document from 2010 signalled this change of approach, with Lord Freud committing £425 million to reduce fraud and error.

Despite the propensity of the complex benefit system to produce errors, and government figures for fraud remaining at 0.7 percent, the focus has been on fraud. So amid a barrage of benefit cuts and reforms, the FIS was introduced alongside private-sector “bounty hunters” who trawl through data and are paid by result.

Dilworth illustrates how intrusive the evidence-gathering process can be: “They can go covertly to their neighbours, employers, and trawl bank statements. Using evidence from their Tesco Clubcard, they look for patterns of expenditure, how much they spend on their weekly shop and search credit reference agencies. Their social media pages are trawled and the most intimate details of their lives are splashed across evidence bundles for all to see as the case proceeds to court.

“It doesn’t surprise me people plead guilty when they’re innocent (after) having their entire life, with embarrassing factors related to their ill health, exposed in a courtroom,

“Can you imagine coping with a disability and then being publicly humiliated as essentially faking your illness to get benefits?”

with often unsympathetic jurors and judges. Clients describe it as ‘a living hell’.”

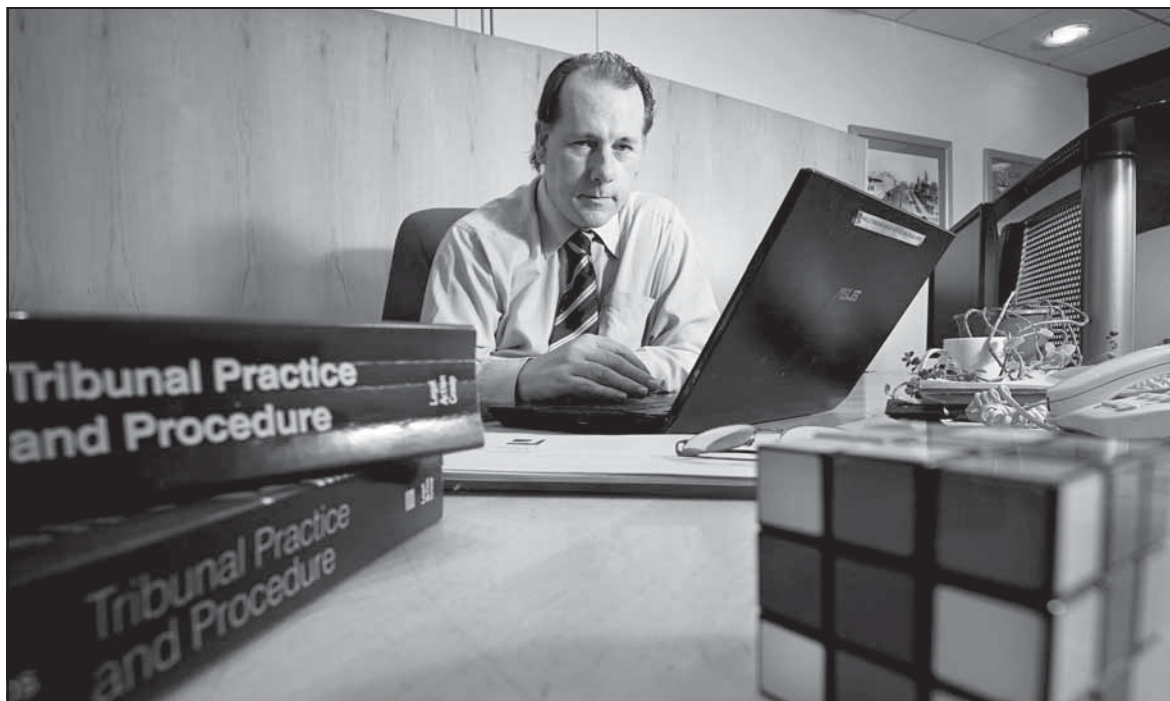
Taking video evidence as an example, it’s clear only part of a picture is portrayed during investigations, as Dilworth explains: “The DWP video surveillance only shows segments that help their case – just enough for it to be shown as a ‘compelling’ account of perceived capability. What it doesn’t show is how a claimant is when they can’t go out.

