



Different face, different rhetoric Same anti-people policies

Anna Pha & Tom Pearson

The main reason Tony Abbott was dumped was the government's policies. The May 2014 budget shook the electorate. The Abbott government broke its pre-election promises not to cut health, education, the age pension and ABC funding. Public hospitals and education faced \$80 billion in cuts. The broken promises continued in the 2015 budget as did the lies.

Malcolm Turnbull as Communications Minister delivered the cuts to the ABC. Then there was the attempt to introduce a Medicare co-payment.

The government laid into the most vulnerable and needy. Vital Indigenous, women's, legal and other community services were forced to shut as their funding was discontinued. The treatment of asylum seekers, the fostering of racial and religious differences created divisions within the community and cost the Coalition considerable support.

Then Australian forces were sent to take part in another US war, this time in Syria.

The government ruled openly in the interests of the mining corporations and major banks.

Turnbull is a different face with a different rhetoric: a conservative, a merchant banker and wealthy property owner, instead of a backward, arch reactionary like Abbott.

Turnbull didn't hold back when choosing his ministry. In what he described as a process of "renewal" more women and younger

ministers were given positions. His would be a "21st century government" with "a ministry for the future". The big question now is – will this government be any different.

Turnbull was able to swing enough inner party support by pointing to 18 months of poor ratings from six different polling agencies to defeat Tony Abbott in a party-room ballot. Key Ministers in swinging the vote in favour of Turnbull – Arthur Sinodinos, Mal Brough, Scott Ryan, Mitch Fifield and Simon Birmingham – were all rewarded with positions.

Abbott's three-word slogans, the secrecy surrounding the government's actions, the "captain's calls" were taking their toll.

He was sexist, arrogant and contemptuous of working people. And he made himself and the government he headed look ludicrous when he restored the titles of knights and dames and then made Prince Philip the recipient of a knighthood for his services to Australia.

But none of these fully explain the ongoing low ratings. After all, there was no real opposition apart from the Greens whose relatively small numbers posed no immediate threat.

Turnbull compromised

Before being sworn in as PM, Turnbull had to sit down and gain the support of the National Party as the Liberal Party is one short of an absolute majority in the Lower House. They were ready with their list of demands.

Turnbull accepted all of them. These included opposition to an emissions trading scheme and support for the Coalition's do-nothing



Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Direct Action scheme. He also agreed, contrary to his own views, to retain Abbott's commitment to the holding of a same-sex marriage plebiscite following the next elections.

More crucially, he agreed to hand over responsibility for water resources to the National Party instead of giving priority to scientific investigation and planning. The Nationals' Barnaby Joyce is the new Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources. Previously, when Turnbull had been environment and water minister in 2007 he passed legislation to save the Murray-Darling river system which was threatened by overuse from farming.

Turnbull is not only beholden to the National Party but also to the ultra right wing of his own party. There is a solid core who do not support him and it is questionable whether they will hold back until the next elections.

It did not take long for someone to break ranks. First horse out of the box was a bitter Kevin Andrews who thought he was entitled to hold on to his Defence portfolio. In fact Andrews, the minister for WorkChoices under Howard, was dumped.

He pre-empted Turnbull's announcement of the new portfolios with his own press conference: "Can I say that I'm disappointed that Mr Turnbull did not accept my offer to work with him. Frankly, my remaining in this job was not about me, it was all about the stability of our Defence Force in Australia and its leadership," Kevin Andrews said.

"As you know, Defence is meant to be a natural strength for the Coalition, but during

this government it's not always been the case," he said taking a swipe at his predecessor.

Whereas when he took over the defence portfolio, "the fragile trust between government and defence was restored."

Turnbull faces a huge challenge in keeping up the appearances of a united party in the lead up to the next federal elections. Andrews is not the only disappointed former minister.

The biggest losers are the leaderless Labor Party. Abbott was their greatest asset. Turnbull has strong appeal amongst "middle class" Australians and small "l" liberals.

More of the same

Big business is looking for a "stronger" Treasurer to make the "tough" decisions and in Scott Morrison they have found a man proven to be ruthless. He served as the "stop the boats" minister and then pushed for cuts to social security in Abbott's ministry.

He has already indicated his focus will be on building jobs which is spin for lower wages – based on the capitalist myth that lower wages create jobs.

The many groups who lost their funding or had it slashed are already lining up in the hope that the "new" government will restore their lost income. They will wait in vain.

The change in leadership might result in some token changes to win the vote of some sections of the community but the fundamental direction of the government will continue as before. Australia is still open for big business, still open for plunder.

If these groups and workers are to make any gains under the prime ministership of Malcolm Turnbull it will be a result of the organised class struggle outside of Parliament which must be as broad as possible, including trade union and community organisations as well as individuals. As both Liberal and Labor have demonstrated, disunity is death. ✪

Turnbull faces a huge challenge in keeping up the appearances of a united party in the lead up to the next federal elections.

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Guardian

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Europe's breaking union

German Chancellor Angela Merkel had announced that all were welcome – winning her a reputation as the most humane leader in all Europe. But suddenly the line was changed; German crossing points from Austria were shut down. Then Austria closed its entry points from Hungary, while Hungary, by far the most brutal, plugged up its entry points from Serbia with razor wire and, when it felt necessary, with batons, tear gas and multiple arrests. Now Serbia has followed suit, followed by Croatia and those Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans and other refuge-seekers who survived dangerous crossings through ever stormier seas are caught in a series of mouse-traps. Their loud chants of “Germany, Germany” and joyful waving of Merkel portraits have largely vanished.

It has been suggested that Merkel's mercy was really motivated by hopes that a large increase in population, especially by young people of working age, would not only counteract the demographic threat of a Germany with ever fewer babies but also build up a reserve army of eager workers, useful in counteracting fights for wage increases by a work force already hit hard by a growing number of temporary, part-time, low-paid jobs, always harder to organise and easier to exploit.

But her reversal was also based on the refusal of the European Union to take in more than 120,000 of the 1,000,000 expected in Germany alone. Few member countries have accepted even modest quotas; Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Baltic countries – many now celebrating “velvet revolutions for human rights” a quarter of a century ago – refuse to take in even a handful.

The quarrel is threatening the very basis of the highly-heralded European Union, especially one of its key achievements – visa-free borders, unhindered travel and migration from Estonia to Malta, from the North Cape (Norway) to the Rock of Gibraltar.

One long-lasting cause is the colony-like treatment of poorer countries. Most African immigrants (aside from Eritrea, a different story) are from Nigeria. With over 50 years of oil exploitation, vast stretches have poor water quality; there is pollution, disruption and degradation of farmlands and fishing ports, destruction of wildlife and biodiversity, loss of fertile soil.

Moreover, there has been no provision of adequate compensation or a planned mitigation policy for the areas affected. The response in the form of protest and campaigns against the activities of the multinational oil companies, has led and continues to lead to violations of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in the form of extra-judicial executions, arbitrary detentions, and unlawful restrictions on their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. These restrictions are imposed by security agents mostly with the complicit support of oil multinationals.

But behind all the recent human surges are wars started or supported by the “western democracies.” Large numbers have fled from Iraq and Afghanistan, both thrown into deathly turmoil by illegal foreign invasions.

In Syria, Germany and other major powers have provided all sides with weapons for years, even poison gas, while repeatedly rejecting peace negotiations unless Assad is eliminated, an impossible condition for any realistic efforts. The worst killer in the region, ISIS, has constantly exported oil (and valuable antique objects) via that friendly Western ally Turkey, now carrying out a merciless bombing campaign against left-wing Kurdish groups, far and away the most effective force in fighting ISIS.

Main sources of ISIS weapons, it is clear, have been Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, close US allies, who also use them to fight Saudi's chosen new foes, the Houthis, destroying much of Yemen in the process. They, in turn, were supplied for years by just those western countries which complain most loudly about ISIS cruelty.

While the USA is the main supplier, Germany has also sold them arms worth billions. In February and March it sold huge amounts of ammo and spare parts for tanks and ground-air missile equipment.

It is clear; humane treatment is a must in accepting the refugees, while the only way to stop more such waves is to end the wars and the armament sales.

PRESS FUND

The King is dead, long live the King! What a great spectacle it was, seeing the Abbott gang bicker and snarl, shouldering one another in the scramble for ministerial portfolios. With Abbott's technique of blatant fear-mongering and endless negativity no longer effective, the Coalition has decided to rely more on the *bon vivant* charm and good humour of its new leader. But can the leopard change its spots, or the unrighteous party its ways? As Abbott himself would say, nope, nope, nope! If you want to know the Coalition's real intentions, watch their actions very closely. We'll be doing that too, but we badly need your Press Fund contributions, so please, if you possibly can, send us something for the next edition. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

KM \$10, Mark Mannion \$5, “Round Figure” \$15
This week's total: \$30 Progressive total: \$5,030

CPA solidarity with Simón Trinidad

The Communist Party of Australia sends greetings to the protest being held outside the US super-max prison in Florence, Colorado where Colombian citizen Simón Trinidad is being held. Simón's treatment is outrageously unjust and emblematic of the arrogance of the US in its dealings with Latin America and developing countries around the world.

His extradition to the US showed utter disrespect for the sovereignty of Colombia and Trinidad's role as a peace negotiator for the FARC-EP at the time of his capture. Australia is locked in a political and military alliance with the US and it is the duty of peace-loving people in our country,

also, to show solidarity with the victims of imperialism like Simón. We applaud the actions of progressive US citizens and their call for the release of the prisoner.

Trinidad's detention in soul-crushing conditions in the US is out of step with the flow of historical events. His skills should be brought to the table in Havana where discussions about the future of Colombia are being held between representatives of the Colombian government and the FARC-EP. The US and Colombian governments should facilitate Trinidad's participation.

The long-suffering people of Colombia deserve peace with social justice. A decision from the US

President to release Simón would be an indication to the world that the US is moving in the direction of respectful relations with its neighbours in Latin America as was evidenced recently with the re-establishment of diplomatic ties with Cuba.

The CPA stands with those calling for peace and international relations based on equality and mutual benefit, not imperialist domination and exploitation. We call for the freedom of all Colombian political prisoners, including those in US prisons. Free Simón Trinidad!

Bob Briton
General Secretary
Communist Party of Australia
18 September 2015

The Islamic regime of Iran murdered Shahrokh Zamani

We have received news that Shahrokh Zamani died in Rajaei Shahr prison. We are saddened by this news. The criminal Islamic regime imprisoned Shahrokh, put him under the most severe brutal torture, physically and psychologically, and every method possible to silence him. Despite all the threats and crackdowns, Shahrokh continued his activities in defending workers' rights, and educating his co-workers while in prison. Shahrokh challenged the authorities and the anti-worker fundamentalist Islamic regime by turning prison into a trench war of struggle with his writings and leadership.

Throughout his life Shahrokh struggled for the liberation and emancipation of the working class from exploitation and oppression. Outside prison, as a member of the painters' trade union, the Provisional Board for Reopening of House-Painter Workers' union and the Follow-up Committee to Set up Free Labour Organisations he struggled for workers' rights and freedom. In prison he did not stop for one moment fighting for his humanitarian cause, defending the rights of other social classes, prison inmates and those who were sentenced to death.

Shahrokh, with all his being was thinking about the emancipation of the working class from deprivation and exploitation. Despite the difficult conditions, the problems and deprivations inside prison, he still tried to promote his ideas beyond prison for the creation of political and trade union organisations through his various writings.

The continuation of his struggle and commitment to the revolutionary objectives of the working class in prison was a deep thorn in the side of the corrupt and criminal ruling authorities. That is why these perpetrators of crime and corruption hated Shahrokh and others similar to him and took his life. He was not only under mental and physical pressure, but he was denied any medical treatment for his health issues which were a result of his many years of imprisonment.

Prison officials, security and judicial forces prevented him from the necessary medical treatment. The Islamic regime is responsible for his murder. Those responsible for this heinous crime must be brought to justice and pay for their criminal actions.

