



7-Eleven scandal

The tip of a low-wage iceberg

Bob Briton

It's no wonder the Coalition hates the ABC. The national broadcaster's latest expose of Australia's growing extreme low-wage, "black" labour market has sent industry and anti-worker state and federal politicians scurrying. The *Four Corners* program's revelations of illegally inadequate pay and conditions at 7-Eleven franchised convenience stores nation-wide has prompted a reshuffle at the top of the company and protestations of "shock" that such a systemic rip-off of mostly young workers had developed within the 620-store chain.

A crack down has been promised on stores operating "visa factories" in which overseas students are "sponsored" to attend colleges linked to 7-Eleven stores. The visas were "sold" to students for between \$25,000 and \$70,000 and the indentured employees forced to work for half pay in the convenience stores to wipe out their debt. Greens federal member for Melbourne, Adam Bandt, has established a Senate inquiry into the developing scandal and the company has set up its own probe headed by former Australian Competition and Consumer Commission chief Allan Fels.

"I encourage current and past 7-Eleven workers as a positive signal to lodge a claim if they have not been paid fairly," Professor Fels said recently. It is unlikely many will take up the offer. Employment Minister Eric Abetz won't back calls for an amnesty for overseas students who may have been in breach of the 20-hour per week work limit. Such an amnesty would allow them to spill the beans on illegal workplace practices. The low limit on the number of hours that can be worked and the threat of deportation give dodgy employers a very strong whip hand under current arrangements.

Franchise holders have been attending meetings across the country to hear reports from 7-Eleven and to vent their grievances. As the *Four Corners* program pointed out, the convenience store and petrol station business model usually won't work without drastically underpaying store workers. The income pie has 57 percent going to head office and 43 percent to the franchisee who then pay wages and other costs. The franchisee only keeps 1c per litre of petrol sold. Stores with little walk up trade are not permitted to open fewer than the mandated 24 hours a day. Bottom of this nasty pecking

order are the workers who toil away, sometimes for as little as \$10 an hour, way below the legal ordinary minimum wage rate of \$17.29.

Federal government's crooked stance

Franchises often fail. The "churning" of franchisees makes \$140,514 on average for the company. The system as it stands has made some handsome profits for 7-Eleven and some personal fortunes along the way. Fallout from the *Four Corners* program has seen chairman Russ Withers, chief executive Warren Wilmot and general operations manager Natalie Dalbo resign their posts. Incoming chairman Michael Smith says he was surprised at how the current scandalous situation had developed.

"There's a kind of Petri dish of factors all acting with each other. One on their own could not have caused it all. You've had a bit of a boiling frog," Mr Smith said.

"A week ago I could have walked around these city blocks ignorant. I can now walk around here and say 'underpayment, underpayment, underpayment'."

Low wages and substandard workplace conditions should come as no surprise to the federal government. It was warned long ago about the abuse of type 457 and 417 visas, that they would be used to undermine local wage level and standards. A joint Fairfax Media and Monash University study has shown that 80 percent of ads targeting workers and students from overseas were offering wages below legal rates. The figure is conservative because some many don't give pay details.

The study showed how middlemen operate in this shadowy sector of the labour market. Some workers get as little as \$4 an hour once various parasites have taken their share. These aren't rare examples. At the end of last year there were 750,000 overseas workers in Australia, mostly on student, working holiday and 457 visas. That figure has more than doubled since 2000.

A large proportion of that number are victims of the shonky practices coming to light thanks to the efforts of *Four Corners*, trade unions, well-placed whistle-blowers and brave employees. The hapless workers are being used as a battering ram against current pay rates, including penalty rates.

The Turnbull government is not "resetting"



its industrial relations policy in the sense of taking a more moderate stance. Turnbull and Resource Minister Josh Frydenberg are increasing the frequency of the attacks on penalty rates and the minimum wage, backing the axe-wielding recommendations of the government's Productivity Commission. They want the employers to know they are not "timid" about industrial relations "reform", i.e. attacking the living standards of workers in Australia to increase profits.

We say fight back

The producers of the *Four Corners* program have been inundated with, mostly anonymous, tip-offs about other employers engaging in practices similar to those of 7-Eleven. Mountain Bread in Melbourne has been found to be grossly underpaying production

line workers. National burger chain Grill'd has managed to pay flat hourly rates of \$9.50 for juniors and \$17.70 to adults under agreements involving mandated traineeships. The latest revelations have revived memories of the super exploitation of migrant workers at Baiada poultry processing plants. Workers see injustice. Turnbull and the bosses see lots of downward pressure on pay rates, penalties and workplace conditions.

Unions are promising a determined grassroots campaign, along the lines of the *Your Rights at Work* campaign deployed in the lead-up to the 2007 federal election, to defeat the latest attacks. It is in the interests of all workers to get behind such a campaign and, additionally, to ensure that it stays independently committed to the fightback on trade union, workplace and other democratic rights. *

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"Intervention in Syria must end now"

Guardian

Issue 1705

October 7, 2015

Profiting from abuse and misery

A front page picture-caption of Transfield chair Diane Smith-Gander, a two-page feature and an editorial in the October 3 *Australian Financial Review* sought to justify the corporation's existence as the government's detention centre contractor at Manus Island and Nauru. As justifications go it's of testimonial proportions and a measure of the stigmatising nature of the abuse and inhumane treatment of those locked up in those prison camps.

Transfield personifies the oppression and exploitation that are at the very core of the capitalist system. It has gone as far as proposing guided tours of Manus and Nauru for fund managers to try and placate industry superannuation funds investors over the ongoing human rights abuses.

Last month Transfield announced it was the preferred tenderer for a new five-year \$2.2 billion contract to run the camps. This at the time a Senate inquiry found that the centre at Nauru is "badly run" and the inquiry revealing allegations including child rape and sexual assault of asylum seekers. The select committee found that Transfield Services was "not properly accountable to the Commonwealth".

The committee called for all children to be removed immediately from Nauru and concluded conditions were "not adequate, appropriate or safe" for asylum seekers. Smith-Gander says the complaints are about "government policy". Thus Transfield changed its name at the end of September to BroadSpectrum.

The Australian Lawyers Alliance has carried out comprehensive examination of evidence from Manus and Nauru, including through Freedom of Information. The ALA's Greg Barns points out that the Senate inquiry has indicated that the Immigration Department is regularly updated as to incidents within the Nauru processing centre and asks why no action has been taken.

ALA points to allegations of sexual incidents that were never reported by the Department to Comcare, the Commonwealth agency responsible for workplace safety:

November 2013 incident involving a young boy and a local cleaner; December 2013 sexual incident involving a 9 year old boy; January 2014 sexual assault allegations regarding an 8 year old girl; February 2014, 8 year old boy sexually assaulted by two men, witnessed by Commonwealth employee; May 2015, rape of a 22 year old woman while on day release, found at 9pm naked and beaten on the road.

"It is clear that the Department has known about incidents. It is clear that the Department has failed to adequately report incidents to the regulator," said Mr Barns. "Failure to report the types of incidents that are alleged to have occurred on Nauru raises serious questions about how complicit is the Department in the cover-up of the true conditions on Nauru?"

Leading campaigner against domestic violence and Australia of the Year Rosie Batty, last week called for the closure of the offshore detention centres. "These centres cannot be patched up. They must be shut down," said Ms Batty. "The people forcibly held there are those who sought protection in this country. They deserve care, not punishment." She described the centres as "by their very design, unsafe and dangerous places."

"Those of us who care about violence against women, children and other vulnerable people at home need to care about what happens to these same people elsewhere who are under our care."

The campaign to close the centres is growing. In a full page spread in *The Saturday Newspaper*, "An open letter from the women of Australia to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Opposition leader Bill Shorten" demands the "urgent and immediate removal of all asylum seekers from Nauru and Manus Island on the grounds that neither the government of Nauru nor Manus Island can guarantee the effective protection of women, children and men."

You can sign the letter by visiting www.change.org

As for Transfield, through the 20th century to today, concentration camps have been cesspools of human misery for the generation of corporate profits, whether it be via slave labour or government contracts.

PRESS FUND

Last week Rosie Batty, courageous campaigner against domestic violence, demanded closure of Australia's Manus Island and Nauru immigration detention centres, infamous places of violence, rape, sexual abuse and mental illness. Describing them as "by their very design unsafe and dangerous places", she stated "The people forcibly held there ... sought protection in this country [and] deserve care not punishment". But PM Malcolm Turnbull defends the cruel offshore detention policy and refuses to close the centres, saying the government is helping Nauruan police establish a gender violence unit instead! The *Guardian* is contributing to the nationwide effort to remedy this terrible national disgrace, and you can help us with a Press Fund contribution for the next issue. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

Anon \$50, S Bond \$50, Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15, Michael Smith \$20, Dennis White \$20

This week's total: \$160 Progressive total: \$5,235

PS: Anonymous encouragement received with thanks!

Nauru: Young refugees attacked

Two 18 year-old refugees have been attacked on Nauru.

The attack took place around 11.30pm on Wednesday, September 30 as the two refugees returned to their camp at Ewa. The two men, an Afghan refugee, and Zijah, a Pakistani refugee, were ambushed as they were walking into the Ewa refugee camp, by up to 12 local Nauruan men.

Along with the abuse hurled at the refugees, the attackers demanded money and stole their mobile phones.

Zijah was left with severe cuts on his knee, his hand as well as extensive bruising and scratches on his back from being knocked to the ground.

The Ewa camp has also been the site of a rape and a number of attacks on single refugee women. A local witness to the attack called the police to the scene.

The boys themselves later went to the police station to make a statement. They also went to the hospital for treatment for the cuts and abrasions, when the ambulance failed to attend the scene of the attack.

"This has got to stop," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "The situation on Nauru is badly out of control. The safety of the refugees cannot be guaranteed.

"There is no security in the community or the refugee camps. There is no lighting. The government has simply created camps where single women and young refugees are preyed upon with impunity."

Responding to the announcement that the Nauru government intends to create an "open camp" arrangement for asylum seekers. Ian Rintoul, said, "The vicious attacks on refugee women in the community and these latest bashings make the 'open camp' arrangement a meaningless gesture. The Australian government is trying to avoid elements of the M68 case

before the High Court starting on October 7.

"Some people found to be refugees are just too afraid to leave the detention centre. One Iranian refugee was savagely raped in May while she was in the community under the open camp arrangement."

There have been increased threats against refugees on Nauru, following the broadcast of the ABC's 7.30 program last week highlighting recent alleged incidents of rape on the island.

On Tuesday September 29, one Somali refugee was approached and threatened by two local men who told her, "We will kill you. We know you. Do not make stories."

Others have reported increased abuse and threatening gestures. There are also reports that two refugees have been sacked from their jobs this morning because of the ABC program.

The ABC program on sexual assault allegations on Nauru has lifted the lid on the scale of abuse women are suffering on Nauru. Urgent action is needed in both cases highlighted by the program.

In one case, the Australian government, Border Force and the medical provider on Nauru IHMS has ignored the request for a termination by a 23 year-old Somali woman who became pregnant after a sexual assault. She is now 10 weeks pregnant.

"The need for action by the government to meet her request grows more urgent by the day," said Ian Rintoul. "Despite her requesting a termination for weeks, the woman is now 10 weeks pregnant.

"It is simply unbelievable that health authorities have not acted sooner. She is in a fragile state, yet those who have a duty of care are recklessly playing with her mental and physical health."