“Many are deeply affected by mental health problems and walk into a DWP investigation with fear, but in the belief they’ve done nothing wrong. The interviews, often under caution and without legal representation, are conducted with one goal in mind – to catch the claimant out. People fall into traps and end up admitting mistakes, which are entirely innocent. The [FIS] interviewers use aggressive, accusatory questioning, with some interviews lasting over five hours.

“Investigators rarely look at it objectively to see whether the claimant understood the award when it was first made. I’m convinced large numbers are unfairly convicted because the system itself is stacked so heavily against not believing the claimant.

“The next step is waiting to hear whether or not they’ll be prosecuted, which invariably means an appearance in the magistrates’ or Crown court. As if this isn’t enough, the person then has to go about defending the imposition of an overpayment in a civil social security appeal tribunal. It’s like being on trial twice.

“Can you imagine coping with a disability and then being publicly humiliated as essentially faking your



Welfare rights expert Nick Dilworth.

illness to get benefits? It undermines the relationship the client has with everyone, sometimes even their doctors. If convicted they face a criminal record and may be barred from getting a job or dismissed from a job they love. It’s ironic that those who try to do a few hours work, often voluntary, have their perceived capability used against them.”

Dilworth adds: “The financial implications can be massive – thousands of pounds of overpaid benefit to repay, which in a fair system wouldn’t be repayable at all, and they can also suffer a sanction.

“The biggest cost is, sadly, life itself,” explains Dilworth. “One of my clients was acquitted on the strength of the medical evidence but the ruthless officials still pursued the overpayment. He didn’t turn up for his appointment. Instead his father phoned me and I was shocked to learn he’d died unexpectedly: ‘Hounded to his death,’ his relatives claim.”

Dilworth’s clear where the blame lies: “The media amplifies the untruths of a government hell-bent on winning the welfare argument through highly inaccurate propaganda vilifying those accused of benefit fraud. More coverage is given to them than violent offenders. If we had an honest press, we’d hear the real side. We have to press for change, government has to act.

“These legal actions are prohibitively expensive all round and proper funding for decent help should be seen as a priority whenever liberty or life is at stake.”

Nick Dilworth is a consultant and co-founder with New Approach. *Morning Star* ☘



Region Briefs

According to a statement from Vietnam’s National Committee for Major Events, the country will hold a major parade in Hanoi on September 2, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the August Revolution and National Day. Thirty-thousand war veterans, workers, ethnic minorities, farmers and entrepreneurs will join the parade. The theme of the parade is “promoting the strength of the entire nation and being determined to build and firmly defend the Socialist Republic of Vietnam”. The parade will be broadcast on TV in order to “affirm the great historical values of the August Revolution and the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the history of the nation’s construction and defence”. Art performances, fireworks and exhibitions will also be held during the celebration season.

The Russian State Movie Fund will hold a Soviet-era World War Two movie festival in the cities of Beijing and Suzhou from August 26 to September 12, showing seven unscreened (in China) Soviet movies to celebrate the two countries’ joint victory over Japanese and German invasion in the war. The festival was initiated jointly by the countries’ state and commercial organisations, aimed at increasing cultural connections and cooperation, and they believe the festival will raise interest in their shared history. A similar Chinese movies festival will be held in Moscow and St Petersburg (Leningrad) in September.

Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong attended an opening ceremony of the country’s 10th Ethnic Games. In the Inner Mongolian city of Ordos, 6,240 athletes from China’s 56 ethnic groups will perform and compete 200 traditional sports in eight days. Ethnic groups (including groups from Taiwan) demonstrated their traditional songs, dances and dress, introducing their culture and traditions. The first games were held in 1953, bringing all China’s 56 ethnic groups together and playing an important role in keeping traditional sports alive. The games offer an opportunity for people who live in remote and border regions to demonstrate their skills and culture. The games also prioritise mutual understanding, cultural-difference recognition, cultural exchange and ethnic interaction rather than competition.