Shahrokh is not the first victim of the Islamic regime inside prison, nor will he be the last one. As long as this regime exists and rules with

such methods and leaders we will witness the same criminal murderous acts. In order to achieve freedom and prosperity and a society free from such crime and corruption, there is no other way than to overthrow the Islamic regime, and replace it with a society free from the features of that regime. Towards the same society that Shahrokh was struggling for, outside and inside prison.

The Solidarity Committees Abroad send their sympathy and extend their condolences to Shahrokh's family, relatives and his comrades in the follow up committee, all of his friends and working class leaders.

In the near future, we will try to organise a suitable and worthy ceremony to appreciate and remember a true and great fighter of the working class, also to expose and protest against the crimes of the Islamic regime.

- Shame on the capitalist Islamic regime, the murderer of Shahrokh Zamani
- Down with the Islamic regime
- Long live socialism

The Solidarity Committees with the Iranian Workers' Movement Abroad
September 13, 2015

The CPA 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. We still need to raise more to meet our needs. We urge you to dig deep and support our fundraiser. If you have just received a tax refund, perhaps you could share it with us.

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

10 days of airport turbulence

Passengers at all eight international airports around the country have been warned of potential disruption, as Immigration and Border Force workers launch at least 10 days of strike action to defend their rights, conditions and take-home pay.

Staff processing both departing and arriving travellers on international flights are preparing to stop work for two hours, twice a day – during the morning and afternoon peaks. Action has been notified from Monday September 21 through to Wednesday September 30.

These strikes are part of an ongoing campaign as staff grow increasingly frustrated at government policy which seeks to cut many rights, conditions and allowances, cutting current pay for many staff by \$8,000 a year.

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) secretary Nadine Flood said: “These workers are angry, they’re under pressure, they face major cuts to their take-home pay and workplace rights and government simply hasn’t listened. Border Force workers feel they have no choice but to act, so they are prepared to strike every day, twice a day over peak periods, over 10 days.

“Rather than deal sensibly with the core issue, Border Force is flying large teams of managers all over the country to act as strike breakers at airports at vast expense. They’re turning heavy handed tactics on their own workforce.

“This million-dollar band-aid operation means the impact of strike action on the travelling public will be unpredictable and may vary from place to place and day to day.”

Ms Flood said that rather than ask government for sensible changes so they can actually negotiate, Border Force management is

focussing all their efforts on a band-aid operation.

“Border Force workers are calling on their managers to reject these nasty divide-and-rule tactics and to join the union so they can refuse to act as strike breakers.

“The government and the Department have had well over a year to sit down with the union and work out a fair deal. These men and women work in important, difficult and sometimes dangerous jobs to keep all Australians safe. They deserve better treatment from the government.

“This campaign will end when the federal government takes \$8,000 cuts to take-home pay off the table and works with us to find a sensible resolution to an 18-month bargaining dispute.

“We are calling on Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to make resolving this dispute a public service priority, with a Minister who’s prepared to talk and hear workers’ legitimate concerns.”

There will also be disruptions for international cargo and mail as workers in other essential roles also strike on selected days, including biosecurity, the Dog Detector Unit and Maritime Operations.

Workers in other agencies, including Human Services, the Tax Office, Defence, DVA, ABS, Environment and Employment are also planning further strike action on Thursday 24 September.

Meanwhile, frustrated with the government’s continuing attack on their rights, conditions and take-home pay, thousands of public sector workers have launched another major round of national industrial action including strikes across the country.

The latest round of action in the long-running bargaining dispute kicked off with a lunch-time rally and half-day strike on September



15 involving Canberra-based members from agencies including Human Services, the Tax Office, Immigration and Border Protection and Employment.

This action has continued with further strikes and industrial action around Australia which affect service centres, call-centres, international airports, ports and a range of other public service workplaces.

At the same time as stepping up industrial action, the CPSU is exploring sensible avenues for resolving bargaining. Feedback has been received from over a thousand union delegates and has been taken to union members.

Public sector workers in Veterans’ Affairs, IP Australia, Health, and the government’s largest agency, Human Services, overwhelmingly rejected proposed agreements that would have attacked their rights, conditions and take home pay.

The agreement in Human

Services was voted down by 83 percent of staff. Nadine Flood said: “We are happy to meet with Senator Abetz – anytime, anywhere about sensible solutions, but the government seems more interested in grandstanding and fighting their workforce.

“Public sector workers are angry with a government that continues to denigrate the work they do and now wants to rip away their rights, conditions and take home pay.

“These workers are facing nasty, low-ball agreements that strip important workplace rights and conditions from enterprise agreements. Under this policy, Immigration and Border Force workers stand to lose up to \$8,000 in stripped allowances, while working parents in Centrelink and Medicare are being pushed to give up essential work and family protections and other rights.

“After more than a year of stop/start bargaining, less than 2 percent of public sector workers have new

enterprise agreements in place. That figure alone shows the government’s bargaining policy is simply not working and needs to change.”

More than 17,000 public service jobs have been cut since the Coalition government took office. Now pay, conditions and rights are being threatened. The union points out that this is no way to run a modern, professional public sector.

“Over recent months we’ve seen unprecedented levels of industrial action by thousands of public sector workers. This will continue unless the government drops its attacks and sits down with the CPSU to try and find a common sense settlement,” warned Ms Flood.

“All these workers are asking for is the continuing protection of their existing rights and conditions and a fair pay rise to cover the cost of living in return for delivering high quality services to the Australian community.” ✪

Sydney



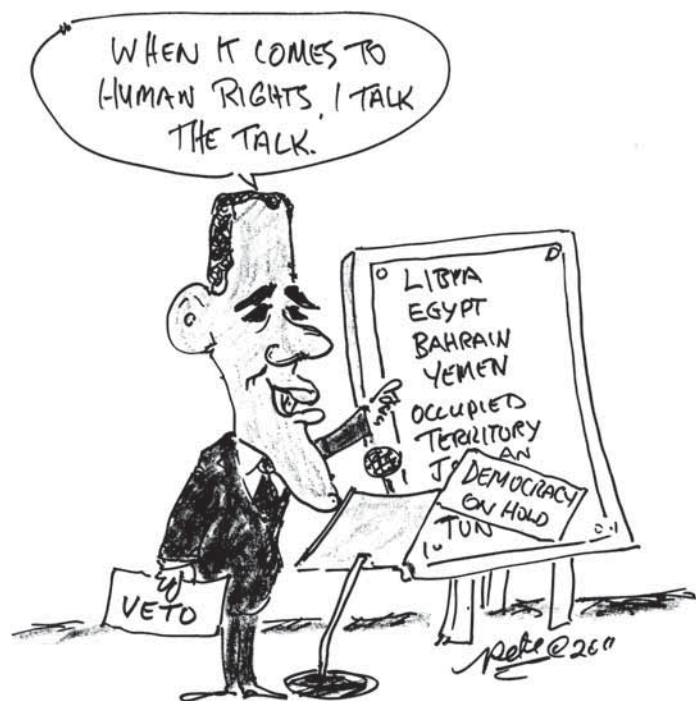
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54 YEARS IS ENOUGH

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Pete's Corner



Sydney

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UN Sustainable Development Goals at risk

Ahead of the UN special summit, industrialised nations are at risk of missing the new Sustainable Development Goals:

“The Millennium Development Goals have led to tangible progress in many developing countries. Once adopted, the United Nations’ new global Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 will additionally require industrialised countries to implement these standards for the first time. But the world’s first comprehensive stocktaking shows that most industrialised nations are a long way from serving as role models for sustainable development.”

Gütersloh (Germany),
September 8, 2015

Most industrialised countries in the OECD are not yet ready for the international community’s new sustainability pledge. Many are nowhere near achieving the global policy objectives that are to be adopted by the heads of state or government at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit this month. Indeed, there is the danger that the targets for many indicators will be missed entirely. The greatest deficits of the industrialised nations lie in their less-than-sustainable production and consumption behaviour. In addition, in many cases their economic systems also exacerbate the trend toward social inequality.

This is the result of a comparative study of all 34 OECD states conducted by Germany’s Bertelsmann Stiftung on the basis of 34 indicators for the 17 future Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. The study is the first one in the world to systematically investigate the present status of each of these countries, both individually and in comparison with one another. This snapshot additionally identifies countries that can serve as role models with regard to particular Sustainable Development Goals, while also pointing out where substantial deficits still exist. Thus the study provides a blueprint for the attainment of the SDGs in the next 15 years.

According to the study, the countries best positioned to achieve the new UN goals are the four Scandinavian nations Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, with Switzerland following in fifth place. The nations with the lowest ranking are the USA, Greece, Chile, Hungary, Turkey, and Mexico.

Australia is in the middle

Australia is 18th (out of 34) in the overall ranking, thereby placing it among the mid-tier countries. Its performance varies considerably in terms of the individual goals. For example, the country down under numbers among the top five for seven of the 34 indicators, but is among the bottom third for 11 indicators.

One positive area is life expectancy. On average, Australians can expect to live 73 years in full health, making it one of the top performers among its peers. The country is also a leader when it comes to the quality of life in its cities, with considerable domestic space, at 2.3 rooms per person, and particulate matter air pollution significantly below WHO safety thresholds. Another strength is its relatively low level of agricultural pollution.

When it comes to the sustainability of consumption and production patterns, the picture is less favourable. At 47 tons per capita, Australia has the worst rate of domestic material consumption. At 647 kilograms per capita, it ranks 30th in terms of municipal waste. When it comes to combating climate change there is also plenty of room for improvement, since the country places next to last in terms of both greenhouse gas and CO2 emissions.

Aart De Geus, Chairman of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, puts it in clear terms: “Our investigation is the first stress test for the industrialised countries with respect to the new targets. We in the rich nations, with our growing social inequality and wasteful use of resources, can no longer present ourselves as the world’s teachers.

“We’re hardly entitled to prescribe a course of development to the emerging countries. Rather, the

“We in the rich nations, with our growing social inequality and wasteful use of resources, can no longer present ourselves as the world’s teachers.”

analysis shows us where we, too, have to do our homework. And it shows us where the industrialised states are already at risk of missing the new Sustainable Development Goals.”

Improvement potentials

The investigation further reveals major differences between the individual countries with respect to various goals. Social inequality, especially, has now reached record levels in industrialised nations and continues to rise. In 23 OECD states, the wealthiest 10 percent of the population now earns at least as much as the poorest 40 percent. The earnings of the richest 10 percent in the USA are even 1.7 times as great as those of the poorest 40 percent and in Chile they are 3.3 times as great. In countries such as Slovakia, Slovenia, Norway, the Czech Republic and Denmark, income is considerably less concentrated, proving that inequality is not an inevitable development.

Great differences are also apparent in, for example, environmental pollution. Countries like Australia, Canada, Poland, and Mexico discharge over six times as much carbon dioxide per unit of economic output as does Sweden or Norway. The share of renewable energy also

varies considerably between countries. South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands use less than 4 percent of renewable energies. By contrast, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have already achieved a share of over 47 percent, which they are steadily expanding without hindering economic growth.

In his foreword to the study, Kofi Annan, the spiritual father of the Millennium Development Goals, calls for greater efforts on the part of the world’s wealthy countries: “I am thankful to the Bertelsmann Stiftung for highlighting this issue in such elaborate detail. This study will hopefully spark reform debates on sustainability and social justice in many high-income countries. We owe it to our planet and its people.”

According to Dr Christian Kroll, who headed the Bertelsmann Stiftung study, these great disparities point out the respective nations’ potential for making substantial advances by 2030: “If you take the new UN Sustainable Development Goals as the standard, all countries are now developing countries. But our comparative study also shows the best examples for, and pioneers in, bringing economic, social, and ecological progress in line with each other.” Kroll continues: “Given that the developing nations were able to cut the infant mortality rate in half



Dr Christian Kroll, head of the Bertelsmann Stiftung study.

with the help of the Millennium Development Goals, we should be able to demand that the industrialised countries make their own economic models more socially just and sustainable with the help of the new UN targets.”