The woman known as "Najma",

also should be brought to Australia immediately.

"Najma lives in daily terror," said Ian Rintoul, "Like other refugee women in the community on Nauru, she is completely vulnerable. Many of the refugee houses are remote; have no lighting and no security. Like so many others, the perpetrators of her assault remain at large. Their houses are not secure; the door locks can be, and often are, slipped with a knife blade, leaving them exposed to assault and theft.

"Many of the Somali women refugees on Nauru have been found to be refugees because they have been victims of sexual abuse.

"Najma was held captive by a rebel Somali group in 2004 and 2005 and was sexually assaulted and abused over those two years and her suffering didn't stop then." Rather than finding protection on Nauru, Najma is facing the same kind of persecution she faced in Somalia.

Rintoul pointed out that the government has been aware of the shocking rate of sexual abuse on Nauru for a long time. One Iranian rape victim was kept on Nauru from May until August before finally being brought to Australia. She is still waiting for her family to join her.

"The Australian government has created a living hell for Najma and others on Nauru. Nauru is not safe, and must be closed. Malcolm Turnbull has made concern about domestic violence a hallmark of the new government. The violence against women on Nauru is as bad as the domestic violence in Australia. It is violence that the government is ultimately responsible for.

"The Prime Minister has the power to immediately to end the violence against the refugee women on Nauru. The only question is, will he?" ✪

Turnbull's women's agenda under question

Recent praise for Malcolm Turnbull's efforts to address issues faced by women – such as domestic violence and lack of representation in parliament – will be tarred unless he stops the Minister for Social Services attack on Paid Parental Leave (PPL) and acts to curb gender inequality.

Unions warmly welcome assistance for women experiencing domestic violence and the PM's promotion of women in parliament but question why – at the same time – the government has ramped up its attack on mothers and babies.

Minister Porter's signalling of further cuts to PPL in addition to those announced on Mother's Day indicates a more brutal attitude toward families than Tony Abbott's anti-women policies.

Unions have called on the Prime Minister to stop all cuts to PPL and to censure Minister Porter for his intention to increase the number of families who no longer qualify,

reducing the amount of time that mothers spend with newborns and increasing financial pressure on families.

These are policies that will force women to choose between their job and their babies.

As well as stopping any dismantling of PPL the Prime Minister now has the opportunity to lift superannuation savings for women by retaining the low income super contribution which will assist women, especially those in part-time jobs with caring responsibilities.

Working mothers urgently require affordable, quality and available childcare and more funding needs to be funnelled into this area.

Paid domestic violence leave must also be supported by the Prime Minister to ensure women keep their employment during this critical time.

"Acting to tackle the important hurdles women face in earning

equal wages, retiring with enough superannuation and balancing family and work is the only genuine way Malcolm Turnbull can say he is different to Tony Abbott," said ACTU president Ged Kearney:

"The government intends to push ahead with changes that would leave as many as 80,000 parents a year worse off – this is despite strong opposition from unions, employers, parents, women's organisations, maternal and child health experts and even childcare providers.

"Worse still, the government is planning to reduce the amount a family can earn and still remain eligible for PPL.

"Forcing tens of thousands of women with newborn babies back to work sooner would put a massive squeeze on childcare yet there is no recommendation on how this would be handled." ✪

Bill prompts dismay

Mandatory sentencing changes under fire

Aboriginal, human rights and legal organisations are dismayed that the West Australian Lower House has passed a Bill that will see more Aboriginal people in prison and teenagers tried as adults

The *Criminal Law Amendment (Home Burglary and Other Offences) Bill* will extend WA's mandatory sentencing regime, which is already the toughest in the nation.

The new amendments tighten existing mandatory sentencing arrangements for non-violent home burglaries and introduce additional mandatory sentences for aggravated home burglaries, which will apply to 16- and 17-year-olds as well as adults.

Amnesty International Indigenous rights manager Tammy Solonec, a Nyikina woman, said Aboriginal people who are already massively overrepresented in WA's prisons, would be further disadvantaged by these laws.

"Mandatory sentencing is not the answer to keeping communities safe because it does not address the underlying causes that lead to criminal behaviour," she said.

"These laws also fly in the face of international law, breaching the Convention on the Rights of the Child

that provides that detention for young people should only be a last resort and for the shortest possible time. Rather than working to find a solution, the WA government has taken the backward step of entrenching a harsh and punitive approach.

Unintended consequences

"We are concerned that these laws will have unintended consequences, particularly for young people and that, ironically, it will lead to increased offending behaviour because we know the more young people that end up incarcerated the more likely they are to re-offend."

Despite only making up around 6% of the youth population, Aboriginal people made up 78% of young people in detention in WA in 2013-14. Ms Solonec said WA Labor, despite being "unequivocally" opposed to mandatory sentencing in their own policy platform, did not oppose the Bill.

"WA already has the appalling distinction of having the highest rate of Indigenous youth in detention in Australia," she said. These laws will only add to that terrible distinction.

"Tragically, young people's lives will be irrevocably changed for the

"Mandatory sentencing is not the answer to keeping communities safe because it does not address the underlying causes that lead to criminal behaviour."



worse with the passing of these mandatory sentencing laws.

"Rather than spending an additional \$93 million to keep youth in detention and jails, the WA government could have shown some vision by putting this money into diversionary and preventative programs that address the underlying causes of crimes, including poverty, trauma and substance abuse."

National Congress of Australia's First People's co-chair Kirstie Parker, who is also co-chair of the #ChangeTheRecord campaign that

aims to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in prison, said Australia had been a signatory to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child for 25 years.

"And yet wave after wave of horrendous and frankly stupid and opportunistic lawmaking make a mockery of that commitment," she said.

"This furious raft of measures will propel people into prisons rather than keeping them out. Mandatory sentencing is a big log for the fire, but so many decisions are heading in the wrong direction.

"It's really hard to image how much more evidence and expert advice is needed to convince the WA government they need to be smarter about this.

"I saw a report where former Prime Minister Abbott described these new laws as a 'political triumph'. How sad that governments are concerned with being politically opportunistic rather than smart on crime and the things that will make our society safer for all."

Koori Mail

Blaming the victim

Tom Pearson

Today the victims of domestic violence are still being blamed.

A new report released on September 24 by VicHealth revealed extremely disturbing attitudes amongst young Australians towards violence against women and gender equality in relationships. The report, which surveyed 1,923 Australians between the ages of 16 and 24, confirms the situation has worsened.

An alarming number of young men and women believe that women are often partly to blame for rape. The survey found that 20 percent of 16-24 year olds believe that women often say "no" when they mean "yes" compared to 13

percent of the 35-64 year age group as revealed in a previous survey.

Just over one in five (22 percent) of young people believe that men should take control in relationships compared with 16 percent of 35-64 year-olds.

Two in five (40%) believe that "rape results from men not being able to control their sexual urges", an increase from one in three (33%) in the 2009 survey.

The situation is set to get worse if the VicHealth survey figures are an accurate indication of the attitudes of the next generation.

"Violence against women is the leading contributor to ill health, disability and death for women aged 15 to 44, and has a profound

and devastating effect on the health and wellbeing of children, families and communities," VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter pointed out.

"We know that victims of violence against women are most commonly young women and that a large number of men who commit sexual violence against women do so for the first time before the age of 20. This violence has serious consequences for young people because they're at a critical life stage. On the other hand, it's a stage when the prospects for preventing violence are particularly strong.

"Violence against women is serious, common and preventable and while there are many factors that contribute to violence against

women, attitudes towards gender roles, relationships and identities are among these. If the community accepts violence against women, men who use violence are more likely to feel it's OK to behave disrespectfully or even violently, and as a community we're less likely to take action when we see violence and disrespect."

Ms Rechter said one of the most concerning aspects of the report was that nearly three in five young people (57%) believe that violence is caused by men being unable to control their anger and a quarter are prepared to excuse violence. Far too many are prepared to see violence as acceptable if alcohol is involved.

These attitudes reflect the

messages that young people are receiving – their experiences in the home, at school, what they see on TV and in the social media, religious practices, from sporting heroes and across the whole of society.

What message does it send when a prime minister threatens to shirt-front another government leader or when a popular footballer or cricketer rapes or assaults a woman and little or nothing is done?

Violence against women cannot and must not be accepted whatever its form – physical, verbal or psychological.

Pete's Corner



Sydney

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Private vocational training shonks

More evidence is emerging of the problems in Australia's privatised vocational education and training (VET) sector, at the same time as the federal government continues to push its plans to take control of vocational training from the states.

Stories of ongoing rorts by private for-profit providers continue to surface, adding to a whole body of evidence suggesting that privatising the VET system is simply not working.

Australian Education Union (AEU) federal TAFE secretary Pat Forward said the revelations showed the need for tougher regulation of private providers, and for a guarantee of funding to TAFEs to preserve their role at the centre of vocational training.

"A national takeover of VET will not solve these problems, it will only accelerate the damaging privatisation process which is under way at the moment – and TAFE will continue to be undermined.

Reports in *The Age* newspaper found unscrupulous Victorian "brokers" – who sell courses to potential students are touting privatised vocational training as the next "get rich quick scheme".

Former students of the for-profit Evocca College have banded together to mount a class action lawsuit against the college, over the poor quality of the education they received. At the

same time, the amount of VET FEE-HELP debt VET students will accrue in 2015 is expected to hit \$4 billion, a huge increase since 2008 when it was just \$15 million.

Students signed up to worthless courses

Despite this, new Education Minister Simon Birmingham seems set to push ahead with a federal takeover of VET, which has the potential to do even more damage to TAFEs.

Ms Forward said that thousands of students had signed up to private VET courses, often not knowing the cost, only to discover that their qualification was worthless and they had incurred a lifelong debt.

"Governments have caused these problems by opening up a huge stream of taxpayer funding to the private sector without putting proper regulations in place," Ms Forward said.

"The promises made by the supporters of privation of higher quality and more options for students have not eventuated. Instead we have a lower quality courses and ballooning student debt.

"They have allowed the sharks to come in to vocational education and rip off students and taxpayers. Regulation is totally inadequate and there are few checks and balances in the system.

"Every dollar that goes to a dodgy private provider is a dollar



that is taken from a TAFE college. Around the country, TAFE colleges are threatened with closure, or reductions in the courses they offer to students, as they struggle to make do with increasingly scarce resources."

Student debts skyrocketing

The rise in VET FEE-HELP debt has been extraordinarily fast, and of the expected \$4 billion by the end of 2015, 75 percent is for courses run by private providers.

While governments have increased regulation of private pro-

viders, this has not been able to stop entrenched rorts from continuing. Last year the Australian Skills Quality Authority found that 75 percent of the private providers it audited did not meet quality standards on a first inspection.

Ms Forward said that weak regulation and government-backed loans through VET FEE-HELP made it easy for private providers to rip off students. "Allowing students to get a government-backed loan through VET FEE-HELP sends them a message that these courses are legitimate – that's playing into the hands of dodgy providers who target young,

inexperienced students, often those who are unemployed and desperate to improve their chance of getting a job," Ms Forward said.

She said that all states needed to put a halt to privatisation by reserving at least 70 percent of VET funding for TAFEs.

"TAFE cannot compete on a level-playing field against for-profit providers which mislead their students, cherry pick the most profitable courses and fail to deliver the minimum hours recommended for courses.