The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) Chair Shii Kazuo recently had meetings at the JCP head office with a 10-member delegation from the French Communist Party (FCP), led by the FCP National Secretary Pierre Laurent. The two parties agreed to increase cooperation and deepen solidarity in common global tasks, such as global warming and abolition of military alliances. Laurent introduced the party’s achievements in fighting financial capital and protecting people’s social welfare, and the FCP called for France to withdraw from NATO and dissolve the US military alliance. Shii introduced the JCP’s history and recent activities, and he added that the JCP fought for building a democratic society in Japan and against US and corporate rule.

The Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO) & The Cuban Institute of Friendship With The People (ICAP)

VII Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of Solidarity with Cuba

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

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

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



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British SAS with ISIS forces

I note the report in the British *Sunday Express* that more than 120 members belonging to the elite regiment are currently in the war-torn country covertly dressed in black and flying ISIS flags, engaged in what's called Operation Shader – attacking Syrian targets on the pretext of combating ISIS.

Around 800 Royal Marines and 4,000 US counterparts were on standby to intervene on short notice if ordered.

The latest revelation comes two weeks after learning Prime Minister David Cameron last year approved British warplanes joining US ones in bombing Syria despite parliamentary rejection in August 2013 (see *Guardian* July 29 Ed).

At least part of its current covert ground operation is under US command – so-called smash units travelling in pickup trucks able to launch mini-UAVs to scan terrain for targets to attack.

Over 250 UK (and perhaps US) specialists are involved to provide communications support.

US and UK claims about training so-called moderate rebels reflect smoke-screen cover for working directly with ISIS terrorists – trained, armed and funded abroad, funnelled cross-border into Syria to fight Assad, now with US/UK and Canadian air support along with covert commandos on the ground.

The *Express* cited former British Army General David Richards saying tanks will roll as part of UK operations in Syria.

A separate article discussed US

airstrikes defending ISIS terrorists serving as US foot soldiers against Assad.

By the way, Russian President Vladimir Putin opposes outside interference by any nations in the internal affairs of others. He supports the sovereign right of Syrians and other people to choose their own leaders and legislators.

So, nothing indicates a lessening of Russian support for Assad.

**T Southern
Brisbane**

Take real action on nukes

Negotiators recently reached a notable accord to limit Tehran's nuclear ability in return for lifting international oil and financial sanctions. The nuclear agreement was reached between Iran and a group of world powers: the USA, Britain, Russia, France, China, Germany and the European Union.

So now that these global powers

are content with measures to curb any potential for Iran to build a nuclear weapon, can the international community do something tangible about those countries that actually possess massive stockpiles of nuclear weapons. The US and Russia have arsenals of thousands of warheads, while other world powers also have large nuclear stockpiles. If these weapons were used even in a "limited" way, the result would be catastrophic nuclear devastation.

The nuclear-weapon states (NWS), China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States are officially recognised as possessing nuclear weapons. In 2000, the five NWS committed themselves to an "unequivocal undertaking ... to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals."

But still the five continue to retain the bulk of their nuclear weapons arsenals. It is estimated China has about 250 total warheads, France has 290 deployed warheads, Russia has over 1,582 strategic warheads deployed, the United Kingdom has 225 strategic nuclear warheads in

their stockpile and the United States has more than 1,597 strategic nuclear warheads deployed. Russia and the US also have thousands of non-deployed nuclear warheads.