About the study

On the occasion of the UN special summit in New York (September 25–27, 2015), the Bertelsmann Stiftung presents the world’s first comparative study of the new global Sustainable Development Goals, which, unlike the Millennium Development Goals, set standards not only for emerging and developing countries, but also for the industrialised nations.

Assistance in the conception and selection of the indicators used in the study came from the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UN SDSN), an association of research institutes formed to support the new UN objectives. These highly relevant indicators convey important information on significant spheres of life. They draw in part on the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s “Sustainable Governance Indicators,” a cooperative international project involving around 100 scientists on the measurement of the future viability of industrialised states (www.sgi-network.org). ✪

More on Stolen Wages

Alf Wilson

Payment of outstanding Stolen Wages to claimants around Queensland is closer, following the naming of a Reparations Taskforce to make recommendations to the state government about distribution of money.

Between 1905 and 1972, thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers had up to 75 percent of their earnings quarantined. Much of this money has still never been paid and is known as Stolen Wages.

Chaired by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda, the taskforce members are Pauline Ah Wang (Thursday Island), John Anderson (Brisbane), Gail Barry (Townsville), Rosaline Bourne (Mackay), Morris Cloudy (Townsville), Pamela Hegarty

(Rockhampton), Raymond Sambo (Cairns), Marshall Saunders (Brisbane), Vivienne Schwartz (Rockhampton), and Thomas Sebasio and Viola Sheridan (both Brisbane).

They will consult with claimants and communities across the state and make recommendations to the Queensland government in November.

Ms Barry told the *Koori Mail* that she considered the appointment to the Reparations Taskforce a privilege and an honour. “I will work collaboratively with taskforce members and applicants to expedite Stolen Wages payments,” she said.

The Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) has worked hard to get the government to pay the Stolen Wages. In 2002, Queensland Premier Peter Beattie promised \$55 million in Stolen Wages reparations. However, after initial payments of \$4,000-\$7,000, the government

decided not to pay the entire \$55 million and put \$21 million into an education fund.

Townsville branch president Les Moffitt was thrilled at progress towards a resolution of the Stolen Wages after a long campaign for fairness. “It’s important that representatives of those communities most affected have the opportunity to meet and together plan the best way forward,” he said.

“There are more than 3,000 estimated claimants who were knocked back under the past scheme because previous governments could not find their records. Now these people will be treated fairly with the respect they deserve for their hard work.”

Mr Moffitt commended the prompt actions of the Palaszczuk government to fulfil an election commitment to resolve the Stolen Wages. “The taskforce work offers

hope for previously unsuccessful claimants such as Uncle Conrad Yeatman, 74, seeking reparation for wages he said were never paid to him when he worked as a carpenter and labourer in north Queensland in the 1950s,” Mr Moffitt said.

Mr Moffitt also outlined the case of the Ah Wang identical twins, Paul and Arthur, now aged 80. The pair had worked alongside each other on a pearling boat in the late 1940s but only Paul’s work records survived. Paul received reparations in 2003 but Arthur was denied any payments.

“He now has some hope of receiving fair outcome after 60 years; justice from a time when these workers simply had their wages stolen by their white ‘protectors,’” Mr Moffitt said.

The state government has committed to resource the taskforce in addition to the \$21 million it will

payout in reparations to Stolen Wages claimants.

An initial taskforce meeting will be followed by various community consultations to gather information and input towards final recommendations for the government in November, with payments in late 2015.

Mr Moffitt said the QCU would monitor the progress of taskforce objectives and continue consulting with the Indigenous community on Stolen Wages.

The taskforce recommendations will cover who should be eligible for payments; how the payments should be allocated; and the best method for claims to be assessed.

Many of the claimants are elderly and ill, and fear they may die before payments are received.

Koori Mail ✪

Coal's last gasp

Bob Briton

Australians are being subjected to a high energy advertising campaign selling the “benefits” of coal. The Minerals Council of Australia, perhaps sensing that the jig is up for the malodorous fossil fuel, is seeking to win friends for the “little black rock” and squeeze the last remaining super-profits from it.

The world has turned on coal. The resource that fuelled the industrial revolution and a sizeable chunk of modern industrial development since has rightly been identified as a major cause of the planet's climate crisis. Current heavy users, emerging economies such as India and China, are working hard to reduce their reliance. Sustainable energy sources are becoming cheaper and more adaptable to a variety of applications. Battery and other energy storage technologies are also advancing rapidly. The words “base-load power” no longer have the persuasive capacity they once did in the debate for or against renewable energy.

The price of coal on international markets has slumped. Coal seam gas is facing stiff resistance, mobilising rural communities as never before in opposition to corporate environmental vandalism. The Lock the Gate movement has made history in this regard.

The Minerals Council would have its work cut out getting the public to feel affection for the “little black rock” on looks alone so it is backing up the appeal with “science”. The Council's executive director, Greg Evans, was given space to

make a pitch for coal in the *Australian Financial Review* recently. He pointed to projects around the world where coal is being burned for power generation with greatly reduced emissions. Elusive Carbon Capture and Storage technology is held out again as a solution to our current predicament.

The “sell” for “clean coal” is reminiscent of the one for nuclear power. Rather than denying the planet has a problem with climate change, coal is held out as part of the “answer”. In fact, people would be reckless not to embrace “clean coal” technology or nuclear power, depending on which vested interest is peddling its wares.

Unfortunately for the coal lobby (and the nuclear lobby), people aren't buying it. The politicians most in tune with the ambitions of the coal industry, like former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, were never able to persuade the public to embrace “clean coal” and its alleged capacity for slowing the pace of climate change. The fact that Abbott was previously an open climate change denier didn't help the cause of coal, either.

As the Minerals Council is quick to point out, the coal industry in Australia is still huge. It clearly has a major influence on policy making. That is a great pity for the future of the country and the planet. The Council effectively ended Kevin Rudd's first stint as prime minister with its campaign against the mining super-profits tax, dubbed the “hands off our billionaires” campaign by workers.

Reaction to the Minerals Council's campaign has been strong. Australian Conservation Council chief



Kelly O'Shanassy pointed out that the industry is responsible for a string of disasters going back a long time. She mentioned the illness cause by the fire at the coal mine outside the Victorian town of Morwell in 2014. “While the world's climate scientists and most Australians realise we need to get off our addiction to coal, the Minerals Council and the federal government want to keep us hooked,” she said. “To promote coal

as ‘amazing’ could be considered negligent, or it might even be considered culpable.”

The actions of the federal government over the next few weeks and months will show if the change of prime minister indicates a change of attitude towards coal. The previous ministerial line-up was moving to make it harder for the public to protect the environment in the wake of the Federal Court's ruling against

the proposed Carmichael mine in Queensland. Money talks and it is unlikely that the Turnbull government will move away from coal and all its devastating consequences as quickly as the people of Australia have. Pro-corporate, dirty business-as-usual politics stand in the way of the sustainable energy future that people want. Inevitably, the lesson that we need a new type of politics will be learned. ☘

Canning by-election Handy Andy limps in

Even before the by-election in the WA seat of Canning had taken place the first casualty bit the dust when a Liberal leadership ballot dumped Tony Abbott and replaced him with Malcolm Turnbull. It did not change any of its policies which so concerned many people.

In Canning, while the task of more left and/or progressive political forces of overcoming an 11.8% margin of the previous incumbent seemed almost doable with Abbott in charge, the superficial change of leadership federally cushioned the blow against the incumbent

Liberals. The corporate media helped them out, prepared to ignore substantial issues such as climate change and renewable energy, free trade agreements, affordable housing and jobs.

It became a campaign of whose political party had the best sounding rhetoric and who could fill up the electorate with the most well known “celebrity politicians”.

Andrew Hastie the Liberal candidate presented himself to the electorate as, “Not just another politician”, but in the end, when pressed by local media, came across as a politician of the status quo.

This despite Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop making much of Hastie's time in Afghanistan in the SAS “defending Australia”. She of course made no mention of the accusations that his regiment had mutilated the corpses of enemy combatants by amputating their hands, a violation of the Geneva Conventions. Hastie had denied any involvement or knowledge.

At the polling booths around the electorate the volunteers who gave out how-to-vote materials and had last minute conversations with the voters found recurring themes of wanting to vote for a local

candidate, provide local jobs and the funding of local infrastructure.

When the voting had ended and the votes were counted it was the Liberal candidate Hastie (46%) who had won but with a majority that had been more than halved while there was a 7% swing towards the ALP candidate Matt Keogh (36%) and the Greens candidate Vanessa Rauland in her first outing managed to hold the Green vote to about 6-7% – the latter being about a 1% drop from the result of the previous election.

If Hastie and his Liberal Party do not respond to the real needs of

the people of the electorate he will go the way of many of the corporate manufactured politicians who last only one term or who are propped up by a party machine supporting the interests of capital rather than the needs of the people.

While the race has now been run in the Canning by-election, Hastie and Turnbull's will within 12 months face the nation again in a general election, this time with Australia's economic, political, social and environmental fortunes looking increasingly shaky. ☘

Rich history

How many Australians have learnt about kings and queens, the Fertile Crescent or the First and Second World Wars at school, but very little about the history of Australia? Let alone the history of the labour movement? Yet the labour movement in Australia has an extremely rich and important history in which the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) has played an important role.

The history of the Communist Party of Australia was the main topic of a National School held on the weekend of September 12-13 in Sydney. Members from around Australia took part, a number of them

with immigrant backgrounds and a range of ages.

The importance of knowing our history was emphasised. “A movement without a knowledge of its history is like a man without a memory – liable to commit the same mistakes over and over again,” as Joe Harris wrote in the foreword to *The Bitter Fight: a pictorial history of the Australian labor movement*. (University of Queensland Press, 1970)

The first session, led by Anna Pha, looked at the period up to 1929 commencing with the early struggles of trade unions, the conditions that led to the formation of the Australian Labor Party and the emergence

of a number of socialist parties. The period covered significant events and policies including Federation, referenda for conscription in 1915 and 1917, the White Australia policy, formation of ACTU and Lenin's remarks on the ALP.

This provided the context for the formation of the CPA on October 30, 1920 – “a party of a new type” based on Lenin's teachings. It concluded with the timber workers' strike in 1929.

The second session, led by Bob Briton, set the context with students contributing their knowledge of international and national developments during the 1930s. These

included the Great Depression, the Militant Minority Movement, the wharfies' refusal to load the *Dalfram* with iron for Japan, evictions, New Theatre, Solidarity with Spain, Workers' Defence League and much more.

A few topics were singled out for group work, with students reporting back on what they were given to read. For group work personal anecdotes from the Depression were discussed.

On the Sunday morning Anna Pha continued with the 1940s, another rich period of struggle with the CPA playing a leading role in the trade union movement and campaigns on national issues and international solidarity. The format was the same as the previous

sessions with group work and reports looking at the role of the CPA and the relevance to today.

The final session with Bob Briton was a hands-on exercise in how to write a media release. After looking at some basic principles and given some details for a press release, the class worked in small groups to do drafts. It proved to be not as easy as it looks!

The two days passed too quickly and really only scratched the surface of so many significant events. It is hoped that the school will have stimulated interest and result in further reading. The study of the Party's history will be continued next year. ☘

Bolivarian left poses major challenge to capitalism

Emile Schepers

Since the election of Hugo Chávez as president of Venezuela in 1998, left or left-centre governments have come to power or remained in power in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Venezuela and some of the smaller Caribbean states. Left-wing governments have been ousted by coups in Haiti, Honduras and Paraguay, and by this year's elections in Guyana.

This "Bolivarian pink tide" represents one of the greatest challenges to international monopoly capital and US hegemony over the region since the fall of the USSR around 1990. Moreover, the process of regional integration which the Latin American and Caribbean left-wing governments have undertaken has contributed to a rise in living standards for majorities in each country.