"We need to preserve TAFEs or risk irreparable damage to our VET sector." ☺

Disability funding shortfall

Far more students with disability in schools need funded support than are receiving it, according to secret data from the federal government's own national disability data collection which shows 13.1 percent of students have some form of disability.

Australian Education Union (AEU) federal president Correna Haythorpe told a Senate Inquiry last month that schools were not getting the resources they needed to educate students with disability.

"New Education Minister Simon Birmingham must make it a priority to deliver on the government's promise of extending funding so it covers all students with disability, and do so by the start of the 2016 school year," Ms Haythorpe said.

"Lack of funding is the biggest barrier to children with disability

participating on an equal basis at schools and making the most of their potential. It means that many students get no funded support at school, while others get a level that does not cover the cost of the adjustment required for their disability.

Funding far short of meeting need

The federal government is keeping the results of the National Consistent Collection of Data on Disability for 2014 and 2015 secret, but data from the 2013 collection shows 13.1 percent of students had some kind of disability, of which 88.2 percent needed support at school.

This compares to just 5.3 percent of students who receive any funded support.

This data backs up the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers which found that half of all students with disability in mainstream schools get no extra support, that's a total of 127,000 students. This includes 37,000 students with severe or profound disability.

Ms Haythorpe told the Senate that the work of dedicated and passionate educators needed to be backed with resources so that schools could provide equipment, one-on-one support and professional development for staff.

"All students with disability who need support at school must be able to get it. Anything less is to leave these students without the skills they will need for work or further education."

Year 12 completion rates among people with a disability are 36%

compared to 60% for those without disability and that flows on into reduced employment rates and greater poverty.

Principals say they are under-resourced

The AEU's State of Our Schools survey for public schools found that 79 percent of principals say they do not have the resources to properly educate students with disability at their school and 84 percent reported diverting resources from other areas of their budget to assist students with disability.

The experience of Sandra Bowden, Khancoban Public School NSW, is typical of those who contributed to the AEU's submission to the Senate Inquiry.

"I have Kindergarten to Year 6 in the same room, a multistage

class with two students with moderate disabilities and three mild. This makes teaching anything very difficult. I often feel I'm letting down the students who could be gifted and talented but I don't have the time or the energy to get to them most days as the behaviour and disabilities take so much time."

Ms Haythorpe said the federal government had let down students with disability by failing to keep its 2013 election promise to increase funding.

"Former Education Minister Christopher Pyne continually denied there was a problem, and failed to put aside any money in the Budget to increase disability funding.

"We need his successor, Simon Birmingham, to take the lead on this issue and tell us how he is going to deliver this urgently-needed funding in 2016." ☺

Organiser entirely vindicated

The Construction Division of the CFMEU has welcomed the decision of the ACT Director of Public Prosecutions to offer no evidence against ACT organiser Johnny Lomax when his case comes up in court on October 19.

CFMEU Construction national secretary Dave Noonan said that the decision meant that Mr Lomax – who was charged with blackmail for negotiating an EBA that meant an employer was required to pay higher wages – was entirely vindicated.

"We argued from the outset that

Mr Lomax was doing nothing other than advocating higher wages for the union's members – which is in fact his job," he said.

Mr Noonan said the use of criminal law to smear the work of Mr Lomax and the union is a new low in Australian industrial relations.

"It has harmed the reputation of Mr Lomax and has been deeply upsetting for his family." Mr Noonan said that union would be seeking answers from the police regarding their pursuit of this case, when it was obvious it had no chance of succeeding.

"Everyone should be concerned at the enormous waste of taxpayers' money when the resources of the Australian Federal Police are used in this way, particularly given there are more pressing issues of national significance for them to focus on.

"Equally, we should be concerned that in a democracy such as ours, the police are not used as tools to further political agendas.

"Johnny Lomax should never have been charged with blackmail." ☺



Sydney

Vigil demanding that the USA stop the blockade on Cuba

54 YEARS IS ENOUGH

Saturday October 17 at 12.30 pm Town Hall

Also to stop the subversion funds against Cuba & to return Guantánamo to its rightful owners – the Cuban people.

Medicare

Privatisation behind rhetoric

Anna Pha

The Coalition government has launched yet another attack on Medicare with a new round of cuts. The cuts come in the guise of a review of items covered by Medicare. Health Minister Sussan Ley speaks in terms of removing items that do not reflect “contemporary best clinical practice”. The review is not just about removing items, but also aims at reducing rebates and opening the way for private health insurance funds to offer “gap” coverage for Medicare items.

The Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) is a listing of Medicare services including GP visits, Xrays, surgery etc, which are subsidised by the government. The Schedule specifies the amount that Medicare pays bulk-billing service providers and to fee-paying patients when they claim a refund.

The Turnbull government has set up a Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce chaired by Professor Bruce Robinson and made up of a range of medical professionals and academics.

Cuts

The government denies its “spring clean” of the Schedule is a cost-cutting exercise. If it were just a matter of removing obsolete items, the government would not be making savings. But it plans to make huge savings. Treasurer Scott Morrison plans to put them towards balancing the budget.

“Efficiency” cuts to the Medicare rebate will not save patients any money. They will mean smaller Medicare refunds and higher co-payments or out of pocket costs for patients who will still pay the same GP fees. Doctors will not lower their fees because the government has cut the rebate.

The MBS review – read cuts – are more about privatisation of Medicare

A Coalition government is not going to tackle specialists. But they do have their sights set on GP services and other MBS items.

(and increased out of pocket costs to patients), part of a bigger review of the health sector and its complete privatisation.

There are 5,769 items on the MBS ranging from a six-minute GP visit, to Xrays, blood tests through to the most complex surgery.

“Doctors and patients alike have raised various issues from over-testing and outdated or unproven treatments to unnecessary referrals, duplication, inefficiencies and systemic waste,” Ms Ley said.

No one can argue against the need for a review.

The ABC *4 Corners* program *Wasted* (September 28, 2015) revealed some common tests and procedures that were not necessary, not backed by research and in some instances could have harmful consequences. Procedures such as arthroscopies and back surgery are not evidence-based.

And it is not just a question of

whether an item should be on the list. The scheduled fee is also extremely important.

Specialists are charging monopoly prices. They rarely bulk bill their patients. A great deal of health spending is wasted on bloated specialist fees. Procedures such as colonoscopies, endoscopies and cataracts have become quicker and simpler.

Labor tried to reduce the scheduled fee for cataracts. Ophthalmologists, using state-of-the-art technology, run assembly lines spending minutes with each patient. They proved too strong, and they continue to rake in the same obscene fees.

A Coalition government is not going to tackle specialists, whether they be ophthalmologists, orthopaedic surgeons or gastroenterologists. But they do have their sights set on GP services and other MBS items.

Gap insurance

For several decades the Medicare rebate paid to doctors and other items has not kept up with rising costs. The Abbott government froze them for four years in its 2014 budget. This freeze is having the same effect as a direct co-payment. It is forcing GPs to abandon bulk billing for pure economic reasons. Many patients who were previously bulk billed are now \$30, \$40 or more out of pocket for a GP visit or blood test.

At present the private health insurance industry is not allowed to provide cover for the gap between the Medicare refund and GP’s fee. The freeze on GP items and any cuts arising from the review will make it far easier for the government to argue for private insurance to cover the gap.

Revamp of Medicare

The MBS Taskforce, in a discussion paper released on September 29, states as one of its objectives: “clarify and align expectations of the MBS, including its *scope* and the *rules* that

underpin MBS payments.” (Emphasis added)

“The Taskforce will provide expert guidance to the government on *reshaping* the MBS ...”

Cuts and gap insurance by private funds are not the only aims of the government. The MBS review is one of a number of reviews underway that aim to privatise Medicare and the public health system.

Treasurer Scott Morrison last week called on the states to hand over the running of public hospitals to the private sector.

Privatisation

In addition to cuts and gap insurance, the government is seeking to privatise Medicare and the public health system, including the MBS. The MBS review is one of three “reform” areas the government announced on April 22 with the label a Healthier Medicare.

It has set up a Primary Health



Care Advisory Group led by former Australian Medical Association President, Dr Steve Hambleton to investigate options for the care of people with complex and chronic illness (eg mental illness, diabetes).

It also released a discussion paper on September 29.

The government also announced that it would “develop clearer Medicare compliance rules and benchmarks”. This looks to be a vehicle for restricting tests and procedures, which would ultimately fall to private health insurance funds.

This would be a huge step towards the US system where private health insurance companies decide whether diagnostic testing and other medical procedures are “required” – in practice whether they will be covered.

“Primary Health Networks could also pursue opportunities with private health insurers to ensure that care pathways recognise the need for patients with and without private health insurance in their regions.”

In other words the government would allocate an amount for the private health insurer to cover people with chronic and complex health conditions.

“Working together with Local Hospital Networks, other health service providers and also private health insurers, Primary Health Networks will be able to better coordinate services and support new and innovative programs that deliver better health outcomes.”

The *4 Corners* program revealed the problems with a fee-for-service model. Ley is using the problems that fee-for-service creates, not to nationalise the system but to privatise Medicare.

The CPA policy supports the retention of Medicare with universal, fee-free access, quality care which is funded out of central revenue. It supports salary payments for GPs and specialists, especially in aged care, and a greater emphasis on primary health care. It strongly opposed government cuts and privatisation which will only worsen the present situation where far too many people are not receiving the care they need.

The next step will be public consultations. Those wishing to make a submission have up to November 9 to do so.

See www.health.gov.au ✪



That corporate octopus Transfield is facing legal action over online job advertisements aimed at recruiting migrant workers to some of its biggest electricity networks. This was after cutting 120 jobs in Victoria, bring the cuts to 400 this year. Under the 457 visa scheme employers are required to demonstrate they have searched for local job-seekers first to fill trade positions. But a big question mark arose about whether the redundancies were “genuine” when it was found that overseas recruitment ads were running online looking for workers from Britain to fill vacancies in Transfield’s powerline maintenance division in Australia. As one ad puts it: “Transfield Services in Australia are looking to relocate UK-based electrical linesmen, construction supervisors and project managers with utilities experience to capital cities within Australia.” Transfield, of course, denies all.

A climate change denier who has compared Adolf Hitler’s tactics to those of the wind energy generation industry and who claims the Australian Medical Association’s support for wind power is “corrupt” is being pushed by the Senate crossbench as a government advisor on wind power. Flat earth society.

The Turnbull government’s bids for UN positions – including the human Rights Commission and Security Council – will run into the contradiction of the government’s treatment of asylum seekers, among other violations of international law. President of the Australian Human Rights Commission Gillian Triggs said it was proper for Australia to promote protecting human rights as part of Australia’s international engagement, but that Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers would be “a major matter of concern to the human rights community and to the Human Rights Council itself.”

Campbell Newman, who ran amuck in Queensland in his brief one term as Premier blames his electoral downfall on ... the media. Newman, whose slash-and-burn economic policies destroyed the biggest parliamentary majority in Australia’s political history within three years, has written a book just a few months after leaving politics (expect a Tony Abbot scornful tell-all soon). The book, ironically called *Can do – Campbell Newman and the Challenge of Reform*, shoots the messenger. “They (journalists) are not interested in the government or reform or the reasons behind the decisions we made. They are only interested in the tactical, in the here and now ... they have always ridiculed and sneered.” After his shambles of a campaign in January, he told an MP colleague, “That’s the last press conference I’ll ever have to do ... that’s the last time I’ll ever have to talk to that pack of bastards.” You were right there, Campbell.