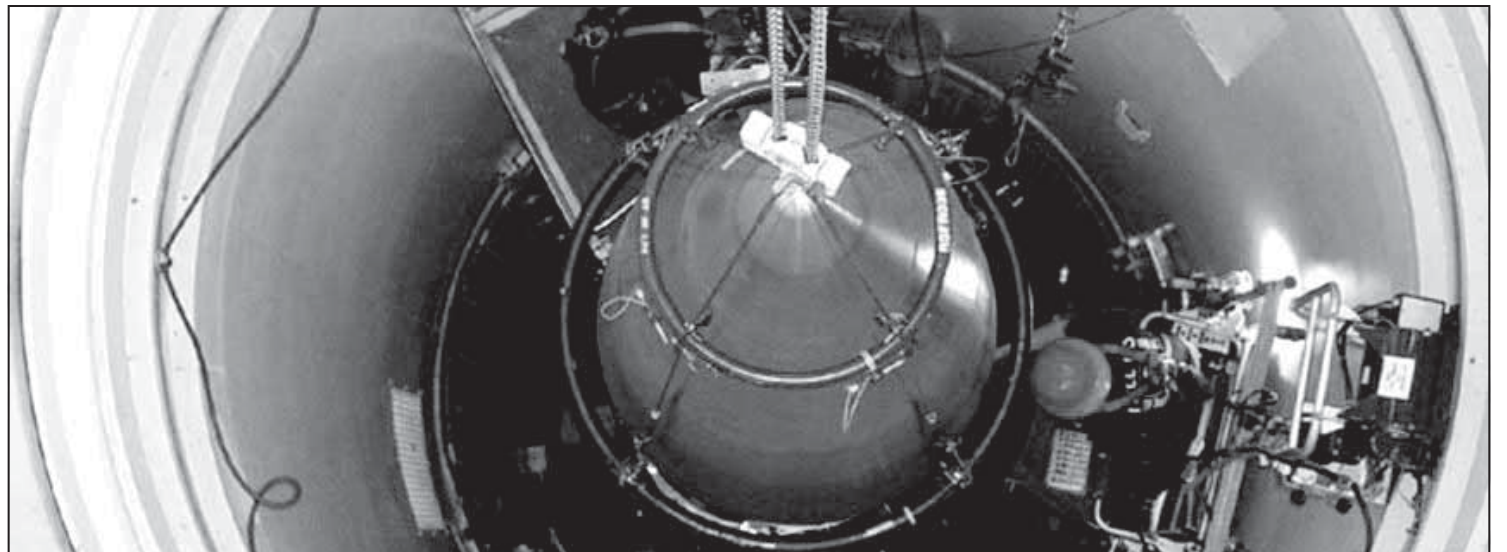
Three other states, India, Israel and Pakistan are known to possess nuclear weapons. India is estimated to have between 90-110 nuclear warheads, while Israel has between 80-100 nuclear warheads and Pakistan has between 100 to 120 nuclear warheads.

Some commentators are calling the agreement between Iran and the grouping of major world powers an historic accord. What would be a truly historic turning point in history is to make our planet, its peoples and other inhabitants safe from a catastrophic nuclear tragedy by genuinely taking real action on eliminating the massive stockpiles of these immoral weapons of mass destruction forever. That would be a really great and historic step for humanity to achieve.

**Steven Katsineris
Vic**

Culture & Life

by
Inna Novikova



An American nuclear missile facility in Montana.

Concern over Russia-US nuclear standoff

Russian analysts are concerned about NATO's buildup near Russian western borders. However, army bases and tanks in Europe do not pose a big threat to Russia. It is the intention of the United States to deploy short-range nuclear missiles in Europe that Russia is concerned about most, military expert Yakov Kedmi told Pravda.Ru.

PR: Does the West intend to intimidate Russia? Obviously, the West does not see such a small country as North Korea as a threat, but Russia fits the role of a global threat very well. What are the dangers of such a policy? How should Russia react?

YK: Firstly, this is a deliberate policy of tensions, because tensions make the decision-making process quicker and they make the decisions that they want to make. In this case, political tensions in relation to Russia started in Ukraine.

Today, local tensions inside the former Soviet republic has evolved into global tensions with elements of military confrontation between the United States and Europe with Russia.

This is being done deliberately and consistently. For no reason, out of nowhere, tensions appeared in relation to the Baltic countries. Without any factual material, they started talking about Russia's supposed plans to attack the Baltic countries, even though there are absolutely no reasons for that. They said that

the Crimea was the reason, but what does the Crimea have to do with the Baltic states? Soon afterwards, we can see a NATO official saying that the alliance was deploying its forces on the territory of the Baltic states.

At one time there was an agreement that they would not build army bases in Eastern Europe and former Soviet republics. Now they say that because of the Russian threat, they have to build temporary bases in Lithuania and then maybe Poland, Romania and other countries. In Europe, they are now building a system to counter strategic missiles. All Europe is about short range missiles.