New structures of regional cooperation and economic integration have included ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for Our America), UNASUR (Union of South American Nations), the revitalised MERCOSUR (South American Common Market), PETROCARIBE, CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), and BancoSur (Bank of the South, a new South American development bank). These bodies have challenged the hegemony of the US in the Western Hemisphere and have built new trade and political relationships with the BRICS group of emerging powers (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa).

However, right now these governments have hit a rough patch. Several key countries are experiencing economic slowdowns, there is new instability, and the historic advances, though not reversed, are threatened. The right wing is making a coordinated regional push to restore its power, counting on support from the US in doing so. Left and left-centre governments emphasise right-wing sabotage as being at the root of the current difficulties, and there is certainly an element of that. The right and the ruling class, including corporate-controlled media, rather, blame everything on the mistakes of the left and left-centre governments. But there are some general characteristics of the whole panorama that constitute systemic challenges to the "Bolivarian" project that need to be overcome.

What are the major challenges?

First of all, their options are severely limited by the fact that they have to work within the overall framework of the neo-liberal imperialist world order.

I prefer the definition of imperialism used by VI Lenin in his 1917 book "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism." For Lenin, imperialism is not a mere policy option of this or that government in wealthy capitalist countries, or just a conspiracy hatched in the basement of the White House or the Quay D'Orsay. To Lenin, imperialism is nothing less than the way that international monopoly capitalism is organised in both its economic and political dimensions.

Though some aspects of imperialism have changed since Lenin's day (which I will refer to below), its major features remain, namely extreme inequality of wealth and of power between the wealthy "developed" countries such as the US, Canada, Western Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea, and the poor countries of Africa, most of Asia, and Latin America. In addition financialisation, pointed to as an essential feature of imperialism by Lenin, has mushroomed to an immense degree since 1917.

The phrase "corporate globalisation" is not

an adequate gloss for the concept of imperialism, because it implies that the multinational corporations act alone in promoting their worldwide interests; in fact, the actions of the state, and of groups of states, in the wealthy capitalist countries are essential for the corporate agenda to be advanced worldwide.

The big multi-state entities which push the agenda of the transnational corporations, such as NATO, NAFTA, CAFTA DR, other "free trade" pacts, the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and Trade in Services Agreement are primarily negotiated and established by national governments individually and collectively, with the wealthy capitalist countries calling the shots, and the poorer countries falling into line, either willingly or under duress, depending on the political nature of their own governments. So "corporate globalisation" is a term which tends to let the state off the hook.

Secondly, with the exception of Cuba, none of the Western Hemisphere countries with left or left-centre governments are actually socialist. The leaders they have elected are themselves sincere socialists, and they and millions of their followers aspire to creating new forms of socialism, but they have not achieved this yet. (Even Cuba's leaders modestly say they are trying to build socialism, not that they have perfected it.) The old ruling classes, while ousted from some key positions in the state apparatus, still dominate others and most of the "commanding heights" of the economy in each country. The private press and media are just as much under the control of the wealthy in the Bolivarian countries as they are in the US, and work assiduously against progressive policies.

For example old ruling-class interests control wholesale and retail trade in staples and other items in Venezuela, giving them leverage against the Bolivarian state in that they can influence prices and the supply of goods. In Bolivia, old ruling groups in Santa Cruz province in the east of the country have caused major headaches for leftist president Evo Morales. Moreover the old ruling classes are allied with the multinational corporations and the governments of the wealthy developed countries, and coordinate with them in their never ending efforts to return to full power in the presidential mansions, the legislatures, the military, the bureaucracy and all other state institutions.

The fact that Bolivarian "pink tide" leftism has to work within the confines of these two "straightjackets" – imperialism and the retention of massive power by "their own" ruling classes – is a severely limiting factor in what they can achieve in the short run.

Also, the mixed nature of the main left and left-centre parties in power has to be borne in mind. Although almost without exception the communist parties are in strong support of the Bolivarian dynamic, these are not the largest parties anywhere except Cuba. The big parties in power such as the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil, the Venezuelan United Socialist Party, the Alianza País coalition in Ecuador, etc, are a mixture of Marxist, Christian left, social democratic, nationalist, left-Peronist and populist tendencies, which creates its own problems, internal conflicts and limitations.

Other impediments to advances

A major one is the fact that many of the left-wing governments have inherited an economic model based on export of commodities, which, although it may bring a lot of capital into the country, does not conduce to balanced development. And it leaves governments and

nations at the mercy of commodity prices which they don't have many ways to control, even when, as in the case of Venezuela's oil, the industries in question have been nationalised. In Latin America, advances have been achieved by harnessing profits from the international sale of oil, natural gas and mining products for the purpose of raising the abysmally low living standards of the working class and poor agricultural population. But over the last year, the price of oil in the international marketplace has dropped by half.

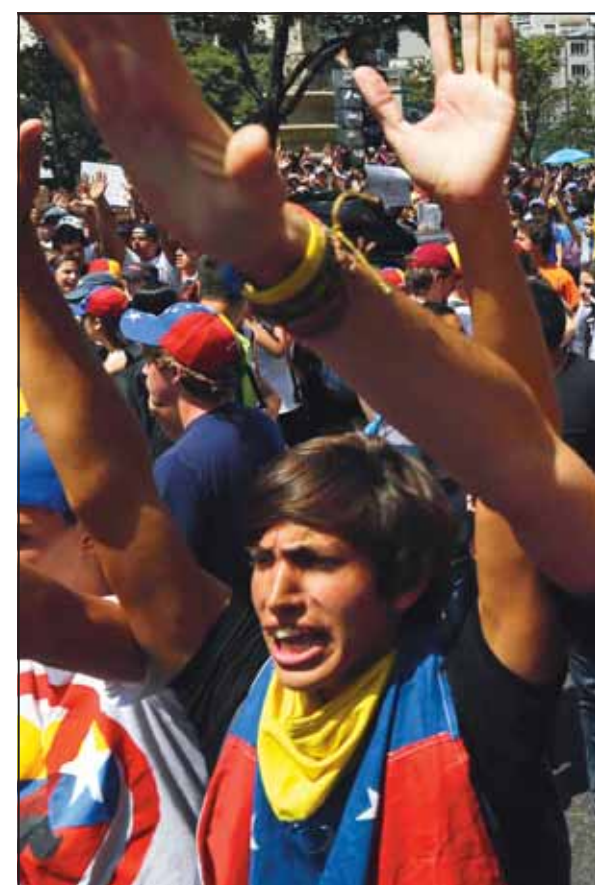
Venezuela's economy is severely stressed by the oil price drop; efforts by the Venezuelan government to get OPEC to cut back on production and thus support oil prices failed due to opposition from Saudi Arabia. This is not a new phenomenon or one confined to the Western Hemisphere; in South Africa, for example, the issue of the fluctuating price of mining products (gold, platinum, etc.) has been a cause of instability since pre-apartheid days, and the current slump in gold prices is having a deleterious effect.

Every progressive government in Latin America has had the ambition of employing profits from commodity sales to diversify the economy by developing new industries, modernising agriculture, etc. But this takes time and is far from completion. Meanwhile a country like Venezuela has to import a large proportion of the goods its people need for everyday life, and the lower the price it can get for its oil, the more difficult it becomes either to keep on importing all these things, or to capitalise its own projects in the diversification of production, while at the same time continuing to improve the living standards of its poor and working class majority.

Then there is the debt trap. For poor countries in the past, the only way to get money for development projects has been to borrow it (often via the International Monetary Fund and World Bank), and the only way to pay it back has been to keep living standards low. Nevertheless the debt of many countries turns out to be unsustainable, and efforts to get out from under it are extremely difficult and traumatic. Argentina, for example, had to live under a military dictatorship during the 1970s that was as corrupt as it was bloodthirsty, and which got the country deeply into debt that had very bad long term consequences, some of which are still being felt today.

Another problem is that of balancing economic development vis-à-vis environmental protection and sustainability. There are legitimate demands by environmentalists and, in some cases, Indigenous populations to limit certain kinds of growth. But to stop all development in the interest of protecting the rural environment is not a viable option because urban poor and working-class populations demand improvements in their living standards, including jobs, housing, transportation, electricity and other things, all of which have their impact. Left-wing governments like those of Bolivia, Ecuador and others which rely to some extent on extractive industries have had a difficult time managing this balance.

Most of the countries in the region are ethnically diverse, and specific ethnic populations have their own longstanding demands, including retention or regaining of traditional lands, ending of racist discrimination, and protection of language and cultural rights. In each country, part of the promise of the left in power has been to attend to these demands; yet unity is also essential for the Bolivarian project to move forward. Various local elites and also agencies of the empire, including corporate-funded non-government organisations, as well as those receiving money from US government agencies such as USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy, have been quick to move



in and try to play on these ethnic differences. Recent mass disturbances in Ecuador are a case in point. There have been similar dynamics elsewhere.

How to really build socialism

Finally, there is an issue which must be of concern to all socialists everywhere, which is how to really build socialism rather than letting a sort of paternalistic clientelism (or patronage politics), perhaps using socialist phraseology, take over the Bolivarian project and destroy its socialist potential. The left-wing governments in Latin America have been correctly concerned with quickly raising the horrible living standards of millions of their people as an immediate, urgent priority.

They have been successful in pulling millions out of poverty, and of vastly improving health care, schools, housing and other basic public services. In doing this, they have also created the mass base for governing, and, not least important, for continuing to win elections and staying in power.

But this still works within a framework of "the people demand and the government provides." The socialist project, from the very beginning, must go far beyond this or it will not thrive; it has to be based on the concept that "the people (workers, small farmers, etc) organise and run the economy and the state." Otherwise, in hard times, when the left-wing government finds itself not able to provide the same level of services as before, important sectors of the population are likely to abandon their support for it, and listen to demagogic promises of the right.

Moreover, the stopgap of raising living standards by redistributing wealth to the marginalised poor does not address the need to engage these sectors of the population in productive activities that will build up the economy and lead to the desired levels of diversification, including the creation of a larger industrialised sector, more productive and environmentally friendly agriculture, and other things that all agree have to be achieved to make a final break with "underdevelopment."

This last point is the focus of major discussions on the socialist left worldwide, not just in Latin America. The task is in reality one of reconceptualising what socialism actually is. That, in turn, entails careful study of the reasons that the socialist project in the USSR and Eastern Europe collapsed so spectacularly by 1991. A lot of the discussions on this topic that I have heard and read range from frustrating to useless, rehashing old sectarian battles that have little to teach people in places like Latin America. If Marxists can't come to grips with all this, we can't contribute much to the practical tasks of those who are trying to build socialism in extremely difficult circumstances.

Before I move on to the topic of internationalist solidarity, let me just point out that whatever the problems of the left and left-centre governments, the situation of the other governments in the region is much worse. The



president of Guatemala has just resigned and been arrested for corruption. Things are trending the same way in Honduras. Both of these countries are mired in intractable poverty and violence.

Mexico is in crisis, with a slumping economy, a shockingly corrupt political class, and major threats to public security. Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, Haiti, the Dominican Republic are in notably bad shape. Even Puerto Rico, controlled and heavily subsidised by the US, is swamped by unsustainable debt and facing economic collapse. Badly as things are going in the Bolivarian pink tide countries, they are going much worse in Latin American countries that have simply gone with the flow of neo-liberal imperialism.

How can the left in the US help?

First of all, at the start of this piece, I noted that there were some differences between the imperialism of Lenin's day and that of our own time. One difference that is extremely important for our practical work is that while in Lenin's day the imperial plunder of the "colonies and semi-colonies" allowed the bourgeoisie to partly satisfy short-term demands of the working class in the imperial centres, this is no longer happening. On the contrary, the shift to outsourcing of industrial production and jobs to areas of the world where the cheapest labour can be found has the opposite effect, of dragging wages down everywhere, a dynamic that began in the 1950s and has reached a fever pitch today.