The choice facing the people of Portugal

The following are extracts from a speech made by Jerónimo de Sousa, General Secretary, Amora, Seixal in Portugal at a rally of the 2015 *Avante!* Festival on September 6, 2015. *Avante!* is the newspaper of the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP).

Here we are those who in various countries from every continent truly want to change the world. A change all the more necessary since the international situation is increasingly marked by great instability, insecurity and injustice.

The deepening of capitalism's structural crisis is here marking the present. Capitalism's economic and financial crisis is far from over, expressing itself in many different ways and in all parts of the globe.

What we see everywhere is a violent sharpening of imperialist aggressiveness. In a world marked by important processes of rearrangement of forces it is increasingly clear that the major imperialist powers do not accept the loss of their hegemonic domination and bet on militarism and war to try to keep it.

Sources of tension multiply and expand in various parts of the globe, carrying out criminal operations of destabilisation and foreign interference.

Seventy years after the victory over Nazi-fascism, which we are celebrating, fascism raises its head in various regions of the globe. This is clearly visible in Ukraine, where a putschist power of the oligarchy and fascist groups, supported by the US and the European Union attacks its own people and persecutes the democrats of that country – which includes the communists, victims of terrorism and illegalisation. To the Ukrainian communists who are present here, we would like to express our solidarity and support.

Recent news has shown us shocking images of hundreds of thousands of human beings who come to Europe or die on its doorstep, fleeing war, poverty, unemployment, destruction of their countries. They flee from countries like Syria, Iraq and Libya, among others. All countries subject to processes of interference and imperialist domination, wars of aggression unleashed by the US and the European Union.

In answer to hypocritical speeches, we affirm: it is necessary to respond to the humanitarian drama, respect the rights of these human beings, creating conditions for a real integration. But it is necessary, also and above all, to tackle the causes – and the causes lie in the policy of the US, NATO and the European Union – in the destabilisation and plunder of the resources of these countries, imposing an end to aggression and not creating others, whatever the pretext, including the false pretext of concern for the refugees.

That is the great need that emerges from the analysis of the international situation. Strive for the progress of the people, for the sovereign development of States, fight for peace, against militarism and disregard for international law. Fight against the war plans, against NATO.

Our Country is, together with other European countries, one of the main victims of the process of European capitalist integration which is crushing rights and sovereignty on this continent.

If anyone had doubts on the nature of the European Union they can now be dispelled. Capitalism's crisis further enhanced the neoliberal, militarist and federalist pillars of the European Union. The last few years, and the most recent events, have proved that the European Union's solidarity and cohesion was, and is, a huge lie. Reality proves PCP right when it says that the European Union is a project of domination of peoples and countries by large multinationals and a directory of powers.

We affirm today, as we have always affirmed, that in Europe there are sufficient forces to tread different paths. Paths that reject the trampling of national sovereignties, the exploitation of workers and depletion of the resources and wealth of the countries.

Other paths are both necessary and possible. That should be treaded boldly, with

principles, truth and determination, implementing the necessary ruptures!

No! We do not accept, as we have never accepted, theories of inevitability!

Timeliness of socialism

The sharpening of the class struggle and capitalism's increasingly exploitative, oppressive, aggressive and predatory nature demonstrates, increasingly, the timeliness and importance of the communist project, of a new society, of socialism and communism. This is the big prospect of struggle that, in different ways and stages, the workers and the people face.

The PCP, a patriotic and internationalist party is here, fighting major battles. To all of you we affirm that you can rely on this Portuguese Communist Party and its contribution to the broader struggle for the emancipation of the workers and peoples.

Successive years of right-wing policy, with consequences on the life of the Country and of the Portuguese during the period of the last two governments, with the application of three Stability and Growth Pacts – SGPs – by the PS (social democrat) government and a Program of a so-called Financial Assistance, but in fact of interference and aggression and which weakened and ruined the country even more.

Yes, they were the ones who all together – (PSD right-wing social democrat), PS and CDS (Christian Democrat) – placed the country into the hands of foreigners and their program of plunder and social terrorism.

It was with their active connivance, their arrangements and the fallacious pretext of an imminent bankruptcy that they imposed the policy of exploitation and impoverishment of the workers, of our people and the plunder of the country's assets that we have been witnessing and which they aim to continue.

When Portugal is today a more impoverished, more fragile, more dependent country, we owe it to them and their policy of national disaster, of capitalist recovery and monopolist restoration.

When we have a country marked by economic stagnation for a decade and a half and a sharp fall of the GDP, more than six percent in these years of the policy of the Troika, with the destruction of thousands of companies and jobs, we owe it to them, to the PS, PSD and CDS and their policy of privatisation and destruction of national productive sectors and, with the Euro, the alienation of our budgetary, monetary and exchange rate sovereignty.

If today we have a dramatic social situation with high levels of unemployment that affect 1.2 million Portuguese, brutal levels of job precariousness, drastic cuts in labour income and of large sections of the population, we owe it to them, to the PSD, PS and CDS and their policy of continuous aggravation of labour exploitation.

Impoverishment

If thousands of Portuguese have their salaries, pensions and retirement extorted and degraded and see their most basic labour rights destroyed, a situation that affected all sectors, with particular impact on Public Administration workers, they owe it to them, and their deliberate policy of transferring to the people losses from speculative banking and big business activities.

If in the last five years more than 500,000 Portuguese were forced to migrate, we owe it to them, to the PSD, PS and CDS and their strategy of impoverishment of the people and their policy of destruction of jobs, and of the national scientific and research system.

If we have a country which is long riddled with a profound fiscal injustice, worsened by the greatest increase in taxes on labour income



A man in a Che Guevara T-shirt at Festa do *Avante!*, in Seixal. The festival draws crowds of 200

in living memory, we owe it to them, and particularly this PSD/CDS government and their policy of national confiscation.

If the country has, in these years of SGP and Pact of Aggression, a state of serious decline in access to rights to health, education, social protection and culture, with cuts and attacks lashed on the National Health Service, Public Schools, Social Security and liquidation and weakening of the system of social benefits, we owe it to them, to the PS, PSD and CDS and their policy of reconfiguration of the State in favour of large groups and their businesses, dismantling the achievements of April and in confrontation with the Constitution of the Republic.

If Portugal is a country increasingly unequal, socially and territorially, where poverty came knocking on the door of hundreds of thousands of people – over 800,000 in the last four years of this government, rising to 2.7 million Portuguese living below the poverty line – we owe it to them, their decisions bound to the policies of the troika and their policy of centralisation and concentration of wealth in the hands of the lords of money and power.

These are the ones whose wealth continues to grow. With the rich getting richer, with the 25 largest fortunes in the country once again having their assets growing!

Intense struggle

This intense struggle that the workers, the Portuguese people have been carrying out to uphold their interests and rights, in resistance to the offensive of big business and the political power at their service, always with a view to make a rupture with the policy of exploitation, impoverishment and national disaster.

From here we salute the workers, the youth, the retired and pensioners, the users of public services, the small and medium-size entrepreneurs, the small and medium-size farmers, the fishermen, people with disabilities, the unemployed, the military, the professionals of forces of security, all those who took in their hands the resistance and the struggle for rights, against social regression, for a better life, for a developed and sovereign country.

Resistance and struggle without which the offensive of big business would have gone further, that isolated socially and politically the PSD/CDS government and points the way that will lead to their defeat.

A struggle that had the strength and the role of the broad united trade union movement, the CGTP-IN, the great trade union central of the

Portuguese workers. A struggle that had the communists at the forefront of its execution, that had the active intervention and solidarity of PCP.

The struggle of the workers of a broad anti-monopoly social front, enabled to isolate a government whose defeat the people are now called to confirm with their vote in the important electoral battle for the Assembly of the Republic that is near. We won the battle against resignation and inevitabilities; we will win the battle for a rupture and a change.

The necessity and urgency of a rupture with the right-wing policy to stop the course of economic decline and social regression, emerges as a national imperative, a patriotic demand!

PSD and CDS, instrumentalising the State apparatus and public monies to garner electoral support, at the same time as they launch fraudulent propaganda operations, with recourse to fantastic interpretations of statistical indicators, trying to present a trail of destruction left by four years of their government as a success.

They proclaim themselves liberators of the homeland. The homeland they themselves, shamelessly, also turned over to the bankers.

They wave the Greek situation around, to make it their lifejacket. But what the events in Greece demonstrate is the imperious need for resistance and struggle against the blackmails, pressures and impositions of the Euro and European Union.

What they demonstrate is how PCP was right, that there is no solution without renegotiating the debt, without liberation from the constraints of the Euro that condition the sovereign development of countries. What they demonstrate is that the paths that one need follow and that are possible need to be built with courage, with principles, truth and determination, leading to the necessary ruptures and believing always in the power and strength of the people's struggle.

Therefore, whatever they promise or say, the Portuguese won't forget the nightmare of their governance. As they won't forget that their true program is the one they sent to Brussels – the National Reform Program – based on the intensification of the policy of disasters of the previous four years, and therefore nothing will save them from a profound defeat!

But if PSD and CDS are hiding that their true program is tied to the guidelines of big national and transnational capital, the Socialist Party (PS) is following the same path.

Behind much propaganda, what PS, PSD

Iran nuclear agreement

The decline of US power

Jack Dresser

In a stratified society, the tiny fraction who comprise the ruling class must control perceptions of the much larger fraction under their control. To do so they must tightly manage the conduits of information and its interpretation through endlessly repeated story lines that alternately generate and relieve public anxiety. Driven by anxiety and reinforced by its reduction, we are herded along the path chosen by the rulers with only fleeting glimpses of reality. US news reports, invariably immersed in American mythology and disembodied from honest history, remain intentionally disinformative.

There is no more glaring current example than the Iran nuclear issue, a red herring recognisable as such through examining our past and likely future relationships with Iran. Who should distrust whom? Who are the aggressors, who deserves international sanctions, who holds which cards, and what are the real stakes? For answers it helps to examine the historical trajectory within which today's "news" about Iran is embedded.

In 1953 the US overthrew Iran's elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq and destroyed Iranian democracy to maintain Western control of Iran's oil industry, then installed Shah Pahlavi and his brutal Savak-enforced police state for a quarter century as a bastion of US power in Central Asia until overthrown by a popular revolution in 1979. Given US stakes in control of the region, holding US embassy hostages seemed sensible at that time to discourage US military intervention, but the Iranian people have been punished by sanctions ever since including billions of dollars in frozen Iranian assets and a 40 percent reduction in Iranian oil exports.

In 1980 the US encouraged and supported Iraq in launching and maintaining an eight-year war against Iran causing an estimated half-million Iranian deaths. Assuring sustained devastation to both sides, the US increased sanctions against Iran while duplicitously providing it secret arms using Israel as an intermediary with revenues diverted and laundered to support US atrocities in Central America. In 1988 shortly before a UN-brokered ceasefire, the USS *Vincennes* shot down Iran Flight 655 with two missiles, killing all 290 aboard including 66 children. Rather than disciplinary consequences, its Captain received the

Legion of Merit, a neck decoration reserved for flag rank officers and second only to the Congressional Medal of Honour. Thus have we respected Iranian life.