The United States can violate and ignore any international agreement, if the latter contradicts American interests. This is a unique phenomenon in the world's most democratic country. In the USA, it is considered a state norm that all political parties support it as state policy. The Americans execute international obligations when it is good for them.

PR: There were many reports from US intelligence services about Russia's growing aggression, even though the data of US intelligence services differed from the data of European intelligence services. How was it possible?

YK: Many people are trying to forget that the recent destruction of Iraq was conducted on the basis of information from US intelligence agencies. Colin Power said at the UN that Iraq was ready to use chemical,

biological and nuclear weapons. It has been more than ten years since the invasion of Iraq, but there was nothing found in the country that could prove the allegations from the US intelligence. The whole world saw how the Americans could lie. If Europeans think now that they should listen and do everything that Washington tells them – this is their choice. Yet, Russia is not Iraq.

PR: At the same time, they have decided at a meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels to increase land forces in Europe three times. This is huge spending! Europe is in a crisis – where do they take the money from?

YK: Until recently, the US has not been able to make European states increase their defence spending to two percent of GDP. European officials live by yesterday, rather than tomorrow. They probably do not understand the crisis, in which Europe remains. The second phase of the crisis will be in Spain, Italy and France. No one knows how it will all end up.

Today's Europe resembles the Fourth Reich. German chancellor Merkel is in charge of all vital problems. She speaks on behalf of the whole of Europe. The French government obeys Germany, and together they obey Washington. This is what they call a democratic and united Europe.

PR: What can it lead to?

YK: It has already led to the occupation and subjugation of all of Europe. It is about economic occupation. The only thing that

unites Europe today is NATO. It is only an external threat that can strengthen the uniting factor. It has always been the case.

Russia and China pose a threat to US supremacy. Hillary Clinton clearly said in her re-election program that the current goal of the United States is to stop Russia and to hamper the development of China. Europe is one of the tools for that.

The United States intends to deploy medium and short-range nuclear missiles in Europe. The Americans want to build strategic missile defence systems in Europe.

Russian military officials say that such a system would embrace the territory of Russia right up to the Urals. It takes a missiles 8-9 minutes to fly from Europe to Russia. Russian intelligence agencies were aware of that. They knew that the Americans could do it, but they were certain that they would not do it. They thought wrong.

If there are weapons that can pose a threat to most of Russia's territory, then Russia should do something in response. The US makes Europe responsible for the strategic standoff with Russia. Yet, Putin said that Russia could see growing military tensions with both Europe and the United States. Therefore, Russia's response to possible military actions with Europe will reach not just Berlin or Paris, but also Washington, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Pravda.Ru ☺



Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sunday August 23 –
Saturday August 29

Vera (ABC1 Sundays at 8.30pm) makes a strenuous effort to be more down-to-earth than other British cop shows: the lead character, Detective Chief Inspector Vera Stanhope of the fictional Northumberland police is middle-aged and unglamorous. She is also lonely and rude.

Vera is competently played by Brenda Blethyn, and the series is based more closely than usual on the actual novels written by Ann Cleeves, so why does it do nothing for me?

I think it is because Vera's character – despite her supposed "caustic wit" – has no charisma. The series is just too bland. It doesn't even have the pretty scenery that most people claim is the reason they watch *Midsomer Murders*.

They only make about four episodes of the series in each season, so it would presumably be hard for *Vera* to wear out its welcome, which may be why it has reached series five in Britain (the ABC is currently running series 3).

Made for commercial network ITV in Britain, each episode of *Vera* runs 100 minutes (two hours with commercials) which allows for a leisurely and detailed plot structure. But with a lack of verve in the writing, that is probably not a good thing. Nevertheless, apparently some six million people in the UK watch each episode, so what do I know?

I enjoyed the first season of **Utopia** (ABC Wednesdays at 9.00pm). Its depiction of a federal bureaucracy trying to cope with constant shifts in priorities is very close to the mark. Kitty Flanagan's character, forever spouting California-style office jargon, is eerily echoed in Tony Abbott's ministry as they too prattle on about "having the conversation".