Under so-called "free trade" regimes, which are not mainly about "reducing trade barriers" but rather about enforcing corporate-designed rules and limiting the power of the governments and people to have any control over what corporations can and can't do, austerity, deregulation, privatisation and repression are applied everywhere in similar ways, both in rich countries and poor. More than one person has described this as the "third worldisation" of the working class and masses even in the wealthiest and most "advanced" countries.

The environmental degradation and global warming as well as instability and conflict that characterise the current phase of neo-liberal imperialism also affect everybody, in rich countries as well as poor. Countries like Greece that try to break away from this pattern are in for a severe mauling by the wealthier and more powerful states like Germany.

This creates a more immediate communality of interests between workers in the rich countries and workers in the poor countries. But it is not always perceived that way by the former; there is still a tendency in the US especially to frame the issue as one of the workers in the poorer countries "taking our jobs," a divisive formulation.

The left in the US and the other wealthy countries should therefore undertake, with greater initiative and energy, the task of

building international working-class and all people's solidarity against neo-liberal capitalism and imperialism, and in support of those countries which are working, even if only partially, to break away from monopoly control.

Changes in US labour in recent decades are opening up new possibilities for this type of solidarity work. Old Cold War attitudes under whose influences much (but not all) of US organised labour collaborated with our government's efforts to undermine left-wing labour organising in Latin American countries have been fading, and there have been genuine breakthroughs in positions taken by the AFL-CIO and individual unions opposing aid to repressive regimes in Central America, and in support of independent unions in Mexico. US unions are also taking on major solidarity roles in Colombia and elsewhere. Of signal importance has been labour's opposition to the Trans Pacific Partnership.

The major problem with the US left's international solidarity efforts since World War II has been the difficulty of making international solidarity demands into mass demands that engage and mobilise millions instead of handfuls of people who end up being "the left talking to the left."

Opposition to the Vietnam War, organising against the apartheid regime in South Africa and against the US sponsored "Contra Wars" in Central America, and then against the Iraq War, began to help break us out of this pattern. The changes in organised labour have promise for greatly expanding the mass dimension of anti-imperialist solidarity work. Ways have to be found to point out to US workers of every kind that what US corporations and our government do to the mass of the population in a poor country hurts the interests of workers here. And conversely, advances in countries like the Bolivarian group are very much in the interests of US workers.

This means showing the US workers and masses, also, that US military interventions, direct (American boots on the ground) or indirect (subsidising or "training" – School of the Americas style – other countries' military and security forces to do the dirty work) almost always lead to greater poverty and suffering in other countries, and by doing so harm US workers also. This is why such adventures need the fig leaf of "humanitarian intervention," a fraud which must be exposed.

US working-class people are also harmed by the terrific waste of money on the bloated military budget, which does not contribute to the security of our people but rather undermines it by stealing resources that could go for schools, health care, infrastructure, jobs and environmental protection.

There are still many obstacles, but the possibility of creating unprecedented levels of international working-class and all-people's unity against the common corporate, imperialist enemy are getting greater every day.

We can do it, we must do it, and we will do it!

People's World ✪

Opposition figure's conviction

Statement, Venezuela Strategy Group

Eighteen individuals and organisations in the US-based Venezuela Strategy Group (VSG) issued a statement defending the conviction of Venezuela opposition figure Leopoldo Lopez who was sentenced to 13 years and 9 months in prison for inciting riots in 2014 that killed 43 people including police, civilians, and rioters.

The statement also calls on the US government "to respect Venezuela's sovereignty, to stop funding opposition groups and otherwise interfering in Venezuela's internal affairs, and to normalise relations between our two countries based on respect, peace, and friendship."

National Lawyers Guild (NLG) member Susan Scott said, "Lopez was convicted by his own public statements and tweets." Scott co-chairs the NLG Task Force on the Americas and recently returned from three weeks in Venezuela.

Chuck Kaufman, national co-coordinator of the Alliance for Global Justice and facilitator of the VSG stated, "If a US politician drives drunk and kills two kids in a crosswalk, he'll go to jail. What Leopoldo Lopez did was much more deliberate and it resulted in 43 deaths, both opposition and supporters of the government. Just because he's a politician, that doesn't make him a political prisoner. I'm shocked that some so-called human rights groups persist in calling him that."

Leopoldo López, a leader of the non-democratic faction of the Venezuelan opposition was convicted by a trial judge on September 10, 2015 and sentenced to 13 years and 9 months in prison. Charges were brought against Lopez for inciting violent events that occurred in a march he organised in 2014, which called for the ouster of Venezuela's democratically elected President Nicolas Maduro. In this protest a government supporter and an opposition supporter lost their lives, the public prosecutor's office was vandalised and cars were torched.

This protest was followed by weeks of opposition riots in which 43 people – about half of them government supporters or members of the security services – were killed. Numerous government buildings, as well as public health clinics and children's nurseries, were also destroyed or vandalised in the riots. The evidence against Lopez was his own public speeches and tweets calling people to the streets to remove a democratically elected government that had won more than 70 percent of local elections several weeks earlier.

The Venezuelan Judicial system is an independent branch of government under the 1999 Constitution written and approved by a national referendum. Trial judges are appointed by the Supreme Court, which in turn is appointed by civil society and the National Assembly. The Judicial system has taken firm action against both opposition activists and

members of the security forces who broke the law. In connection with the events of February 12, 2014, five members of SEBIN, the Venezuelan equivalent of the FBI, were arrested and charged for the use of excessive force in the killing of two opposition members.

The head of SEBIN also resigned and President Maduro made a clear statement that members of law enforcement who break the law will be prosecuted. Despite this even-handed approach, Lopez refused to cooperate with the trial and even implicitly threatened the judge before the sentence was read out, declaring, "you are going to be more afraid reading this sentence than I will to hear it."

Speaking prior to the sentencing, Yendry Velásquez, whose husband was killed due to the opposition's violent protests, called for a firm sentence for López, to set an example. She also expressed hope that this would discourage opposition politicians from making further calls to violent protest.

While lauded by some in Washington, Lopez is an isolated figure within the Venezuelan opposition, many of whom have repudiated Lopez's methods. In a US Embassy cable from 2009, entitled "The Lopez Problem," US State Department officials referred to López as a "divisive figure within the opposition" who is "often described as arrogant, vindictive, and power-hungry."

López's democratic credentials have always been questionable. He participated in the 2002 coup attempt against President Hugo Chávez and abused his authority as Mayor of Chacao to illegally arrest Ramón Chacín, the Minister for the Interior – Venezuela's equivalent of the Department for Homeland Security. Unlike other opposition figures who, at least in public, distanced themselves from pursuing a violent road to power, he continued to defend the coup attempt years later.

Venezuela is a democracy. Former US President Jimmy Carter has called its election process the "best in the world", and the democratic arena is the legitimate forum for changing the government.

As Hermann Escarrá, a major figure on the opposition and one of the principal architects of the Venezuelan constitution has commented: "In the United States, [what happened in the 2014 protests] in Venezuela would not have happened and won't happen. No one would think to burn cars or tires, set fire to a street leading up to the White House, because the punishment would be truly serious..."

We, the undersigned members of the Venezuela Strategy Group call on the US government to respect Venezuela's sovereignty, to stop funding opposition groups and otherwise interfering in Venezuela's internal affairs, and to normalise relations between our two countries based on respect, peace, and friendship. **Names provided ✪**



Fools, fascists and cold warriors

Robert Scheer

Are they fools or fascists? Probably the former, but there was a disturbing cast to the second GOP debate, a vituperative jingoism reminiscent of the xenophobia that periodically scars Western capitalist societies in moments of disarray.

While the entire world is riveted by the sight of millions of refugees in terrifying exodus attempting to save drowning and starving children, we were treated to the darkly peculiar spectacle of scorn for the children of undocumented immigrants and celebration of the sanctity of the unborn foetus.

Marching to the beat of that mad drummer Donald Trump, the GOP candidates have taken to scapegoating undocumented immigrants, in particular the young, blaming them for all that ails us. Most of the GOP contenders appeared as a shrill echo of the neo-fascist European movements of late, adopting the traditional tactic of blaming the most vulnerable for economic problems the most powerful have caused.

Forget the collateralised debt obligations and other Wall Street scams that continue to cripple the world economy – as the Federal Reserve Bank noted in postponing a threatened increase in interest rates – or the massive shipment of jobs abroad by leading companies like GE. Instead, blame the folks who cook your food, raise your kids and pick the grapes from the vineyards for all that has gone wrong.

None of the candidates – not even Marco Rubio, who admitted to

a Spanish-speaking grandfather who emigrated from Cuba, or Jeb Bush, who is married to one of those Mexicans now tarred as criminals – had the courage to cite the overwhelming evidence from the Congressional Research Service and other impeccable sources of these facts: Undocumented immigrants are far less likely than the general population to commit crimes, and they pay more in taxes and uncollectible benefits than they receive in public assistance.

No candidate mentioned that the supposedly porous border with Mexico has never been more tightly controlled, that in 2013 the Obama administration set a record for deportations, and that the 9/11 hijackers all had valid documentation, with our ally Saudi Arabia providing documents for 15 of the 19. Even Trump has yet to come up with the name of a Mexican terrorist who crossed our Southern border.

How odd to hear candidates who generally trumpet a pro-family, pro-Christian sensibility speak so cavalierly about ending the birthright path to citizenship affirmed by the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment. Their indifference to the suffering of the stranger in our midst stands in sharp contrast to Jesus's extolling the virtue of the Good Samaritan. The attack on immigrants comes at an inconvenient time, when Pope Francis is about to visit the United States with his message of compassion for millions of refugees pouring into Europe after being dislocated in Mideast nations the US claimed to be concerned with liberating.

It was a bit refreshing that Rand Paul, Ben Carson and even Trump



Donald John Trump.

reasserted their initial opposition to the Iraq invasion, so there is a slight possibility that a GOP candidate might challenge Hillary Clinton, the hawkish big money candidate of the Democratic Party, on her Senate vote for the war.

Paul had the good sense to observe, "Every time we have toppled a secular dictator, we have gotten chaos, the rise of radical Islam, and we're more at risk." But, as Trump noted, Paul's caution on imperial hubris, his opposition to crony capitalism and his principled critique of NSA spying has reduced the Kentucky senator to low single digit support among likely primary voters.

The lone female candidate, fast-rising Carly Fiorina, was the most militaristic contender, even returning to the Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) insanity of the Cold War in calling for ramping up the nuclear triad in apparent preparation for a war of human annihilation with Russia.

"Let's talk about the future," Fiorina demanded before drowning in the swamp of the past. "We need the strongest military on the face of the planet, and everyone has to know it." And that means, she said, 50 Army brigades, 36 Marine battalions, 300 to 350 naval ships, and "we need to upgrade every leg of the nuclear triad ..."

For those not steeped in the full nuttiness of Cold War thinking, the triad of bombers, subs and missiles was necessary to have sufficient military assets to survive an all out Soviet nuclear attack so we could make the radioactive rubble that was left of the enemy bounce higher than their surviving forces could inflict on our rubble.

While we desperately need to break the glass ceiling, it is tragic that we are offered two women who could compete quite effectively for a Margaret Thatcher award.

Information Clearing House ☘

TPP

They put what in my food?

Randy Croce

What does the Minnesota State Fair bring to mind? Food! So, what better place to alert people to the food safety threats posed by the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), the latest "free trade" deal the administration is negotiating?

That's what the Communications Workers and the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition thought when they seized the opportunity on September 1 to hand out fliers to fairgoers passing by the AFL-CIO Labour Pavilion and unfurling a banner reading, "They put WHAT in my food?"

