



# Damning evidence

## Australian officials' involvement in transnational crime

### Statement: Amnesty International

In an open letter to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull published in newspapers on October 29, Amnesty International stated it has "uncovered credible evidence of serious crimes and abuses committed in secret under the Australian government's Operation Sovereign Borders." The following is the organisation's full report:

Transparency and accountability to the public is vital to making sure that governments live up to the principles and values they claim to uphold, such as tackling crime and protecting the lives of those seeking asylum.

However, new evidence gathered by Amnesty International suggests that Australia's secretive maritime border control operations now resemble a lawless venture with evidence of criminal activity by government officials, including pay-offs to boat crews and abusive treatment of women, men and children seeking asylum.

#### New report reveals damning evidence

Through interviews with asylum-seekers, a boat crew and Indonesian police, a new report – "By hook or by crook" – exposes evidence that, in May 2015, Australian officials working as part of Operation Sovereign Borders paid US\$32,000 to six crew who had been taking 65 people seeking asylum to New Zealand and told them to take the people to Indonesia instead. The Australians also provided maps showing the crew where to land in Indonesia.

Witness testimonies backed by video footage reveal how the intervention by Australian officials endangered the lives of the people seeking asylum by transferring them to different boats that did not have enough fuel, and how the incident fits into a wider pattern of abusive so-called "turnbacks" or "pushbacks" of boats.

#### Questions of a second incident in July

The report also raises questions about whether Australian officials paid money to the crew of another boat turned back in July.

"Australia has, for months, denied that it paid for people smuggling, but our report provides detailed evidence pointing to a very different set of events," said Anna Shea, Refugee Researcher at Amnesty International.

"All of the available evidence points to Australian officials having committed a



Asylum seekers being transferred to the HMAS Wollongong. (Photo: Australian Defence Force: Sgt Rob Nyffenegger)

transnational crime by, in effect, directing a people-smuggling operation, paying a boat crew and then instructing them on exactly what to do and where to land in Indonesia. People-smuggling is a crime usually associated with private individuals, not governments – but here we have strong evidence that Australian officials are not just involved, but directing operations.

"In the two incidents documented by Amnesty International, Border Force and Navy officials also put the lives of dozens of people at risk by forcing them onto poorly equipped vessels. When it comes to its treatment of those seeking asylum, Australia is becoming a lawless state."

#### May 2015 incident

Since this incident was first reported in the media, Australian government officials have repeatedly denied paying people-smugglers and have claimed the border patrols were responding to a boat in distress at sea.

However, the crew members of the boat – interviewed by Amnesty International in Indonesia in August where they are currently

in police custody – as well as the passengers, whom Amnesty International also interviewed, all say the boat was not in trouble and that they never made a distress call.

Australian border control officials initially approached the boat on May 17, 2015, and then again on May 22. Most of the passengers – including a pregnant woman, two seven-year-olds and an infant – boarded a Border Force vessel after being told they could bathe there. Once aboard Australian officials held the people in two hot, overcrowded cells for almost a week. Some were denied medical care or access to their own medication.

#### Claims of pay-off to crew

All of the available evidence points to Australian officials having committed a transnational crime by, in effect, directing a people-smuggling operation, paying a boat crew and then instructing them on exactly what to do and where to land in Indonesia.

On the original boat, the six crew claim that Australian officials gave them a total of US\$32,000. At least one person seeking asylum witnessed the transaction and gave his

testimony to Amnesty International. Indonesian police confirmed to Amnesty International that they found this amount of money on the crew when they arrested them on arrival in the country.

Amnesty International's investigation is based on interviews with the 62 adults seeking asylum, the six crew members and Indonesian officials. The organisation has also accessed crucial documentary evidence, including photos and a video taken by the passengers themselves during their journey. Indonesian police also showed an Amnesty International researcher the money they confiscated from the six crew – in crisp US100-dollar bills.

On May 31 Australian officials forced the crew and people seeking asylum onto two different and smaller boats, and the crew were given instructions to go to Rote Island in Indonesia as well as a map showing landing sites. The two boats had little fuel and one ran out of fuel while at sea. The terrified passengers were forced to do a dangerous mid-sea transfer onto the remaining boat and were eventually rescued by Indonesian locals after hitting a reef.