Written and produced by the award-winning team of Santo Cilauro, Tom Gleisner and Rob Sitch, and directed by Sitch, the series takes

place in the offices of the "Nation Building Authority", a government organisation responsible for overseeing major infrastructure projects. Sitch also plays the head of the Authority and makes the character – and his travails – very credible.

We are now in series two. This week's episode, *Shovels Ready*, is typical: after years of meticulous planning nothing can prevent a major tunnelling project getting started. Except Rhonda (Kitty Flanagan). Meanwhile a minor problem with their air conditioning leads to a major problem with the Authority's air conditioning repairman.

It is a matter of record that Britain's Secret Intelligence Service has been involved in activities equally as reprehensible and devious as any undertaken by the CIA, and for the same purpose, of course: to further the interests of their ruling class, the wealthy and powerful people who tell the government what to do.

The people who write British television dramas, however, are curiously loath to expose Britain's intelligence community to real criticism. Instead, they have developed a useful – and highly credible – stalking horse in the form of the CIA. The Yanks can be portrayed as getting up to all manner of bastardry and it will be completely believable, leaving their British counterparts basking in the warm glow of being honourable.

The drama series **The Honourable Woman** (ABC TV Thursday August 27 at 8.30pm) is all about an Anglo-Israeli woman, Nessa Stein (Maggie Gyllenhaal), who as a young girl "witnessed the assassination of her father by the armed wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation".

Despite this, according to the plot, "Nessa is now at the forefront of the Middle East peace process, working tirelessly to help cultivate an atmosphere of reconciliation between the Israelis and Palestinians". Incredibly, the British government has actually made Nessa a Baroness in recognition of her good work.

When her nanny's son is kidnapped, the head of MI6's Middle East desk runs up against meddling by – you guessed it, the CIA. Up-to-the-minute drama based on current events or subtle ruling class propaganda? What do you think?

SBS has decided to add to their Sline-up of cooking shows, Scandinavian dramas and politically dubious documentaries, an "entertainment series" about posh cars, **The Classic Car Show** (SBS Fridays from August 28 at 7.30pm).

This 13-part series is hosted by motoring journalist Quentin Willson



Dave Lawson (Scott) & Michelle Lim Davidson (Amy) – *Utopia* (ABC Wednesdays at 9.00pm). (Photo: Hwa Goh)

and supermodel Jodie Kidd, because of course every show about classic cars needs a supermodel. The first episode features a 1960s American gas-guzzler – the Ford Mustang. Then we rub shoulders with "beautiful people" and even more beautiful cars at London Fashion Week and "compare a million-dollar classic Mercedes against its swoopy modern counterpart".

But that's not the most extravagantly expensive car in the episode, however: that honour is reserved for a \$10 million late-'50s Ferrari California Spider V12. Ten million for a car? That's not a classic. That's a disgrace.

When I was at Uni it was free, thanks to the Whitlam government. After fees were reintroduced a few years later, some female students resorted to prostitution to pay for their courses. And that's the point about prostitution for either sex: it's a way of earning a living when other options aren't viable.

But it's a living that potentially exposes the practitioners to organised crime, violence, disease, sometimes even enforced drug addiction. The two UK sex workers in **High Class Call Girls** (ABC Friday August 28 at 9.40pm) present a deceptively glamorous picture of the industry. They charge thousands of pounds for a night with clients who find them on the Adultwork app.

And that's how it's done now (at least for some), via smart-phones and apps. Now a client can log in with his location in any city, see a list of the prostitutes within, say, a kilometre radius: photos, services offered, fees and client reviews. Then just click to make a booking. It's rather like ordering a cab on Uber. Isn't progress grand? ☺

Sydney

*The Committee in Solidarity with
the Workers Movement of Iran – Australia*

Commemorating the Twenty-Seventh Anniversary of Massacres of the Political and Ideological Prisoners in Iran

In solidarity with the remaining family, relatives and friends of those fallen victims involved in the dire massacre in 1988, committed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the committee in solidarity with the workers movement of Iran – Australia has conducted and organized the following two programs:

Program: (1) 7:00pm September 5

Speech, Poetry, Music, and a Book stall

Speaker: Mr Ahmad Mazarei - A political activist and a previous political prisoner in Iran.