Americans, particularly workers, have many reasons to be alarmed about the impact of the TPP if Congress approves it. The trade deal would cost jobs, extend patents that would raise the cost of medical care and degrade labour conditions and the environment, according to the Citizens Trade Campaign, a national coalition of labour, farm and community groups.

At the "Great Minnesota Get Together," where visitors were searching out their favourite snacks, Richard Shorter, CWA staff representative and co-organiser of the event, distributed information and struck up conversations to

"get people in the mindset to start questioning free trade and where their food actually comes from ... because everyone wants to have safe food. That's our message to all of the people walking around."

As CWA Local 7200 member Tom Laabs passed out fliers, he posed a question about the TPP: "If it's so good, why is it secret? It could affect our food standards and labelling in the future, so it's a big concern of mine and I'm sure a lot of people would be concerned if they knew what was going on."

There's a reason most people don't know much about the TPP.

Representatives of corporations, including big agribusiness firms, and the governments of the 12 participating countries have hammered out the trade deal behind closed doors, while the text of the agreement has not been released to the public. Even lawmakers have only been permitted to read a heavily redacted version, with a third of the text reportedly blanked out.

But portions of the agreement that have been leaked and gleaned from reports to corporate organisations do not bode well for workers or consumers. "If the TPP becomes law, it would require us to import meat and poultry that do not meet US safety standards," said

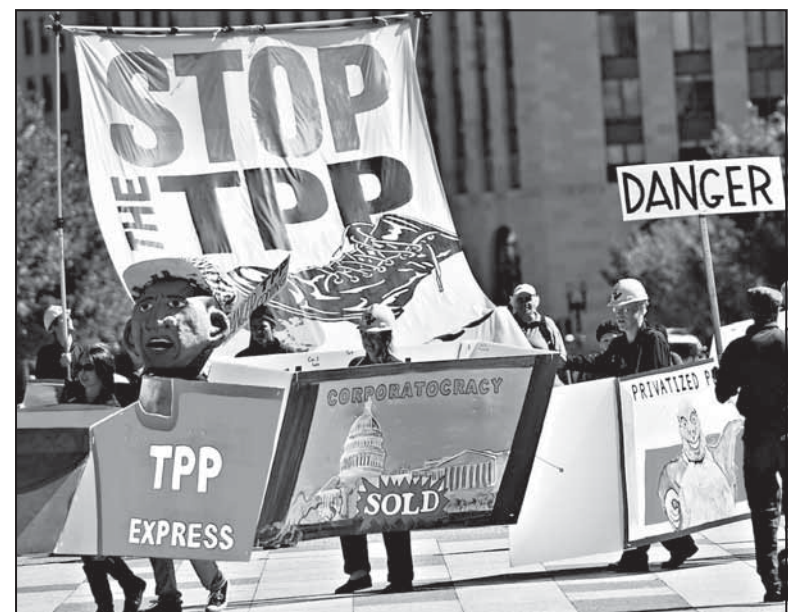
Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition Interim Director Kaela Berg.

In a survey, "73 percent of us said there should be more oversight of food safety, not less. And nearly all of us, 93 percent, say the federal government should require labels on food saying whether it has been genetically modified or bio-engineered. The TPP will consider food labelling a trade barrier and the labels will disappear. We won't know where our food comes from ... Will more of us get sick?" Berg added.

Berg noted consumer concerns about health and the environment have significantly changed American food buying habits and the way groceries stock their shelves. "However, the TPP would allow corporations to challenge laws, essentially setting their own standards for food inspections. The long history of food safety standards here in the US would wither."

As secret international negotiations continue and a congressional vote on the trade deal approaches, activists are stepping up efforts to tell the public that the relatively underreported TPP is "a really big deal" and motivate them to contact their lawmakers about their concerns.

As a mother and grandmother,



CWA Local 7200 member Christina Hollie was so disturbed about the TPP's health implications that she volunteered to leaflet at the state fair.

"Right now, we know that less than 1 percent of our seafood is checked for safety. Yet, we are looking at having more food come through the country without any additional safety standards," further overwhelming inspectors with more

products, some such as Malaysian shellfish, with known health issues, she explained.

"It's an important issue that's going to affect everyone. We've been talking about this issue for over three years now ... we are feeling like there is still groundwork that needs to be done" in educating consumers about the TPP's implications on our food, Hollie said.

People's World ☘

Washington's blind arrogance on Syria

Finian Cunningham

The trouble with arrogance is that it is intellectually blinding; and the trouble with being intellectually blind is that you fail to see your own contradictions – no matter how preposterous those contradictions may be.

The arrogant ones we are referring to here are the United States and its Western allies. In the past week, Washington has been up in arms about Russia's decision to step up its military support for the government of Syria. The Americans are calling on Moscow for "clarification" and are getting all hot under the collar about what they say is unwarranted Russian support for the "regime" of Bashar al-Assad.

This finger-wagging from Washington comes at the same time that a US-led military coalition continues to bomb Syria for nearly 12 months.

This week, US warplanes striking Syria were joined by fighter jets from Australia for the first time in those operations, which are allegedly aimed at hitting the Islamic State terror group within the country. France and Britain are also expected to soon join the bombing runs inside Syrian territory.

Now hold on a moment. Let's get this straight. The US and its allies have appointed themselves to carry out air strikes on a sovereign country – Syria – without having approval from the government of that country, or without a mandate from the UN Security Council.

Thus, the legality of these US-led air strikes – which have resulted in numerous civilian casualties – is therefore of highly dubious status, if

not constituting flagrant violation of international law.

Yet the arrogant Western powers, led by the US, have the temerity to lecture Russia about its decision to supply weapons to the government of Syria.

As Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov pointed out, the military equipment being sent to Syria is consistent with long-standing and legal bilateral agreements between the two allied countries. Russia and Syria have been allies for nearly 40 years.

There is nothing untoward going on – unlike the Western aerial bombing campaign.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin went further in defending the military aid to Syria by saying that it was necessary to help its ally "fight against terrorist aggression".

For the past four years, the Syrian national army has been battling against an array of foreign mercenaries whose main formations comprise Al-Qaeda-linked terror groups, such as Al Nusra Front and Islamic State. Putin is correct when he says that the Syrian government forces are the primary fighting front against the jihadist terror networks.

If Western countries are serious about defeating these same terror groups – as they claim to be – then they should be supportive of the Syrian government, as Russia is.

America's top diplomat John Kerry says that Russia's support for Syria will "exacerbate and extend the conflict" and will "undermine our shared goal of fighting extremism". His Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov rightly dismissed Kerry's objection as "upside-down logic".

Arrogance not only blinds to contradictions; it evidently leads

sufferers of the condition to speak nonsense.

Here's how the *New York Times* this week reported the Russia-Syria development: "The move by Russia to bolster the government of President Bashar al-Assad, who has resisted Mr Obama's demand to step down for years, underscored the conflicting approaches to fighting the Islamic State terrorist organisation. While Mr Obama supports a rival rebel group to take on the Islamic State even as he opposes Mr Assad, Russia contends that the government is the only force that can defeat the Islamic extremists."

Note the arrogance laden in those words. With breezy casualness, the Western view is that the Syrian leader has "resisted Mr Obama's demand to step down for years". Again, just like the presumed "right" to bomb a sovereign country, it is an American presumed right to decide whether a leader of another state should stand down.

Who are the Americans or any other government to decide something that is the prerogative of the Syrian people? At this point, it should be mentioned by the way that the Syrian people voted to re-elect President Assad by a huge majority – nearly 80 percent – in the country's last election in 2012.

But here is the fatal contradiction in the logic of the US and its Western allies. According to the *New York Times*, Obama "supports a rival rebel group to take on the Islamic State even as he opposes Mr Assad".

That proposition is simply not true. In fact, it is delusional. Even the Americans have elsewhere admitted that there is no "rival rebel group" in Syria. After years of pretending that



the West was supporting "moderate rebels" in Syria, the reality is that the war against the Syrian state has been waged by jihadist extremists covertly armed and bankrolled by the US and its allies, Britain, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Former director of the US Defence Intelligence Agency, Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, in an interview with the Al Jazeera news channel back in July, candidly admitted that Washington was well aware that it was supporting the Islamic State and other terror groups as the main anti-government forces. It was a "wilful decision" said Flynn because Washington wanted regime change in Syria.

Regime change, it needs to be emphasised, amounts to criminal interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. And regime change is something that Washington and its European allies are all too habitually

complicit in, as with Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2011 and Ukraine in 2014, to mention just a few.

From that "wilful decision" by Washington, Syria has been plunged into four years of unrelenting war with a death toll of some 240,000 people. Over half its 24 million population has been displaced, with hundreds of thousands surging towards Europe in desperation. Terrorism has now become an even greater regional security problem threatening to tear other countries asunder through sectarian violence.

So, when Washington and its Western allies pontificate to Russia about terrorism and what to do or not to do in Syria, they are best ignored with the contempt they deserve. Arrogant, blind and criminal are not qualifications for international leadership.

Information Clearing House ✪



Region Briefs

Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister, Hoang Trung Hai, noted the importance of raising public awareness of green growth – sustainable growth – and he called on all domestic sectors to make green growth even more attractive to people. Two-hundred participants discussed the relationship between sustainable economic development and environmental protection. Sixteen provinces and cities had launched plans to promote green growth. Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in 2012 approved a national strategy on reducing greenhouse gas emission, increasing the use of renewable energy, and practising environmental friendly lifestyle and consumption.

A Vietnamese government delegation to China last week was received by Chinese Premier, Li Keqiang. The delegation proposed the implementation of common understandings and agreements that the two countries have signed, increasing fishery and forest products imported from Vietnam. Also that China increase investment in Vietnam in infrastructure building and high-technology production. The Chinese Premier affirmed that China would continue to build friendly, peaceful and comprehensive cooperation with Vietnam, and that such a relationship would contribute to stability, prosperity and peace in the region. The two countries also exchanged their experience in fighting against corruption and maintaining party discipline.

Workers in weapons factories across Japan have expressed their opposition to the country's war-related bills that were launched by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Workers at the Mitsubishi Company, for example, criticised their company for increasing weapons production at Nagasaki Shipyard and Machinery Works. The workers were angered by the reinforced cooperative relationship between the company and the Abe government, as many of the weapons will be exported to the US.

Zhang Dejiang, Chairman of China's Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, recently held a meeting in Beijing, asking local branches of the Communist Party of China to better support the development of the People's Congress at town and country levels. He also committed to allocate more resources to congress regions.

"Besieged Britain" exposed as lie

Paddy McGuffin

New EU figures on asylum have spectacularly exploded the lies perpetuated by the Tories and the right-wing media that Britain is being besieged by "swarms" of refugees.

Statistics published by the EU data agency Eurostat show that Britain received just one in 30 of the total number of the asylum claims made by new applicants in EU countries between April and June.

A total of 7,470 people making their first application and their dependents sought refuge in this country – a mere 3.5 percent of the total of 213,200 registered across the EU.

This equates to Britain receiving 115 applicants for every million residents, ranking it 17th in the EU.

By contrast, Germany received 80,935 – or more than one in three

(38 percent) of the total number of claims during the same period, followed by Hungary with 32,675, or 15 percent, and Austria, with 17,395.

Prime Minister David Cameron belatedly announced a U-turn on the government's rabidly anti-refugee stance by announcing plans to take 20,000 people from camps on the Syrian border earlier this month, but over five years.

The turnaround was sparked by widespread public outrage triggered by the publication of photographs of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, who drowned with his mother and brother trying to cross from Turkey to Greece by boat.

Migrants' Rights Network director Don Flynn told the *Morning Star* that the figures showed that despite the large increase in those applying for asylum in the EU, in the case of Britain the claims of

being overwhelmed were simply not true.

"Britain is not doing enough," he said. "It is taking full advantage of the relative geographic advantages of it being more difficult for migrants and refugees to get to. We should not be smugly falling back on that fact. Britain should be pulling its weight."