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## Guardian

Issue 1709

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## Flying the nuclear kite

Malcolm Turnbull's disagreements with former Prime Minister Tony Abbott over climate change were widely reported. Abbott is, at heart, a climate change denier who sought to do nothing about the looming disaster under cover of his "direct action plan". Turnbull, still very much the merchant banker, wanted to tackle soaring emission levels with a market based "solution" of doubtful value that favours big corporations and dominant, capitalist economies. The new PM is still trying to promote a new, more sophisticated, post-Abbott image. Australia has a science minister again, for example, with Christopher Pine adding the portfolio to a brace of others.

Australians would be ill-advised to accept Turnbull's "green" credentials. An indication of his approach and undeserved reputation on environmental issues was the recent appointment of Australia's new Chief Scientist, Alan Finkel. The appointee projects a good image. His home is powered entirely by renewables. He looks forward to a fossil-fuel-free future and as speedy an exit for coal as possible. But Dr Finkel is also an advocate of nuclear power as part of the future energy mix in Australia.

The nuclear industry has never been popular in Australia. The ALP's anti-uranium mining stance was broken by industry pressure, not popular demand. The Liberal Party has tip-toed around its pro-nuclear platform, which includes nuclear power generation. The Howard government got a fright in 2006 when it appointed former Telstra chief Ziggy Switkowski to review the nuclear power option. Switkowski's recommendation for up to 25 nuclear power stations near major coastal cities had Howard & Co running for cover.

No doubt Dr Finkel will continue efforts in his new job for the rehabilitation of nuclear energy in the eyes of a public keen to embrace renewable sources such as wind and solar. The chief scientist's last post was as Chancellor of Monash University. Academia has been a stomping ground for pro-nuclear advocates in recent times. Their voices have been added to those of obvious stakeholders, such as uranium mining companies. The industry has fallen on hard times following the Fukushima disaster. Naturally, people the world over don't want to embrace that sort of risk.

Dr Finkel's appointment suits Turnbull's image-boosting campaign in other ways, too. As the former chief scientist, Professor Ian Chubb, said of his successor - "He is a scientist with the mindset of an entrepreneur. He is a businessman with the insights of a researcher." He has also been described as a "serial entrepreneur" with a number of more or less successful business ventures to his name. He wants to do something about the paucity of funding for bringing technological developments to market. The appointment of long-time venture capitalist Larry Marshall to head the CSIRO was made in the same pro-business spirit.

While clearly wanting to look less of a philistine on the environment than Abbott, the truth is that the "nimbleness" Turnbull seeks is the crushing of unions to provide a cheap, "flexible" workforce. He is quick to hose down suggestions the coal industry should be winding down now, or its growth subject to a moratorium. "Coal is a very important part, a very large part, the largest single part, in fact, of the global energy mix and likely to remain that way for a very long time ...," Turnbull said.

The federal government has made a submission to South Australia's Nuclear Fuel Cycle Royal Commission supporting the idea of reprocessing spent fuel rods from overseas and re-exporting them. It is claimed the risky venture could be a nice little earner for the economically stricken state. Others are pushing for a nuclear waste dump to receive nuclear waste from around the world.

With the Paris Climate Change Conference due to start at the end of the month, it is looking very unlikely that the Turnbull government will bring anything to it that anyone would describe as "innovative". It's inevitable that the government, along with its senior allies, will trot out the same pro-corporate agenda that got the planet into the current predicament. It is up to the progressive people of the world to press hard for a future based on renewable energy sources and other changes that get to the core question of a new social system. Needless to say, this won't be handed down from above.

## PRESS FUND

Some right-wing politicians are expert at corrupting the English language for their own ends. They create new terms to obscure the real implications of their policies, like "incentivation" and "escalation". Sometimes they use an existing word to discredit political opponents. They're now referring to terrorists as having undergone "radicalisation", thereby associating anyone who wants to radically alter society, particularly communists, with the promotion of terrorism - even in the case of people who've spent much of their lives involved in anti-war campaigns. At the *Guardian* we believe in using language to expose reality, not to distort it. But we need contributions to the Press Fund, which helps us cover our production costs, so please, if you possibly can, send us something for the next issue. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

MH \$20, Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$40 Progressive total \$5,580

## Palestine - awake the world

Steven Katsineris

**"Young Palestinians do not go out to murder Jews because they are Jews, but because we are their occupiers, their torturers, their jailers, the thieves of their land and water, their exilers, the demolishers of their homes, the blockers of their horizon." Amira Hass.**

I hope that recent events in the Israeli occupied West Bank have awakened more people to what's really going on in Palestine and has helped them to clearly see who are the oppressors and who are the oppressed in this situation.