Topic of discussion: 'The development of violence on the massacres of the prisoners in Iran.'

Entry Fee: \$15.00 per individual

Program: (2) 7:00pm September 12

Speaker: Mr Ahmad Mazarei

Topic of discussion: 'Iran – Middle East: The development and consequences of the agreements of the nuclear energy.'

Entry: Free Entry

Place of the both programs

Pennant Hills Community Centre

Corner Yarrara and Ramsay Rds opposite pennant Hills train station

More info: 0413 489 420 proletarianunite@gmail.com

Sydney

Film series: Wild in the streets

Portraits of social and political struggle

Various Wednesday, Saturdays, Sundays until September 30

Domain Theatre – Art Gallery NSW

artgallery.nsw.gov.au/calendar/film-series-wild-streets

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Sydney

POLITICS IN THE PUB

August 20

GALILEE BASIN – DISASTROUS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND GREAT BARRIER REEF

Nicola Casule, Senior Climate and Energy Campaigner, Greenpeace;
Ella Weisbrot, National Campaigner AYCC (Australian Youth Climate Change);

August 27

POPE FRANCIS ENCYCLICAL ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND GLOBAL INEQUALITIES – A POWERFUL SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS?

Paul Collins, Broadcaster and commentator on Catholic issues and author of books;

John Kaye, MLC, NSW Greens;

Every Thursday 6:30 pm 'til 8:15 pm

Harold Park Hotel

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Charles Bradley 02 9692 0005
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From Hiroshima to Iraq: The world's leading terrorist state

CJ Werleman

When America's enemies commit crimes, they're crimes. When the United States commits crimes, they didn't happen. According to the Pentagon, US led airstrikes against ISIS have killed only two civilians: both children – "likely in Syria".

A new report compiled by the non-profit group Airwars, which tracks coalition air strikes in the Middle East, documents up to 591 civilian deaths from more than 50 credible incidents – involving 5,600 air strikes.

In 1928, when Arthur Ponsonby, a British politician, said, "When war is declared, the first casualty is the truth" – he never specified what the distorted "truth" might be. If one were to examine all wars the US has engaged in modern history, however, one might conclude the casualty to be civilian death counts.

The US government and its ever-reliable mainstream media cheerleaders rarely, if ever, discuss, debate, or dwell on civilian casualties. To do so would be to acknowledge our own sins. To acknowledge our sins would be to acknowledge the US is as barbaric and uncivilised as those the US pretends pose an existential threat.

"When enemies commit crimes, they're crimes. In fact, we can exaggerate and lie about them with complete impunity," says Noam Chomsky in an interview featured in *Imperial Ambitions: Conversations in a Post-9/11 World*. "When we commit crimes, they didn't happen."

Now even if you file US-caused civilian casualties under the horribly euphemistic moniker "collateral damage", you must, at the very least, file those casualties accurately. But the US has a history of under-reporting civilian casualties at best, and proactively concealing at worst.

In 2004, *The New York Times* ran a piece about the tapes that recorded conversations between President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. In one exchange, Kissinger says he wants to sweep the 1969 My Lai massacre, where US Marines mass murdered as many as 500 civilians, "under the rug".

As the air campaign against North Vietnam and the South Vietnamese Viet Cong continued to fail, Nixon angrily expressed his frustration. "They're not only not imaginative but they are just running these things – bombing jungles," Nixon said. "They have got to go in there and I mean really go in. I want them to hit everything. I want them to

use the big planes, the small planes, everything they can that will help out there, and let's start giving them a little shock."

Kissinger immediately relayed the order to the Pentagon: "A massive bombing campaign in Cambodia. Anything that flies on anything that moves."

Chomsky says this is the "most explicit call for what we call genocide when other people do it that I've ever seen in the historical record".

More than a numbers game

So how many civilians did the US kill in both Vietnam and Cambodia? Well, it depends on whom you ask. If you ask the US government, "official records," you get to a number around 2 million. If, however, you ask NGOs that track civilian casualties, you get to a number closer to 4 million.