Iran is not an aggressor nation, having invaded no other country for over 200 years. US and Israeli intelligence services – supported by the IAEA – acknowledge that NPT-signatory Iran has no nuclear weapons program, and moreover, would pose no military threat even with nukes. They are neither crazy nor suicidal. In contrast, NPT non-signatory Israel has repeatedly attacked and occupied territories of all its contiguous neighbours throughout its brief 67-year history and is the only nuclear threat in the region with both land- and sea-based missile delivery systems.

The US has completely destroyed two modern, advanced, secular, socialist Arab societies, has inflicted continuing chaos upon Afghanistan while restoring their opium production to assure continuing chaos in the West as well, and is covertly waging massive warfare against Syria and Yemen.

Having identified the real aggressors, real victims and real threats, what then is the real agenda behind Israel's hysterical demands for attack and our insistent sanctions upon Iran, both violating the UN Charter prohibiting "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state"?

Wahhabist Saudi Arabia bitterly opposes Shia Iran as a regional hegemonic rival. It has made common cause with Israel, which wants to eliminate Iran's support of Hezbollah, the defensive force against Israel's 1982 invasion and 18-year occupation of south Lebanon that remains Lebanon's bulwark against Israeli aggression.

The Saudis have provided much of the funding and the Israel lobby has provided vigorous political pressure behind our proxy war against Syria, the key "Shia crescent" bridge between Iran and Hezbollah.

But Israel and the Saudis aside, what independent US interests are involved? Russian and Chinese leaders seem to be implementing Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard strategy more quietly and skilfully than the West.

Sanctions against Iran have served a revitalised US cold war face-off against Russia, blocking Iran's admission to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation which excludes membership to nations under UN sanctions. With India and Pakistan to become SCO

members next year, inclusion of Iran would largely complete Russian-Asian dominance of central, southern and eastern Eurasia and encircle the resource-rich Caspian Basin. Iran applied for SCO membership in 2008 and will be eligible to join when UN sanctions are lifted, and the US can no longer block this.

The SCO is a political, economic and military alliance that will soon represent about half the world's population, intended to challenge the Bretton Woods financial institutions and reproduce the former Warsaw Pact's counterweight to NATO. Chinese, Indian and Russian troops marched together in Moscow's WWII victory parade this year. The SCO overlaps the three-continent BRICS alliance, which including Brazil in turn overlaps Latin American alliances of Mercosur, ALBA and UNASUR with its new Banco del Sur for development lending free of neoliberal "structural adjustments" imposed by the World Bank and IMF.

Irrespective of congressional action on the agreement, the other P5+1 negotiating countries will not impose continuing sanctions. The EU is eager for Iranian natural gas. Iran and Russia together hold a third of the world's natural gas reserves, to which the EU wants access. Force is not an option. Russia and Iran have already signed a major trade agreement and Russia will soon deliver them an S-300 surface-to-air anti-missile system, sufficient for effective defence against the US or Israel without needing to maintain ambiguity about a nuclear deterrent.

Iran will also provide essential strategic land and sea links in China's far-reaching New Silk Roads projects and is a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank for financing these projects. Chinese companies have already begun pumping from Iran's immense gas fields in the Persian Gulf and oil fields along its border with Iraq, purchased in yuan and other alternative currencies to bypass Western sanctions.

The Monroe Doctrine is finished and American power to control world resources is declining rapidly. Iran has refused to bend to our will, and the developing world is applauding. The 120-member Non-Aligned Movement chose Tehran for its 2015 conference and Iran is its current chair. We can either lose a decisive round or at least stay in the game. That, I believe, is what our acceptance of this accord will – at least for now – determine.

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,000. (Photo: Pedro Nunes)

and CDS are preparing for after the elections (October 4), if they have the necessary votes, are measures to deepen exploitation, devaluing wages and increasing precariousness, amputating social security, attacking pensions and the retired, the National Health Service, the Public School, Culture, the democratic Local Power, the democratic regime and national sovereignty.

That is their real program.

On October 4, the Portuguese people have two options:

Support and vote for CDU (Democratic Unitarian Union – includes PCP) and therefore break with the policies of disaster that have brought so many privations and condemn those responsible; or, on the contrary, vote for the parties of the arc of right-wing policy and allow them, for a few more years, to pursue exploitation, impoverishment, the submission of the country.

Support CDU

Support and give strength to the patriotic and left-wing policy that CDU proposes or give a free pass to PS, PSD and CDS to prolong and intensify the policy that has led the country into ruin.

For CDU there is no hesitation. CDU is and will be always beside the workers and people, ready to assume all the responsibilities the Portuguese people want to attribute to it in the country's government, bearer of a patriotic and left-wing policy capable of solving the national problems.

There are those who hasten to say there is no alternative to a policy of exploitation and impoverishment, that one can't escape the impositions of the European Union, that the country doesn't have resources capable of sustaining any other policy.

We know very well who elaborates this discourse and whose interests it serves.

It is reality itself that places a rupture with the right-wing policy as a national imperative. A rupture that is no mere decorative measure, but assumes a project of development for the Country, placing at the centre of its action the interests and needs of our people and country. A policy we know is necessary, possible and doable.

Doable with the strength and struggle of the workers and Portuguese people, with economic growth as a decisive and strategic factor, with a determined and firm affirmation of the right of the Country to a sovereign development. ✪



Representatives of the P5+1 and Iran making media announcements in April.

Germany:

Predictions after 25 years

Victor Grossman

BERLIN: That “blood moon” was quite a sight. Not being superstitious, I see in it no omen. Indeed, for a layman like me, it was amazingly predictable, one of the few predictable things in today’s world.

Who could have predicted the Volkswagen disaster?

In April VW boss Martin Winterkorn, whose company already had the highest revenues, profits and assets of any automaker, boasted proudly that by 2018 VW would be “the world’s most profitable, fascinating and sustainable auto manufacturer, with annual sales of 10 million vehicles and a pre-tax profit margin of 8 percent or higher” and “the most satisfied customers and employees (550,000 worldwide) in the industry. Only an automaker who can achieve all these goals can really call itself number one with justification.”

If there is any justice left lying around, by 2018 Winterkorn should be in a less joyous, more restricted situation, and not alone. His assertions that he (and other top managers) never knew of the vicious deception [caught cheating on diesel emissions, could face billions in fines] which has poisoned enough atmosphere to cost too many lives, calls up many a knew-nothing recollection.

Secrets involving diesel motors, popular in Europe with gas far more expensive than in the US, go back exactly 102 years. On the night of September 29, 1913 inventor Rudolf Diesel disappeared from a ship crossing to England, after probably jumping overboard for no known reason.

Similar reactions are not expected of anyone today despite the billions VW will most likely have to cough up. It has wonderful connections. Once publicly owned, a key 20 percent is still property of the state of Lower Saxony, and all politicians from that state enjoyed close ties, like former chancellor Gerhard Schröder and current vice-chancellor Sigmar Gabriel. Other heavyweight firms may well get caught up in this giant, world-wide plot against the environment and political ties with the whole auto industry have always been hearty, with Daimler-Benz and BMW joining in to impel Merkel to achieve a delay in European Union emission limits until 2022.

A symbol was offered by Matthias Wissmann, long the Minister of Transportation, who quit his Bundestag seat on May 30 2007 and showed up on June 1, no doubt with a good new suit and tie, as President of the Automobile Industry Association and soon vice-president of its Pro Mobilität lobby, whose main jobs are to cut railroad traffic and instead build ever wider highways, while preventing changes in Germany’s “No speed limit” rules on many Autobahn stretches, which would discourage high-power vehicle sales. This too causes many hundreds of deaths.

But nothing is fully predictable. Since autos are a key factor in Germany’s economic grip on Europe and elsewhere, a big drop



in sales, especially of VWs, might just upset many an apple cart. In former GDR (East Germany) areas, plagued by joblessness since the western take-over just 25 years ago, there have been signs of a recovery in a few centres called “lighthouses,” with 6,600 VW workers in Zwickau (home of the GDR’s Trabant cars), 515 in Dresden, 3,250 making related Porsches in Leipzig and 4,700 BMW workers in Leipzig. How many will still have jobs next year, after 26 years of German reunification?

I also feel sorry for VW workers in Tennessee, whose billion dollar Passat plant, after big quarrels and giant subsidies, might now collapse. Perhaps Chattanooga should have stuck to its choo-choo!

There’s no predicting which big scandal company will be next.

Pharma again? More billionaire tax evaders? The plant poisoners and bee killers? Oil drillers? The giant new Berlin airport, named for Willy Brandt and originally scheduled to open in 2012, has been plagued by one delay after another, causing the political death of once-popular mayor Klaus Wowereit but filling the deep pockets of many an incompetent and/or crooked construction firm and “expert”. Now the butt of a thousand increasingly sour gags, it may just make it and open in 2017. Home owners in the region hope not!

Happily, there’s also movement in opposing directions, by which I do not mean the

milling crowds and annual fireworks and coloured lights marking the 25 years of German unity, with all the beer, brackwurst, bands and big shots tearfully singing “Deutschland über alles.”

Movement in opposing directions

No, I mean the September 19 counter-demonstration to the annual anti-abortion march of the fundamentalists, who want to revoke modest gains in women’s rights won for West Germans after the downfall of the GDR (which had full freedom of choice, with abortions and all birth control expenses fully covered by medical insurance). Our two parades almost matched theirs in size, although they bussed in gimlet-eyed “baby-defenders” from all over Germany and maybe Poland. We had a jolly crowd, with hard-hitting but often funny, daring posters and banners, and our parades were cheered along by nearly all passers-by.

I also mean the protest march near Ramstein on September 26. This, HQ of the United States Air Forces in Europe, US Air Forces in Africa and HQ of NATO’s Allied Air Command, is the biggest US military air base outside home territory, with 35,000 in uniform that guide the drones on their death missions!

The demonstrators, organised by the Left party and many peace organisations, carried posters and banners which were less jolly than the ones in Berlin but equally determined: “No to the Killer Drones!” “This Is Where Murder Is Organised,” “Allies Go Away,” “Out of NATO” or simply “For Tolerance and Peace.” Most of the media was sarcastic about the small number, but getting almost 2,000 people, mostly young, to this out-of-the-way site about 25 miles from the French border was an encouraging success and may help bridge fissures long troubling the peace movement.

One added motivation: a few weeks earlier the US Army Europe, with 1,500 parachute jumpers, ran an exercise called Swift Response, training for “a multinational airborne joint forcible entry operation across four European nations ... the largest allied airborne training event on the continent since the end of the Cold War.” Its aim: “... to integrate multiple allied nations’ high-readiness forces to operate as a cohesive team and demonstrate the alliance’s capacity to rapidly deploy and operate in support of maintaining a strong and secure Europe.” Soldiers from NATO nations

– Poland, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the UK and the US also trained far too close to Russia in Bulgaria and Romania. This might explain one big peace demonstration banner demanding “Peace with Russia – Not Closer to World War III”.

Another big demonstration in Berlin, now in the offing for October 10, may have lots of balloons but no parachute jumpers. It will protest planned trade agreements between the European Union and Canada (CETA) and between the EU and the US, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Both, like TPP, grant immense power to giant companies, with inconspicuous arbitrators cutting at labour gains and ecological rulings against poisonous insecticides or dubious genetic changes and whatever else obstructs huge profits. Many unions, environmental groups, the Left and many Greens want a giant turnout to warn the government against signing any such treaties.

It is hard to make predictions about Angela Merkel.