And that this will embolden more people to speak up and do

something to help and support the Palestinian people. Because Palestinians have already suffered far too much, for far too long, the loss of their homeland, displacement, ethnic cleansing, dispossession, cruel abuses, atrocities and hundreds of thousands of deaths.

The west cannot remain indifferent to the plight of the Palestinian people and be silent because Jews were persecuted by others during the Second World War. Why must Palestinians continue to pay the terrible price for this past tragedy which was nothing to do with them. An injustice committed against one people does not justify an injustice inflicted against another people. Without justice, respect and the restoration of

Palestinian rights there will be no real peace in Palestine.

Let's not ignore cruel repression or allow the maiming and deaths of thousands more Palestinian children, women and men to go unnoticed without doing something to stop this ongoing gross mistreatment. The Palestinians deserve the utmost empathy and solidarity of all people of conscience and for all those concerned about righteousness to act and show support.

To witness such Israeli human rights abuses and other brutal crimes and not speak out is blatantly morally wrong. Our voices and actions can make a positive difference in ending this heartbreaking catastrophe. ☘

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## The July incident

"By hook or by crook" documents another case of possible payment by Australian officials to a boat crew to smuggle people to Indonesia in July 2015. This case, unlike the May 2015 incident, has not received widespread media coverage. In this case Australian officials again appear to have directed the crew of a boat to take people to Rote Island in Indonesia. Passengers who were on the boat told Amnesty International that they were intercepted by the Australian Navy and Border Force on July 25, and then put onto a new boat on August 1. By this time the boat crew had two new bags that the passengers had not seen before. When the passengers became suspicious and threatened to open the bags the Australians repeatedly told them not to.

These incidents took place in the context of Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders, a military-led border control operation launched in 2013 to stop anyone - including refugees and people seeking asylum - from reaching Australia irregularly by boat.

## Call for Royal Commission

Operation Sovereign Borders, far from saving lives, has become synonymous with abuse of some of the world's most vulnerable people.

Amnesty International is calling for a Royal Commission into Operation Sovereign Borders, to investigate and report on allegations of criminal and unlawful acts committed by Australian government officials.

Despite persistent government claims that Operation Sovereign Borders is designed to "save life at sea," Amnesty International and many others have documented an alarming pattern of abusive and illegal pushbacks by the Australian authorities.

Other people seeking asylum in Indonesia told Amnesty International how they had been involved in pushbacks at sea by Australian officials, who they said used verbal and physical abuse against those on board boats.

Such turnbacks violate the principle of non-refoulement, which says refugees cannot be sent back to countries where they are at risk, and also deny people the right to have their asylum claims assessed.

"Operation Sovereign Borders, far from saving lives, has become synonymous with abuse of some of the world's most vulnerable people," said Anna Shea. "Australia must once and for all start taking its international obligations towards refugees seriously. All people seeking asylum deserve to have their claims fairly dealt with. And instead of continuing with turnbacks Australia must engage in effective dialogue to improve regional protections for vulnerable populations in the Asia-Pacific region, and expand safe and legal routes for people to reach safety."

## Background

The UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (Convention) sets out states' legal obligations to cooperate to prevent and combat transnational organised crime. The Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (Smuggling Protocol), which supplements the Convention, requires states to prevent and combat the smuggling of migrants and protect the rights of smuggled persons. Australia has ratified both the Convention and the Smuggling Protocol. The Smuggling Protocol requires that signatories criminalise the smuggling of migrants, which is defined as "the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party

of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident".

People-smuggling is a transnational crime, though people who are smuggled are not criminals, and international law forbids states from penalising asylum-seekers solely for the manner of their entry into a country.