While there's a big difference between 2 and 4 million, there's an even bigger discrepancy between 4 million and the number of civilian casualties the average American believes were killed in Vietnam by US military actions. In *The Gulf War: A Study of the Media, Public Opinion, and Public Knowledge*, the authors conducted a poll in which Americans were asked to estimate the number of Vietnamese killed in the war. The mean answer was 100,000, which represents 5 percent of official US estimates, and 2.5 percent of more credible estimates.

Of course, neither the above official and credible figures include the estimated 500,000 who have died slow and painful deaths over the course of the post-war decades from exposure to chemical weapons – Agent Orange and other dioxins.

More recently, the story of the 2003–2010 US invasion and occupation of Iraq is a story of Bush administration officials fudging the numbers on Iraqi casualties. In a 2005 press conference, President Bush was asked about the Iraqi death toll. With what became his typical befuddled and dismissive manner, Bush declared that only "30,000 Iraqi citizens" had been killed in the conflict thus far.

Lancet, a highly regarded British medical journal, however, published an "epidemiological study" in November 2004 that concluded more than 100,000 Iraqis had been killed in "violent actions" since the invasion. In 2006, two household surveys – considered to be the most accurate methodology for calculating casualties – put the Iraqi death



The US government and its ever-reliable mainstream media cheerleaders rarely, if ever, discuss, debate, or dwell on civilian casualties.

toll at somewhere between 400,000 to 650,000 – thus making a mockery of Bush's "30,000."

"This inattention to civilian deaths in America's wars isn't unique to Iraq," observes John Tirman, author of *The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in American Wars*. "There's little evidence that the American public gives much thought to the people who live in the nations where our military interventions take place."

Tirman likens US indifference to civilian casualties to what social psychologists call the "just world theory," which argues, "Humans naturally assume that the world should be orderly and rational. When that 'just world' is disrupted, we tend to explain away the event as an aberration" and that when wars start to go badly for the US, Americans tend to "ignore or even blame the victims."

US indifference

America's indifference to civilian casualties is also rooted in racism via what cultural historian Richard Slotkin calls "the myth of the Frontier," which posits America is always trying to subdue a "savage enemy" and that it is this myth that drives

the way Americans see themselves and the world around them. "The savage enemy kills and terrorises without limit ... in order to exterminate or drive out the civilised race (and) the civilised race learns to respond in kind. A cycle of massacre and revenge is thus inaugurated that drives both sides toward a war of extermination," writes Slotkin.

Indifference to foreign "savages" and suffering is even codified into the US public education system. Susan Fujita, an assistant professor of US modern history, carried out a study of US history textbooks that were "published in the United States between 1949 and 2010."

Of 58 textbooks that mentioned the atomic bomb, only 42 mentioned the civilian death toll of Hiroshima and only 18 mentioned the civilian death toll of Nagasaki. For Hiroshima, 35 of the textbooks gave a lower figure than official United Nations estimates. For Nagasaki, nearly all gave a lower figure than official United Nations estimates.

So what were the United Nations estimates? For Hiroshima, 140,000 killed civilians. For Nagasaki, 70,000 killed civilians. Now compare these estimates to official US estimates,

which were carried out by the US Strategic Bombing Survey, which had killed civilians at 70,000 and 35,000, respectively.

Our refusal to acknowledge the human cost our violence inflicts upon those we seek to dominate, subjugate, and occupy blinds us to both the realities of war and the malevolence of US imperialism. "It is in the nature of imperialism that citizens of imperial power are always among the last to know – or care – about circumstances in the colonies," wrote the late philosopher Bertrand Russell.

Chomsky says we're the last to know because of "massive propaganda campaigns" that keep us from knowing and that "when you're silent about your own crimes, that's propaganda, too."

Go ahead. Conduct your own poll the next time you're chatting with Americans. Ask how many civilians were killed in Vietnam, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Iraq, Syria, Panama, Cuba, Nicaragua, Korea, etc. I bet they either don't know or care. And that's why as Chomsky wrote in a 2014 op-ed makes America the "leading terrorist state and proud of it." **Stop the War Coalition** ✪



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