Will she and Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, a Social Democrat, fight on for the trade treaties, resisting growing pressure from the people? And will they dance along with the threatening music blared at Putin, or further tread the thin line between floor thumpers in their own ranks, with bellicose pressure from Washington, and their haunting, often haunted hunt for some form of compromise in Ukraine and Syria, placating business interests hoping to forestall a backward lurch in German economic dominance (with VW the latest and biggest worry).

And, after zigzagging on the question of the huge wave of immigrants from the Near East, Africa and south eastern Europe, will she bow to mounting pressure, first to restrict European refugees, mainly Roma people (Gypsies), viciously discriminated against in or around former Yugoslavia, which was split into today’s weak fragments under pressure – and some heavy air strikes – from Germany? Merkel is feeling the hot breath of far right hate-mongers, in and outside her own party; will she bow to them or keep on that fine line? As in the US, they can get out of hand and become dangerous!

After 25 years of unification, annexation or occupation, or whatever people call it, the only safe predictions in Germany still seem to be the ones about lunar eclipses.

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Sister unions need us

Stephen Smellie

The Turkish government could teach David Cameron a thing or two about trade union laws designed to stop unions organising.

While we campaign to stop the Trade Union Bill in Britain, in Turkey the unions deal with laws which determine what union workers can join, and some are banned from striking. The government of AKP President Recep Tayyip Erdogan promotes a rival union confederation, Memur Sen, which competes with every other union to show how loyal it is to the government and as a result members of this “yellow union” get promoted before members of any other union.

In addition those union activists in the progressive unions of Disk and Kesk confederations suffer police harassment and where they take part in the social movements or support the Kurdish-led Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) they face physical attack and arrest.

On a recent delegation to Diyarbakir in the Kurdish south east of Turkey this point was highlighted by a member from the Kesk-affiliated health union SES, who reported that his branch office had been raided by the police, the door smashed in and staff and members terrorised on September 21. The police claimed to be looking for terrorists.

The Turkish government has over the past few weeks unleashed a violent attack on Kurdish activists in Turkey. This has been alongside the aerial bombardment of Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) bases in Iraq.

As progressives who supported the peace process and gave support to the HDP in the June election, trade unionists in Diyarbakir have been drawn into this conflict.

Ramazan Kiziltepe, co-president of the Disk health union branch in Diyarbakir, told our delegation that the unions opposed war and that no one should die. However he said: “We are fighting government terrorism.”

Disk activist Zeynep Denirakger explained how she had visited the town of Cizre, which the army had kept under curfew for eight days and where snipers had shot people, including children, in the street and then fired on anyone going to help them. At least one of the children killed was the son of a Disk member and the union was now trying to organise material and psychological support for the family.

Union activists in Kesk, who are only allowed to recruit in the public sector, and Disk, who are only allowed to recruit in the private sector, are fearful that the current situation will get worse in the weeks running up to the re-called general election on November 1. They believe that the government is intent on using the increasing violence in an attempt to regain votes lost to the HDP and to take half the seats in parliament: a task made easier by the electoral system that denies any party with less than 10 percent of the vote nationally any seats.

Both Kiziltepe and Denirakger believe that unions outside Turkey have a role to play in supporting them in their struggle with the government.



The Scottish delegation meets with the metalworkers’ union DISK in Diyarbakir.

Kiziltepe said: “We are waiting for other trade unions in other countries to help us.”

In a recorded message, Denirakger – in halting English – appealed to workers elsewhere: “We don’t want in this land war anymore ... We ask for trade union solidarity from workers in Scotland and Britain.”

Sometimes international solidarity is more than passing motions at conferences and signing petitions on social media. The Turkish trade unions are in a struggle with an

anti-trade union government that uses war against its own citizens for electoral advantage. It is caught up in that war and the unions and their members are suffering as a result. Trade unions in Britain and the rest of Europe, can make a difference if they respond to the call from their sisters and brothers in Turkey.

Disk, Kesk and two other labour movement organisations (comprising engineers and doctors) have called a demonstration in Ankara for October 10 to protest for peace. Messages of support would be a start.

However, in the days before the November election visitors from British trade unions to their sister unions in Turkey would help to focus the world’s attention on the violence and human rights breaches they are suffering as they campaign for peace and for a democratic solution to the problems in Turkey and its Kurdish regions.

Stephen Smellie is chair of Unison Scotland’s social work issues group.
Morning Star ☘

Imperialism and the refugee disaster

Statement, CP of Denmark

At the moment, we are witnessing the worst refugee disaster since the Second World War. Millions are fleeing war and oppression. Others are trying to outrun death by starvation or escape abysmal poverty. The overwhelming majority reside as internal refugees in the stricken countries themselves or in neighbouring countries, but many are trying to reach Europe. Theirs is a dangerous journey, and many refugees drown en route or perish in other horrible ways.

The present government of Denmark, with the support of the rightist-national Danish People’s Party and the Social Democrats, refuses to share the responsibility for the fate of the refugees. On the contrary, the government holds that Denmark must aim to admit as few refugees as possible to the country.

This highly disgraceful attitude largely ignores that Denmark itself to a very considerable degree has contributed to creating the torrent of refugees.

The refugees essentially come from these countries:

Afghanistan; it will be remembered that in 1988 the present Prime Minister of Denmark, then chairman of the youth organisation of the liberal party Venstre, paid a visit to the Afghan Islamist terrorists and was photographed playing with an AK-47 assault rifle. The subsequent war in Afghanistan in which Denmark “naturally” participated produced death, destruction, and a large number of refugees.

Iraq, which earlier had a relatively stable non-Islamist rule. This rule was ended when Imperialism in the shape of the USA and several European NATO countries, among them Denmark, invaded Iraq in 2003. The result is well known: not a day passes without innocent people being killed, caught in skirmishes between various warring Islamist groups. Again, the consequence was a large number of refugees who fled Iraq to save their lives.

In Libya, NATO intervened, again with Denmark at the front. The Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was brutally murdered. The outcome was a completely split country with rival groups fighting each other for power. In this situation, thousands of people who had come from other regions of Africa to work in Libya have been caught in the middle and are forced to flee northward to Europe to save their lives.

Finally, NATO and the EU have contributed substantially to fanning the flames that grew into a violent civil war in Syria – a civil war that has cost innumerable lives and put millions of people to flight. By virtue of its membership of NATO and the EU, Denmark has participated in creating the torrent of refugees from Syria. Turkey, also a member of NATO, has given both direct and indirect support to ISIS (ISIL), and other US friends among the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, have supported various groups of “insurgents” fighting

to topple Syria’s democratically elected leader Bashar al-Assad.

The regions of origin

By far most refugees are housed in camps in poor neighbouring countries, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan. Only a relatively small number reaches Europe, and of these just a few continue to Denmark. Denmark bears a large part of the responsibility and blame for the ruin, killings and maimings which have hit the civilian population of the affected countries very hard. It is preposterous and disgusting that almost all parties in the Danish Parliament adamantly refuse to receive any more refugees and try to foist them off on poor countries in the region of origin instead.

Communists appeal

Now as before, we Communists point out that Capitalism with its Imperialism carries the blame for the refugee problem. We appeal to everybody to welcome the war refugees and help them in every way possible.

We will work to make the causes of war and destruction clear to the whole population.

We will work to create a broad and strong peace movement that is able to put a stop to wars and in this way prevent future refugee disasters.

**The Executive Committee
Communist Party of Denmark,
KPiD**



Not a day passes without innocent people being killed, caught in skirmishes between various warring Islamist groups.

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

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au



Letter from America

What if the price of your medication increased by 5,000 percent the next time you filled your prescription?

That's how much Martin Shkreli's Turing Pharmaceuticals jacked up the price on Daraprim – a pill commonly used to treat a parasitic infection in pregnant women or people with weakened immune systems.

And while Shkreli is said to be backtracking from the increase, price spikes like this one are not an isolated incident. According to a *Consumer Reports* poll, one-third of Americans who regularly take prescription medication for common conditions such as asthma and high blood pressure are seeing price hikes this year.

Turing Pharmaceuticals engaged in a disturbing *but technically legal* business strategy of buying up the rights to old, little-known drugs and marketing them as high-priced specialty drugs. In August, Senator Sanders and Representative Elijah Cummings uncovered that Valeant Pharmaceuticals had acquired the rights to two heart drugs – Isuprel and Nitropress – from another company and raised their prices by 525 percent and 212 percent respectively.

These prices are leaving Americans with tough choices – skipping next month's prescription, or forgoing other important expenses in order to afford these exorbitant prices – all the while pharmaceutical companies close out the year with some of the biggest profit margins in the national and global economy.

The Prescription Drug Affordability Act would restore some much-needed sanity to our health care. If passed, it would:

- Authorise the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies to bring down costs for Medicare drug benefits.
- Apply tough penalties on pharmaceutical companies that commit fraud

- Ban the practice of brand-name drugmakers paying competitors to keep lower-priced generic substitutes off the market
- Break down barriers that would finally allow consumers to import cheaper drugs from Canada
- Plain and simple, the quality of health care in this country will not improve if we allow pharmaceutical companies to continue exploiting our most vulnerable.

Thanks for standing with us.

The Watchdog.net team

Rally for refugees

I wonder if it has occurred to anyone in the Labor Party that they can also “wedge”. It can do this from the left. For instance, it could propose that Manus and Nauru be closed down immediately, followed by the other camps throughout this country. There is more than enough evidence that the offshore camps are centres of sickness, self-harm, and sexual assault.

What it needs for either major party to change is public pressure. That is why the Refugee Action

Coalition is having a major rally at Sydney Town Hall Square on Sunday 11th October at 2pm.

Anyone and everyone who believes in refugee rights are invited to be part of it. It is time we put pressure on the two major parties in every possible ethical way, to stop the cruelty, and to abide by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention we are signed up to. The time has come to draw a line under the unspeakable cruelty of indefinite “detention” (i.e. imprisonment) that Labor started in 1989, making it legal in 1992, and the Coalition has capitalised on.

See you at the rally on Sunday 11th October.

Stephen Langford
Sydney

End greyhound racing

One can only imagine the unmitigated pain and terror of rabbits, possums and piglets torn apart by dogs used for greyhound racing. It has been claimed that as many as ninety percent of “trainers” in NSW use living animals as bait to “blood” the dogs. That sadism is paralleled by reports that up to 17,000 young, healthy greyhounds

– 17,000! – are killed every year for the “crime” of not winning races. The greyhound racing industry, which deliberately churns out dogs and cavalierly dismisses the excess as “wastage,” must be banned.

Greyhounds are sociable dogs who crave the love and attention of a family, but when used in racing, most spend the vast majority of their lives in cramped cages.

Although they are extremely sensitive to temperature because of their lack of body fat and their thin coats, greyhounds are forced to race in extreme conditions – ranging from subzero temperatures to sweltering heat. Some trainers reportedly dope greyhounds with cocaine, caffeine, anabolic steroids and even Viagra.

The evidence released by the Special Commission of Inquiry makes it irrefutably clear that the entrenched cruelty in greyhound racing cannot be “fixed”. Regulations have already long failed the dogs.

This deadly cycle must end. Legislators must take decisive action to stop racing without delays or excuses.