Britain still retains opt-out, negotiated by Tony Blair in 1997, from all automatic EU decisions on asylum and immigration. This means, Mr Flynn says, that its default status has been to refuse any such proposals unless it is profitable to Britain.

The Refugee Council's Lisa Doyle added: "These figures clearly demonstrate Britain must do more to help refugees arriving in Europe."

Morning Star ✪

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

We must take more

Community pressure has forced the federal government to give safe haven to 12,000 people seeking asylum from the war in Syria, as well as a small humanitarian aid contribution.

Australians deserve to be very proud of the way they have come together and demanded the government show compassion to the people of Syria.

It is a welcome first step but there is much more we can and should be doing to help people around the globe in need of safety.

The government can and should be taking in more people and we

can and should be providing more support to people living in refugee camps so they aren't forced to seek asylum elsewhere.

We also call on the government to again listen to Australians and immediately remove people from detention on Nauru and Manus Island.

There are Syrian people currently locked up on Nauru and Manus – people who fled the same deadly war as the 11 million other Syrians currently looking for safety across the Middle East and Europe.

It is unacceptable that we offer safe haven to some people, yet turn our backs on people locked up in Australian-run detention centres where children and women have been sexually abused and one man has been murdered.

The government has proved they have the ability to open their hearts and show compassion to people in need of safety.

We call on them to let that compassion guide them to do the right thing by the people they have locked up in detention.

Mary Fall

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

Open letter to Mark Scott at the ABC

Dear Mark Scott, ABC CEO, I phoned the Breakfast morning show on Radio National earlier this week and made the point to the person I was speaking to that the 12,000 Syrian refugee people who will be coming from Europe to Australia, are essentially the same as the 4,000 we have locked up in Australia's gulag, including on Manus and Nauru. "No," she told me, "they came here under a different circumstance."

"How is that?" I asked. She told me that the refugees coming from Europe would be coming in an orderly way, but the people in the camps are "illegals". I asked her to repeat it, but she said defensively, "I am only a journalist!" She asked me to phone after the show (which I did).

My point is that there seems to be a great deal of ignorance about asylum seekers and their rights. It is the right of a person fleeing persecution to cross a border and claim asylum. The present government (in league with the "Opposition")

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is doing its best to make this impossible.

What is the ABC doing to educate its employees in this most important matter?

A friend who worked at the ABC has told me that the older generation who know about such things, like my friend, are no longer at the ABC. So what is the ABC doing to pass on this kind of human rights knowledge that really does seem to be lacking?

We have an horrendous situation: 4,000 people are locked up because they came here seeking our

protection. The arrival of 12,000 other people, who will be welcomed, suggests the obvious question; Why have we got 4,000 of the same people locked up?

It looks to me that many of the ABC journalists will not be capable of asking this very obvious question, or will be intimidated by the spurious talk about "people smugglers".

Please tell me what the ABC is doing to address this problem.

Stephen Langford
(Letter dated 11/09/2015)
Sydney

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

No union mines left in Kentucky

Underground coal mining is dirty, hard and dangerous work. Apart from accidents, miners are liable to lung damage from coal dust. In South Africa, England, Australia, the US and many other countries, miners have fought often vicious battles to improve their pay and conditions. In few places were those battles harder than in the US.

As Dylan Lovan said in an article for Associated Press on September 5: "Kentucky coal miners bled and died to unionise. Their workplaces became war zones, and gun battles once punctuated union protests. In past decades, organisers have been beaten, stabbed and shot while seeking better pay and safer conditions deep underground."

Despite the obvious drama inherent in these battles to unionise, they are not considered appropriate subjects for US films and TV. The independent movie *Matewan* was a notable exception, as was the documentary feature *Harlan County USA*. But, considering Hollywood's partiality for guns and killings, it is obviously not the violence that inhibits producers from taking up this subject. Clearly, the subject's class position is the key.

Employers have worked assiduously for decades to not only combat but to destroy workers' class consciousness, belittling class as an "outdated" concept, and playing down the role of unions in raising living and working standards. This relentless propaganda campaign has been very successful in reducing union membership, in the US as here in Australia.

Just recently, despite the state's heroic industrial history, the last union mine in Kentucky has shut down. For the first time in about a century, in the state that was home to the gun battles of "Bloody Harlan," not a single working miner belongs to a union.

Retired miners who suffered through the long and bloody struggles in the Kentucky coal fields point out that "A lot of young miners right now who don't know what the union stands for are only getting good wages and benefits because of the sacrifices that we made." It is only thanks to the struggles waged by the union that today's miners enjoy higher wages and safer mines, but as memories fade, in recent decades employers, politicians and their media mates have been able persuade workers at non-union mines to not organise.

In an example of astonishingly twisted logic, the mine owners argue that the union's very success has been the cause of its own decline! Says a smug Bill Bissett, president of industry group the Kentucky Coal Association, "I just don't think there's that level of discontent between the company and working coal miners, which I think is a very good thing". Well, he would, wouldn't he?

Dylan Lovan puts it another way: "Hard-fought gains are taken for granted by younger workers who earn high wages now." He recalls the deadly organising battles of the 1920s and '30s, many in Harlan County.

"Organising battles raged in Appalachia throughout the last century, most notably the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia, where thousands of striking miners fought a shooting war with law enforcement and replacement workers [scabs], ending in dozens of deaths. One year earlier, 10 people had died in Matewan, West Virginia, in a skirmish over eviction notices served to miners who had joined the union.

"In Harlan County, Kentucky, the 1931 Battle of Evarts ended in four deaths. ... One ambush shooting in 1937 ended with the death of union organiser Marshall Musick's 14-year-old son, Bennett, when 'a shower of bullets tore through the walls of the house', according to union leader George Titler's book, *Hell in Harlan*."

More recently, "I had my house shot up during [the long strike against the AT Massey Coal Company in Pike County in 1984 and 1985]," said Charles Dixon, the United Mine Workers local president at the time. "I was just laying in bed and next thing you know you hear a big AR-15 [machine gun] unloading on it."

"When the coal industry rebounds to the extent that it does, and non-union operators take a look around and see that there's no union competition, and they'll see that they can begin to cut wages, they can begin to cut benefits, they can begin to cut corners on safety, they'll do that," said Phil Smith, a national spokesman for the miner's union.

Smith pointed to the record of former Massey Energy chief Don Blankenship, who closed union mines in the 1980s and now faces criminal conspiracy charges over a deadly explosion in 2010 at the Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia that killed 29 workers.

"More vigorous federal enforcement and the closing of older Appalachian mines in a turbulent coal market have also contributed to declining injuries and deaths," says Lovan.



Union miners at the Highland mine, the last working union mine in Kentucky, were making about \$24 an hour and working four 10-hour shifts a week. "Workers at non-union mines typically work long shifts six days a week, and benefits vary from mine to mine." Former Highland miners who have found jobs at smaller non-union mines have had to take a hefty pay cut.

Ironically, enforcement of environmental regulations on high-sulphur coal essentially halted mining in western Kentucky in the 1990s, leading to mine shutdowns that in turn led to the loss of about 20,000 union members in two years. In neighbouring West Virginia, which wasn't affected by the same

environmental regulations the union still has more than 30,000 members.

As a young man Kenny Johnson took part in the Brookside strike in the 1970s over safety and union recognition. Johnson was arrested on the picket line.

Returning to the scene of his arrest four decades ago, Johnson looked past a small bridge that leads to a mining operation. Coal is still being mined there today, just not by union miners.

"I realised that day that it was very serious and that people would fight you, even to the point of having you put in jail for standing up for some of the ideals that coal miners hold dear," he said. ☺



Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sunday September 27 –
Saturday October 3

Frank Sinatra, unashamed protégé and associate of gangsters, is the subject of *Sinatra: All Or Nothing At All* (SBS Sunday, September 27 at 8.35pm), an “unprecedented tribute to the beloved showman”. He wasn’t so beloved when he came to Australia and disparaged female journalists as “hookers”, a comment that saw him blacklisted by the union movement until he ignominiously backed down and apologised.

He was a constant headliner in Mob-run Las Vegas. Nuff said?

Let’s imagine that you’re a writer looking for a suitable subject for a new TV drama series. We’ve just had the anniversary of WWI, so why not choose a working class area of Britain in the immediate post-war years. Topical, and, as a quick look in any decent history book would show you, a period rife with unrest and political turmoil.

British Prime Minister Lloyd George, with what Marxist historian AL Morton called “his almost uncanny capacity for gauging the temper of the masses”, said of the situation in the year after the Armistice: “Europe is filled with revolutionary ideas. A feeling not of depression, but of passion and revolt reigns in the breasts of the working class against the conditions that prevailed before the War. The whole existing system, political, social and economic, is regarded with distrust by the whole population of Europe.”

Britain itself was certainly not immune to this turmoil: 1918 had seen opposition to the War grow significantly, along with sympathy for the Russian Revolution which had taken Russia out of the War. Industrially, the Shop Stewards movement was getting itself organised nationally. A serious naval mutiny was only just averted by timely concessions. An attempt by the British government to extend conscription to Ireland was defeated by a General Strike. In September 1918 London police went on strike for higher wages. Plenty

of scope there, you would think, for meaningful drama.

The moment the War ended there was an outbreak of mutinies in the British Army, beginning at Shoreham only two days after the Armistice. “Before long the revolt had spread to scores of camps in France and all over the South of England. The most determined units were hastily demobilised and the political inexperience of the leaders prevented the mutinies from having more than local success.” (AL Morton).

In Ireland, the Easter Uprising of 1916 had been defeated and its leaders, including the Socialist Connolly, executed. The following two years saw his class perspective largely replaced by anti-British nationalism. Nevertheless, in 1919, the IRA began a guerrilla war that lasted until 1921 (to be resumed years later). The ferocity of the British oppression of Ireland’s national interest by the Irish bourgeoisie surely also has tremendous scope for meaningful drama.

The same year, 1919, saw widespread opposition in Britain to the action of Lloyd George’s government in sending an expeditionary force to Archangel against the Bolsheviks. There were army mutinies as well as rallies and demonstrations. A national “Hands Off Russia” Committee was formed and the government was forced to cease its direct intervention in Russia. Scope for drama, wouldn’t you think?

So what is *Peaky Blinders* (ABC2 Mondays from September 28 at 9.20pm), the new British drama series set in 1919, about? Essentially, crime. It’s about a gang of criminals into graft, SP bookmaking and race fixing, who accidentally get possession of a cache of stolen military weapons. It is set in working class Birmingham, and it must be said the setting is realised with some style: there is squalor everywhere, the prevailing gloom brightened by sparks from small-scale foundries, and the people look right.

However, the writers have apparently felt the need to give their tale added gravitas by incorporating topical references. So the police, on orders from Winston Churchill (the Secretary of State for War) are not only out to find the missing guns but also out to clean out the IRA and the Communists. Lumping the Irish rebels and the Reds in with a bunch of thuggish crooks is hardly accidental. It is clear from the writing that the writers, Steven Knight, Stephen Russell and Toby Finlay, actually see them that way.

For some reason (inadequate research?), the IRA is supposedly led by “Fenians”, despite the fact that the



Cillian Murphy as Tommy Selby (left) with Samuel Edward-Cook as Danny Whizz-Bang – *Peaky Blinders* (ABC2 Mondays from September 28 at 9.20pm).

Fenian movement essentially went out existence several decades before the story begins. And the Communist agitator Freddie (played by Iddo Goldberg) seems to be more Churchill’s idea of a Red than Lenin’s.