Under the Smuggling Protocol, the modes of commission - in other words, the ways in which someone can be found responsible - of a smuggling offence include committing an offence, attempting to commit an offence, participating as an accomplice in an offence, and organising or directing others to commit an offence.

## Summary of events

The evidence collected by Amnesty International about the events of May 2015 indicates that on or about May 24, Australian officials appear to have organised or directed the crew to commit a people-smuggling offence. It was under Australian officials' instruction and with their material assistance (including two boats, fuel, maps and GPS) that the offence of smuggling people into Indonesia took place. The mode of entry into Indonesia that, according to the crew, the Australian officials directed them to follow - landing at identified points in Rote Island rather than presenting themselves to Indonesian border officials and complying with procedures for entry by boat to Indonesia - amounts to illegal entry within the terms of the Smuggling Protocol. The US\$32,000 constitutes a financial benefit to the crew to procure the illegal entry. The Australian officials who paid the crew and instructed them to land on Rote Island in May 2015 may also have participated as accomplices in the transnational crime of people-smuggling. ☘

Something to say? Write to the Editor!

email: [tpearson@cpa.org.au](mailto:tpearson@cpa.org.au)

# Support the rebuilding of your ABC

The incoming Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull promised a “more innovative, open and outward-looking Australia”. Such a country, though, needs a fully independent and properly resourced national broadcaster.

Damage to the ABC during the Abbott government years (and while Malcolm Turnbull was Communications Minister) has been extensive. Despite pre-election promises, cuts to the ABC have already resulted in some 500 talented employees being lost to us, plus hundreds of millions of dollars taken from operational and programming budgets.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) condemned the ABC’s decision to cut another 29 workers last month from its Technology division, a decision forced by the government’s ongoing attack on the important services the ABC provides for all Australians.

Those staff cuts came on top of the 12 Technology jobs axed by the ABC in September. More than 430 jobs have now been cut since the ABC’s budget was slashed by \$254 million in May and November last year.

CPSU ABC section secretary Sinddy Ealy said: “This is an illogical decision by ABC managers who don’t understand that short-term

savings will come at a long-term cost to the needs of the Australian public and the productivity of those ABC staff who remain.”

The ABC has never been more reliant on technology, yet in just two months the ABC axed 42 jobs and sacked some of the most technically experienced workers the broadcaster has. At the same time they are creating new tiers of upper management roles to oversee fewer workers.

“Unfortunately this decision means there are likely to be more technical glitches and interruptions to programming as a result of this decision,” said Ms Ealy. The CPSU is concerned that the cracks are already starting to show and there’s only so much the hardworking ABC staff who remain can do to paper over them.

The ABC’s ongoing funding shortfall means many of its operating systems are not compatible. Experienced and senior technologists are needed to make sure the ABC’s systems literally work together so that programs make it to air.

“The harsh and unreasonable cuts to ABC funding were announced while Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had charge of the Communications portfolio. These job cuts are the latest sign that those cuts are unsustainable and should be reversed,” Ms Ealy said.



“The harsh and unreasonable cuts to ABC funding were announced while Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had charge of the Communications portfolio.”

## The cuts

- Direct cuts of \$254 million, leading to mass redundancies – nearly 500 people – many highly creative
- The centralisation of broadcast services, disconnecting and disadvantaging regional and rural Australia
- The loss of the Australia Network

contract and closure of overseas bureaux, restricting access to international news

- Less exposure to the work of the creative producers, directors, musicians and artists.

Australians are losing out and the ABC risks failing its Charter to provide innovative and comprehensive broadcast services and programs that contribute to a sense of

national identity. Added to that, some media organisations continue to run a relentless campaign to denigrate and undermine Australia’s vital National Institution that is the ABC.

Clearly, Malcolm Turnbull’s accession to the top job does not mean all is now well. Remember that, as Communications Minister, he took part in the budget cuts and attacks on the ABC’s independence. ✪

## Action urged on NT report

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) has called for urgent action to address issues raised in the NT Children’s Commissioner’s alarming report into incidents at the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre in August, 2014.

NATSILS chair Shane Duffy said the report provides indisputable evidence of a system that has failed, and catalogues numerous breaches of the *NT Youth Justice Act*.