Jason Baker
People for the
Ethical Treatment of Animals

Culture & Life

by
Nick Dearden

UN sustainable development goals miss the point

Not many people enjoy the existence of poverty. Some think it's inevitable, others that tackling it is politically impossible. But for those with ambition, an end to poverty is a worthy enough goal. Naturally, the self-congratulation was in full flow last month, as celebrities and world leaders gathered in New York to launch their latest effort to do just that, in the form of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

But something was missing in between the speeches and performances by the likes of Ed Sheeran, Beyoncé, Bill Gates and Meryl Streep. That thing is power. Because unless you understand that the poverty of some flows from the wealth and power of others, efforts to fight poverty will not truly work.

The SDGs consist of 17 objectives which aim to build a better planet – from eradicating hunger to building more sustainable cities. Each objective contains a number of targets which cover everything from having better public transport to helping artisanal fisherfolk get better access to markets.

The goals *do* represent the many dimensions of poverty – it isn't simply about a certain number of dollars a day. While some targets are limited or problematic (“preventing trade restrictions in agriculture” could cover a multitude of sins) others are very good (“encouraging local involvement in water management” and “improving the incomes of small farmers”).

The real problem is that this wish-list comes with no historical background of how we got here, and no political strategy for how we get out. As such, it relies on a mixture of more market and more technically competent governments. There's no sign that the economic model itself is broken – just that it needs some tuning.

Take one obvious gap: transnational corporations. They aren't mentioned in the SDGs, yet the power of corporations is fundamental to the staggering levels of inequality which afflict the world, and are at the centre of an economic model quite prepared to burn the planet in its drive for ever more profit. It is impossible to realise the targets of the SDGs without tackling corporate power.

Nor is there any acknowledgment of colonial history, of slavery, of racism, of desperately unfair terms of trade, of structural adjustment policies which flushed dozens of countries' economies down the drain only 30 years ago. Far from critiquing the control of the market, the SDGs exhort world leaders to “remove market distortions” and “ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets”.

The SDGs' answer to “hunger” is growing more food – despite the fact that we have more than enough food in the world to feed everyone. Technology plays a key role in the targets – for instance in the eradication of epidemics of HIV and malaria – but with no sign of how governments will improve the flow of

knowledge around the world without breaking the ever more ferocious intellectual property regime that allows corporate giants to monopolise that knowledge. More foreign investment is encouraged, but without a framework for controlling that investment, how is it supposed to benefit the majority?

In short, power doesn't exist in the SDGs. The chapter on inequality nowhere mentions that the problem of poverty is inseparable from the problem of super-wealth; that exploitation and the monopolisation of resources by the few is the cause of poverty.

Of course, this lack of analysis isn't accidental. In the world of fighting poverty, of “development”, corporations and the super-rich are no longer problems, but partners. How on earth will the SDGs be financed, especially since a global tax body has already been vetoed by rich countries three months ago? By big business, of course. With a captured public sector unable to fund the SDG promises, big business will happily come in, with state backing, to run healthcare and education, communications and transport, food and water. The market is the answer.

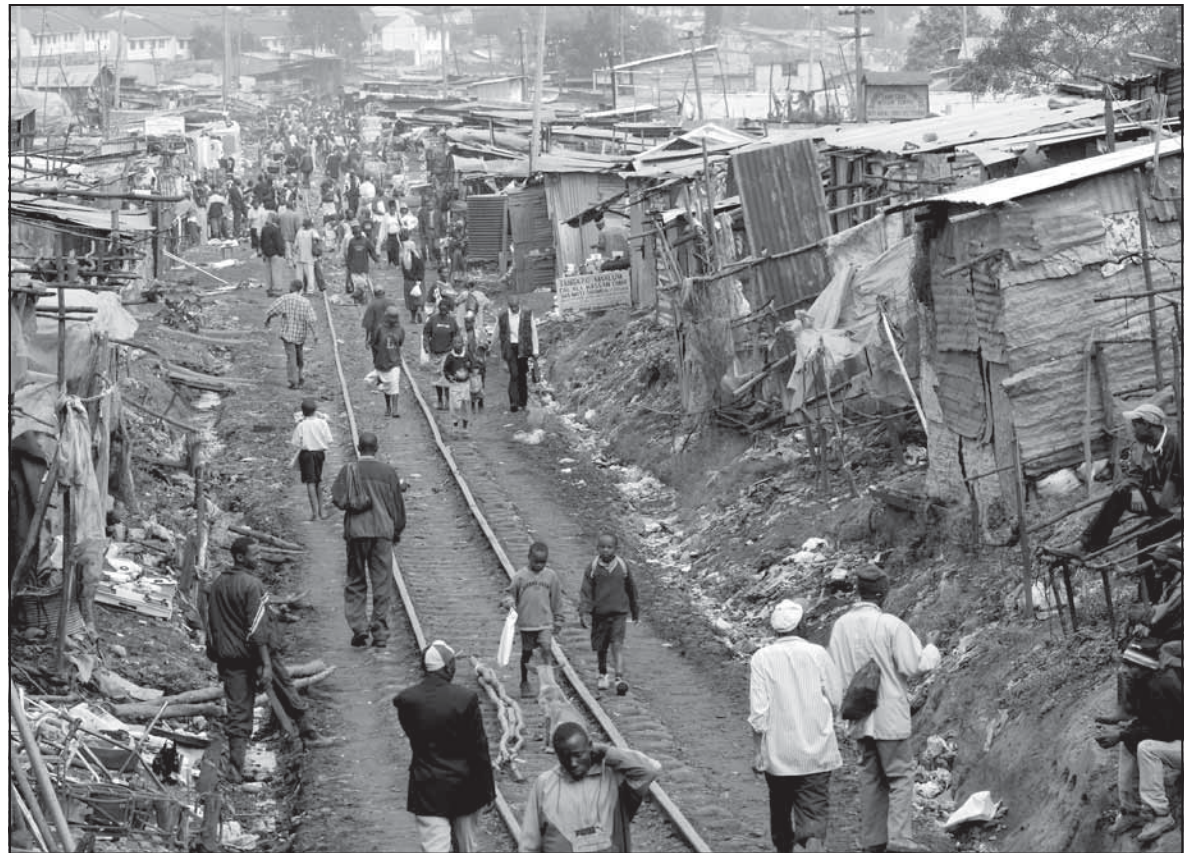
Perhaps it's unfeasible to think that the UN could advocate such seemingly radical proposals as democratic control of the world's resources? Actually, that doubt shows how far backwards we've gone. Because in the mid-1970s the UN adopted a policy which, while

less detailed (mercifully, it fits on a few pages), laid out a far better analysis of the world's problems, with a clearer set of solutions for moving forward.

It seems incredible now that the New International Economic Order (NIEO) was really UN policy, but it passed the General Assembly in May 1974 and was regarded as much too moderate by many campaigners of the time. The NIEO declared that “the remaining vestiges of alien and colonial domination, foreign occupation, racial discrimination, apartheid and neo-colonialism in all its forms continue to be among the greatest obstacles to ... full emancipation and progress”. In an era when few people knew what a transnational corporation was, its recommendations included the “regulation and supervision of the activities of transnational corporations”, as well as radical reform of the global trade regime.

The world has changed and the NIEO is not a blueprint for a perfect planet. But it highlights the poverty of “development” thinking, the pinnacle of which is represented by the SDGs. The answer to world poverty couldn't be found among the development professional and celebrities in New York last month. Rather it will be found among the many thousands of activists, community organisations and social movements who are really confronting power in the world. Let's join them.

New Internationalist ✪



Poverty in Kenya.



**Rob Gowland
previews
Public
Television**

Sunday October 11 –
Saturday October 17

The US/Eurocentric view of the world that is relentlessly followed by television in this country – and in the rest of the developed world – is exemplified by the new four part series on SBS, *The Seventies* (SBS from Sunday, October 11 at 8.30pm). The seventies occurred all over the world (it's only a date after all) but for this American series, it's about "the individuals and events that influenced and shaped a decade that had a profound impact on America and the world." For the writers of the series, the rest of the world is either admiring of US military adventures or a breeding ground for terrorism, the growth of which has nothing to do with those military adventures. Of course not!

In this week's episode, the US goes down to defeat in Vietnam, the economy tanks, and the right-wing opportunist in the White House oversteps the mark (with the help of the CIA) and has to resign. And although the program tries to put a positive pro-US spin on it, this was the decade when the US turned its attention to fostering terrorism as an excuse to launch attacks, either military or subversive, on other countries.

Watching *Angry White and Proud* (ABC2 Wednesday, October 14 at 9.20pm) is rather like sticking your head in an unflushed toilet. It takes an up close and personal look at some of the far-right political groups in the

UK today. For the most part poorly educated, they are fearful of changes to the culture they grew up in and their combination of fear and anger renders them able to respond only in terms of violence. They desperately need to be with like-minded friends to give them mob courage, and like nothing better than a good stoush at the end of the day to close off an outing.

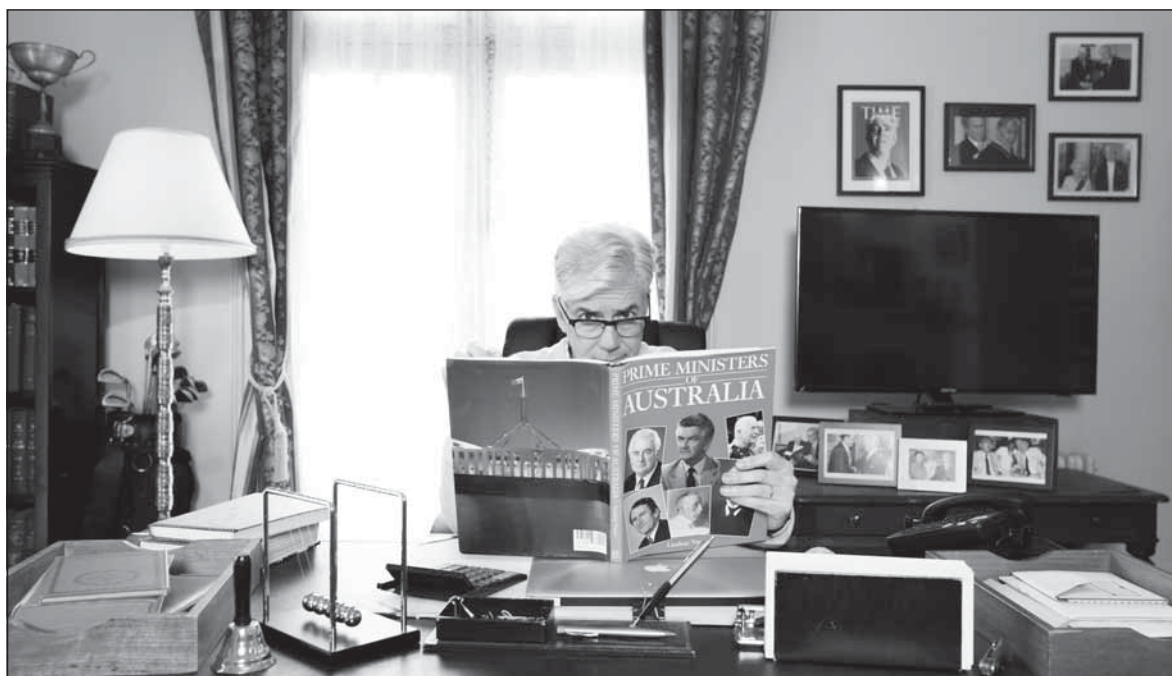
Their fear and consequent hatred of Muslims, including their food, clothing and religion, is deeply felt and quite irrational. But it is now a way of life. Substitute Muslims for Jews and they are the same bully-boys that Hitler gathered to his racist banner. And they would do the same things to the people they hate as Hitler's thugs did to the people they hated.