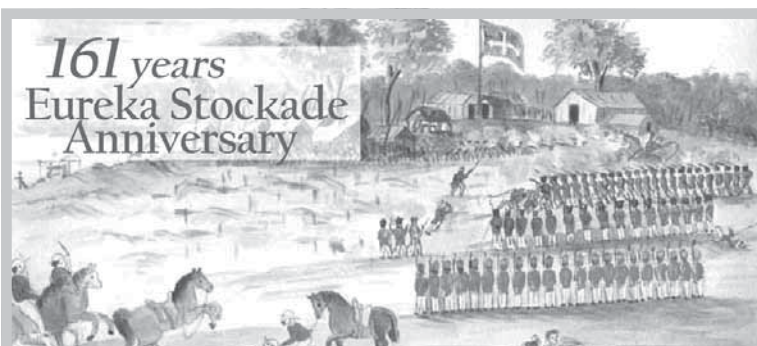
In other words, despite its well-realised locale, the series’ blatant political bias makes it essentially clever anti-Communist, anti-IRA, anti-working class propaganda.

Episode 5 of *Restoration Australia* (ABC Tuesday September 29 at 8.30pm) is devoted to the restoration of a weatherboard cottage, “Emmaville”, near Orange. The cottage is thought by some to be the birthplace of Banjo Patterson. Patterson, favourite “Bush poet” of squatters and cockies, never gave voice to a progressive idea in his entire life. He attacked Henry Lawson for finding life in the bush for poor people harsh and wearing, whereas the well-off Patterson enjoyed his trips to the country.

Emmaville was built in the 1850s, and would be a major tourist attraction for Orange if it could be proven that Patterson was born there. The cottage was supposedly sent out from California as a “kit home”, but when one of the restoring team strips back the layers of paint on its interior he finds Australian, not American timber.

In fact, the locals are split as to where Patterson’s cottage even stood. As the program follows the restoration, the former mayor of Orange, originally a firm believer in the cottage’s claim to be Patterson’s birthplace, changes to “undecided”.

The series’ presenter Sibella Court is very disappointed by their failure to prove its authenticity. On the plus side, at least the shire authorities did not go ahead with the proposal to build a “Big Akubra” out of stainless steel for the tourists to shelter under! ☺



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Sydney

POLITICS IN THE PUB

September 24

BIG BROTHER, BLOOD MONEY & THE DEEP STATE

Nozomi Hayase, Dr, writer on the global corporate state at Common Dreams & Open Democracy, former writer at Wikileaks Central;
Bernard Keane, Political editor of Crikey, co-author of *A Short History of Stupid*, author *War on the Internet and Surveillance*;

October 1

BREAKING OUT OF AUSTRALIA’S NEO-LIBERAL STRAITJACKET: THE PEOPLE’S ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVE PROJECT

Frank Stilwell, Emeritus Professor, University of Sydney
Tom Skladzien, Dr, Research Officer AMWU;

October 8

FROM THE WIKILEAKS FILES: INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE, DIPLOMACY AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Jake Lynch, Associate Professor, Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Sydney University;
Linda Pearson, Contributing author, *The Wikileaks Files: The World According to US Empire*;

October 15

GREECE BAILOUT: WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR GREECE & EUROPE?

Satyajit Das, Economist, ABC Commentator and author of new book *Banquet of Consequences*;

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US rejected Syria deal in 2012

David Swanson

In the United States it is considered fashionable to maintain a steadfast ignorance of rejected peace offers, and to believe that all the wars launched by the US government are matters of “last resort”. Our schools still don’t teach that Spain wanted the matter of the Maine to go to international arbitration, that Japan wanted peace before Hiroshima, that the Soviet Union proposed peace negotiations before the Korean War, or that the US sabotaged peace proposals for Vietnam from the Vietnamese, the Soviets, and the French. When a Spanish newspaper reported that Saddam Hussein had offered to leave Iraq before the 2003 invasion, US media took little interest. When British media reported that the Taliban was willing to have Osama bin Laden put on trial before the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, US journalists yawned. Iran’s 2003 offer to negotiate ending its nuclear energy program wasn’t mentioned much during this year’s debate over an agreement with Iran – which was itself nearly rejected as an impediment to war.

The UK *Guardian* reported last week that the former Finnish president and Nobel peace prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari, who had been involved in negotiations in 2012, said that in

2012 Russia had proposed a process of peace settlement between the Syrian government and its opponents that would have included President Bashar al-Assad stepping down. But, according to Ahtisaari, the United States was so confident that Assad would soon be violently overthrown that it rejected the proposal.

The catastrophic Syrian civil war since 2012 has followed US adherence to actual US policy in which peaceful compromise is usually the last resort. Does the US government believe violence tends to produce better results? The record shows otherwise. More likely it believes that violence will lead to greater US-control, while satisfying the war industry. The record on the first part of that is mixed at best.

Supreme Allied Commander in Europe of NATO from 1997 to 2000 Wesley Clark claims that in 2001, Secretary of War Donald Rumsfeld put out a memo proposing to take over seven countries in five years: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran. The basic outline of this plan was confirmed by none other than former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who in 2010 pinned it on former Vice President Dick Cheney:

“Cheney wanted forcible ‘regime change’ in all Middle Eastern countries that he considered hostile to US interests,” according to Blair. “He would have worked through the whole lot, Iraq, Syria, Iran, dealing with all

their surrogates in the course of it – Hezbollah, Hamas, etc,” Blair wrote. “In other words, he [Cheney] thought the world had to be made anew, and that after 11 September, it had to be done by force and with urgency. So he was for hard, hard power. No ifs, no buts, no maybes.”

US State Department cables released by WikiLeaks trace US efforts in Syria to undermine the government back to at least 2006. In 2013, the White House went public with plans to lob some unspecified number of missiles into Syria, which was in the midst of a horrible civil war already fuelled in part by US arms and training camps, as well as by wealthy US allies in the region and fighters emerging from other US-created disasters in the region.

The excuse for the missiles was an alleged killing of civilians, including children, with chemical weapons – a crime that President Barack Obama claimed to have certain proof had been committed by the Syrian government. Watch the videos of the dead children, the President said, support that horror or support my missile strikes. Those were the only choices, supposedly. It wasn’t a soft sell, but it wasn’t a powerful or successful one either.

The “proof” of responsibility for that use of chemical weapons fell apart, and public opposition to what we later learned would have been a massive bombing campaign succeeded. Public opposition succeeded without knowing about

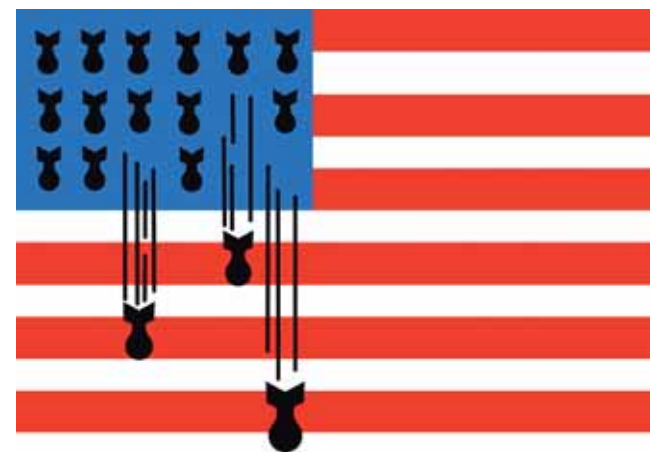
the rejected proposal for peace of 2012. But it succeeded without follow-through. No new effort was made for peace, and the US went right ahead inching its way into the war with trainers and weapons and drones.

In January 2015, a scholarly study found that the US public believes that whenever the US government proposes a war, it has already exhausted all other possibilities. When a sample group was asked if they supported a particular war, and a second group was asked if they supported that particular war after being told that all alternatives were no good, and a third group was asked if they supported that war even though there were good alternatives, the first two groups registered the same level of support, while support for war dropped off significantly in the third group.

This led the researchers to the conclusion that if alternatives are not mentioned, people don’t assume they exist – rather, people assume they’ve already been tried. So, if you mention that there is a serious alternative, the game is up. You’ll have to get your war on later.

Based on the record of past wars, engaged in and avoided, as it dribbles out in the years that follow, the general assumption should always be that peace has been carefully avoided at every turn.

Information Clearing House ✪



Antibiotic resistance is now

Emma Rose

Most people are now aware of the problem of antibiotic resistance, thanks to the increasingly vocal proclamations from numerous experts. From Britain’s Chief Medical Officer, Dame Sally Davies, to the World Health Organisation (WHO), health professionals are warning that the impacts of antibiotic resistance in human medicine are being felt now. This is not a prediction for the future. Resistance to “front-line” antibiotics has become commonplace in our hospitals, so doctors must now cast around for alternatives. Increasingly, they are turning to “last-resort” drugs in order to cure patients.

We are facing a terrifying future in which routine infections may once again kill, and operations such as hip replacements become too risky for doctors to carry out. Even cancer chemotherapy will be threatened if we lose the ability to prevent bacterial diseases from infecting vulnerable patients. Unless we act fast, our ability to treat and cure human disease and infection will be at stake.

We are enabling the emergence of antibiotic resistance through our own complacency. Bacterial resistance – a natural phenomenon – is sped up through excessive antibiotic use. Each dose administered to a sick human or animal encourages resistant bacteria to thrive, while weaker bacteria are killed off. Resistant bacteria can move between animals and humans in both directions – through the environment, through direct contact with animals or people, or through handling and consuming meat.

But while doctors are urged to curb inappropriate prescribing practices, systematic overuse of antibiotics in farming has received far less attention. Given that farm animals account for approximately 40 percent of total antibiotic usage within Britain, this is an inexcusable oversight, and it undermines targets directed at doctors prescribing antibiotics.

In most European Union (EU) countries, including Britain, it remains legal to routinely treat groups of healthy animals with antibiotics. This preventative measure is commonly deployed to counter the disease-inducing conditions of

intensive farming systems, where outbreaks are more common and harder to control. Drugs are often administered through animals’ feed or drinking water, a form of mass medication which accounts for 85 percent of antibiotic use within farms in Britain.

Farmers may even treat animals using drugs classed by the WHO as “critically important” for humans. Worryingly, while medical use of these drugs has declined steadily in Britain, farm-use has increased in last four years.

Meanwhile, the weight of scientific evidence that links farm-use and human resistance grows ever stronger. Human infections are being traced back to the farm, and resistance in the bacteria which cause them is recognised as originating in livestock. Commentators of all stripes are crunching the numbers: the costs to our National Health Service of not acting on the antibiotic crisis have been put as high as US\$46,000 per patient, and we may see 1 million deaths across Europe by 2025.

In some EU countries, including Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, significant reduction

in farm antibiotic use has already been achieved, but in Britain the importance of reduction strategies is downplayed and industry practices remain unchanged.

So how can we explain the lack of action to address such indiscriminate use of drugs in farming? Why does the government’s Anti-microbial Resistance Strategy fail to include measurable targets for reductions in farm-use of drugs, despite including them for human use? Why are GPs urged to take action, while veterinary prescribing continues as usual?

Representatives of the farming industry may argue that preventative treatment of livestock is necessary to avoid the disease outbreaks which pose a huge risk to animal welfare, production efficiency and farm profitability. This holds true for more intensive systems, where animals, such as early weaning piglets, are often kept together indoors in confined spaces. Antibiotics are a prop that such practices cannot do without.

The on-farm antibiotics problem is a systemic issue, signalling that all is not well within our farming systems. Routinely treating groups

of healthy animals to help them withstand disease-inducing conditions delivers an impressive double whammy: enabling the continuation of intensive farming while contributing to what some consider to be the biggest human health threat of the modern era.

Routine, purely preventative dosing of healthy animals must stop. We urgently need a coherent policy to phase out such mass-medication, and dramatically reduce use of important antibiotics. In tandem, there needs to be a shift toward systems which are able to rely more on animals’ natural immunity to disease. This means prioritising good husbandry and hygiene, lower stocking densities, slower-growing breeds and extensive systems (where animals require far fewer antibiotics than those reared in intensive conditions).

Failure to crack down on our drug habit will have serious consequences. Let’s hope that pressure can be brought to bear on our policymakers before we see these play out in our hospitals, farms and families.

New Internationalist ✪



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