The filmmaker, Jamie Roberts, clearly thought he was making a powerful exposé, but I have the distinct feeling that the people who will watch it with real pleasure are the fascist goons in his film. He could have made most of the same points with a study of the young anti-fascists who confront these Nazi wannabes whenever the British Right attempts a rally or march. They at least have a real understanding of what their politics are all about.

Resorting to bum and fart jokes and other even less enchanting forms of scatological humour is not generally a sign of sophisticated comic writing. It is, however, the main element in the six-part comedy series *Sammy J and Randy in Rickett's Lane* (ABC Wednesdays from October 14 at 9.30pm). A sitcom starring a man and a life-size puppet, it is also graced by excruciating songs sung by the two leads.

I could only stomach part of it before I had to turn it off.

I was more hopeful of *The ExPM* (ABC Wednesdays from October 14 at 9:00pm), the six-part comedy series starring Shaun Micallef as the fictitious former PM Andrew Dugdale. Dugdale's popularity is neatly summed



Shaun Micallef is *The Ex-PM* (ABC Wednesdays from October 14 at 9:00pm).

up by the spate of eggs that splatter his car every day.

He is making a pretence of writing his memoirs, his family almost defines "dysfunctional", his aide Sonny is banging his wife, his body-guard who doubles as his driver is angling for a job somewhere else (almost anywhere else in fact), and he's been landed with an inquisitive and over enthusiastic ghost writer for the memoirs he's being pushed into writing named Ellen (played by Lucy Honigman). She has an unhelpfully insatiable appetite for the truth.

Each of the six episodes is a self-contained story. I have only seen the first episode, but although it had its amusing moments, I was hoping for more wit, more humour with real bite. Perhaps next week's will be better?

The comedy series *Inside Amy Schumer* (ABC Thursday, October 15 at 10.05pm) is clearly aimed at the "youth market", which you can apparently catch with jokes about herpes, eating a guy's face and going to the can.

I found it tiresome and rather desperate.

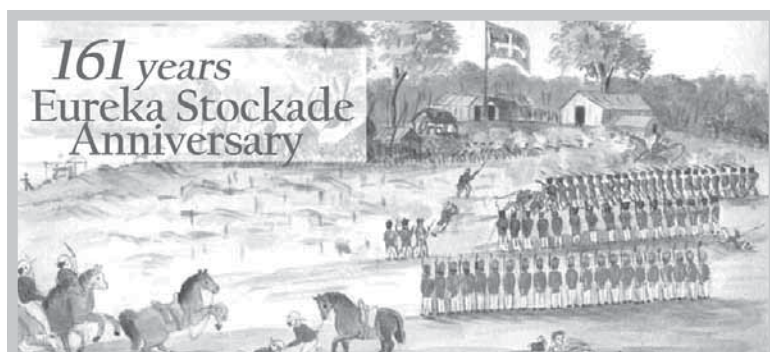
The British panel game *Never Mind The Buzzcocks* (ABC2 Thursdays from October 15 at 9.35pm) is clearly cheap to produce, which probably explains the fact that it is in its 26th series in the UK. Personally, I think that our local variant, *Spicks and Specks*, is more watchable by far.

Like the last-named, *Never Mind The Buzzcocks* is basically a quiz show about popular music. The panels have guest members each week from the worlds of music, TV and comedy but the captains remain the same each week, namely, Phill Jupitus and Noel Fielding who can both in their different ways be very amusing. The host is a guest celebrity each week.

It passes time if you have nothing better to do (like read a book). ✪



Never Mind The Buzzcocks (ABC2 Thursdays from October 15 at 9.35pm).



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IN THE PUB**

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*;

October 22

HIDING CHILD ABUSE IN DETENTION CENTRES: THE HEALTH, MORAL AND LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS

David Issacs, Prof, Paediatrician, Health Assessment for Refugee Kids, Westmead Children's Hospital;
Ebony Birchall, Lawyer in the Medical Law Practice Group of Slater and Gordon, Sydney;

October 29

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS: IS OUR MOST IMPORTANT SOCIAL INSTITUTION SUSTAINABLE? WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GONSKI PLANS UNDER ABBOTT & SHORTEN?

Raewyn Connell, Prof, Education Department, University of Sydney;
Maurie Mulheron, President NSW Teachers Federation;

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Editorial Office
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Editor: Tom Pearson

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"Imperialist intervention in Syria must end now"

Speech of World Federation of Trade Unions General Secretary George Mavrikos at the International Conference of WFTU and GFTU in Solidarity With the Syrian People held in Damascus, Syria on September 13-14, 2015.

It is my honour to greet this very successful International Conference organised jointly by WFTU and the General Federation of Syria and ICATU in order to express solidarity with the Syrian people and the Syrian working class.

Dear President of GFTU, brother Jamal Kadri, on behalf of the members and friends of the WFTU who live and struggle in 126 countries of the five continents, I convey to you our honest, fraternal and international salutations.

We appreciate that our invitation was accepted by 230 trade unionists from 43 countries representing the trade union organisations with millions of members.

Despite difficult conditions they did not hesitate to travel to Damascus to be on the side of the Syrian people who the last five years have suffered under the target of imperialism.

We are here:

- To demand that the foreign intervention in Syria ends now!
- To demand the immediate end of the blockade
- To demand the immediate cessation of economic sanctions and discriminations against Syria.

The World Federation of Trade Unions, from the first moment of the outburst of this methodically planned and orchestrated crisis in Syria, openly expressed its support for the Syrian people and the Syrian workers. We did not follow the flow. Against the massive propaganda manufactured by the USA, by the European Union, by their allies; a propaganda that the International Organizations and the ITUC accepted and promoted; a propaganda that some workers parties and trade union organisations fell for. Against this propaganda the WFTU was opposed and we exposed the truth.

We informed the workers around the world. We clearly stated that in Syria, terrorist mercenaries are working for the destabilisation of the country, serving the interests of the US, the EU and their monopolies.

The WFTU supports the struggle of the Syrian people. In an organised way and on every podium we had in the international sphere we projected the truth contrary to the lies of the mass media, the USA, the NATO, the EU, the ITUC. The WFTU contributed in forming public opinion and creating a movement of solidarity with the Syrian people. From the first minute until this International



World Federation of Trade Unions General Secretary George Mavrikos.

Conference we remained stable in our fraternal position on the side of the Syrian people and we defend the right of the Syrian people to decide by themselves with democratic procedures for their present and future without foreign intervention.

The WFTU in its 70 years of struggle since 1945 has proved ethically and practically its solidarity with the Arab workers, the workers of all the world and the public who struggle for their just demands. The WFTU was on the front line of the struggle and international trade union coordination for the achievement of important socioeconomic demands of the workers such as better wages, better working hours, social security rights, working women's rights, trade union and democratic rights.

For health and safety at workplaces, for healthcare, for education countering illiteracy, for a better quality of life, the WFTU at the same time defended the struggle of the people in the Arab countries against colonialism and against imperialism and fought for the victory of their struggle.

There are dozens of statements of WFTU, interventions in international organisations, protests against persecutions, tortures and executions of militants.

Protests towards governments and appeals for the expression of international solidarity were organised and coordinated in various forms. All these reflect the position of the WFTU in all crucial moments as well as daily problems of the Arab trade unions and Arab workers.

The WFTU supported the struggle of the Algerian people in November 1954 for the recognition and the independence of Algeria and the withdrawal of the French troops, in the struggle of the Iraqi people for the recognition of the newly founded state, in the struggle of the Egyptian people for the autonomy of the Suez Canal.

Also the struggle of the Syrian people against imperialist aggression, in the struggle of the Lebanese people, the struggle of the people of Jordan, Libya against the military operations of the Anglo-American troops, the struggle of the people of Sudan, of the people of Aden for independence and the creation of Yemen. In addition the struggle of the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation and imperialism for an independent and democratic Palestinian State. And later on against the plot for the New Middle East and the imperialist wars in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Libya.

In the same way today, from this hall, we unite our voices with the the people and the working class of Syria, with the workers in all Arab countries and we denounce the government of USA, the governments of the European Union countries, NATO for the invasive policy adopted undermining the freedom of choice of the Syrian people and looking to plunder its natural resources and wealth.

Their objective is to fragment the Arab states, to fragment the Arab people and to profit from the exploitation of the wealth-producing resources and transportation. They want the Arabs divided, humiliated, surrendered; they

want the Arab workers to be economic migrants in Europe and the USA and to work for meagre wages in terrible conditions.

We express our respect for the religious beliefs, culture, the great traditions of all Arabs and appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to coordinate our struggle against the imperialists and against foreign invasions, against the plot for the new Middle East with states that are puppets of the USA.

Based on the strong foundation of the 70 years of internationalist solidarity in favour of the interests of the Arab workers and the people of the Arab countries, dear brothers and sisters from the Arab organisations, you know very well that the WFTU will never let you down, never give up on you, never sell you out. On the contrary, we are your stable, consistent, trustworthy ally. The WFTU is your family, your organisation. This family we want to strengthen all together; make it more strong against the plan for the new Middle East, more strong for the interests of the workers.

We appeal to you for unity and action, for unity in action against imperialism. Against privatisation of the strategic sectors of the economy, for labour, social and democratic rights for all, for social and economic development based on the needs of the people and not profit. We call upon you for unity in action in order to protect the rights of our people to decide for themselves their present and future.

In conclusion of this short greeting, allow us to express our fraternal solidarity with the migrant workers and the refugees who seek a better future in Europe. The imperialist interventions generate poverty, death, refugees and migrants.

In Europe, today, governments and the employers exploit the refugees, profit from them and treat them as modern slaves. We will continue our struggle so that we can all live in our countries peacefully without foreign interventions and without the barbarity of capitalism.

We demand that the discriminations end now against refugees and migrants.

Thank you ✪

Their objective is to fragment the Arab states, to fragment the Arab people and to profit from the exploitation of the wealth-producing resources and transportation.



Communist Party of Australia

www.cpa.org.au

cpa@cpa.org.au

General Secretary
Bob Briton
email: gensec@cpa.org.au

Party President
Vinnie Molina
email: president@cpa.org.au

Adelaide Bob Briton postal: PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC, SA 5015
phone: 0418 894 366 email: sa@cpa.org.au web: www.adelaidecommunists.org
Brisbane postal: PO Box 6012, Manly, Qld 4179 phone: 0499 476 540
email: bris@cpa.org.au
Canberra Ruben Duran phone: 0421 049 602 email: act@cpa.org.au
Melbourne Andrew Irving
postal: Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall, Lygon St, Carlton Sth Vic 3053
phone: 03 9639 1550 email: cpavic@cpa.org.au

Head Office (Sydney)

postal: 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

phone: 02 9699 8844 fax: 02 9699 9833 email: info@cpa.org.au

Newcastle email: newcastle@cpa.org.au

Perth Vinnie Molina postal: PO Box 98, North Perth, WA 6906
phone: 0419 812 872 email: perth@cpa.org.au

Riverina Allan Hamilton
postal: 2/57 Cooper St, Cootamundra, NSW 2590 email: riverina@cpa.org.au

Sydney Wayne Sonter
postal: 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010 phone: 02 9699 8844

Tasmania Bob Briton phone: 0418 894 366 email: tas@cpa.org.au