The report shows that:

- children were tear-gassed when no meaningful attempt had been made to negotiate a peaceful outcome without the use of force;

- solitary confinement was used in breach of the *Youth Justice Act*;
- the conditions in which children were held were inhumane;
- hoods and handcuffs were used on children indiscriminately; and
- the public were misled about what happened.

One of the youth justice officers interviewed for the report said he didn’t blame the kids for “going off” – he would have done so if he had been treated like they had and was “surprised it didn’t happen sooner”.

Mr Duffy said NATSILS is extremely concerned that the NT government has still not made a commitment to implement the

findings of the Children’s Commissioner’s report, which was released more than a month ago, or that criminal investigations or disciplinary proceedings would be taken against staff who have acted unlawfully or inappropriately.

“The brutality exposed in this report is shocking,” Mr Duffy said.

“We call on the NT government to immediately respond to the Children’s Commissioner’s report and commit to implementing each and every one of the recommendations.

“The community has lost confidence in the youth detention system. It is simply not working. We can’t keep going down this same track.

“Children in detention are amongst the most vulnerable kids in our community. The evidence shows that they need therapeutic programs and the support of fully trained, professional staff if we are serious about their rehabilitation.

“It is time that youth justice was separated from adult correctional services so that young people get the specialist treatment they need to turn their lives around.”

The Law Council of Australia also added its voice to the call for action, with director Arthur Moses saying he is deeply concerned.

“If these findings are true,

the inhumane management of the Don Dale incident is a blight against Australia’s human rights profile,” he said.

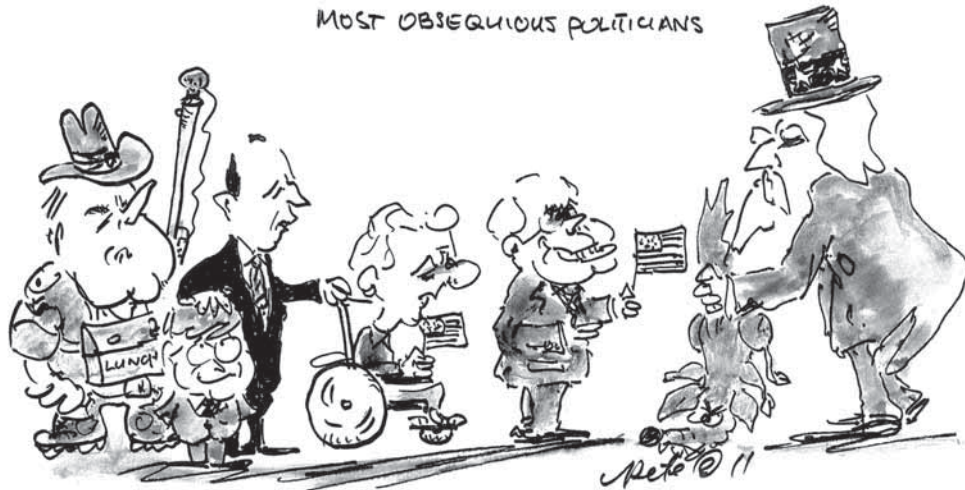
“It’s important to remember that more than 90 percent of youth detainees in the NT are Indigenous. Children are, of course, the most vulnerable group in the Australian community and it is critical the NT government takes swift and effective action to implement the findings of this report.

“If it fails to do so, the federal government should intervene to deal with the situation.”

Koori Mail ✪

### Pete’s Corner

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# "New" economy another way to suppress workers' rights

The emergence of Uber and other technology-driven, computer based corporations raise important issues for workers and their unions. Larry Rubin examines the changes in the US that are relevant to developments in Australia.

**WASHINGTON: Progressive economists, policy strategists and labour representatives held a seminar here last week focusing on multi-billion dollar corporations that claim they're not employers but merely managers of computer programs that allow customers to directly hire workers as needed.**

These workers, the corporations say, are not employees entitled to rights under law. They are "independent contractors working for themselves" and entitled to virtually no rights at all.

Most participants in the seminar, sponsored by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) and other progressive think tanks, agreed that the so-called "new" economy is just another scheme by corporations to attack workers' rights.

They also agreed that the key to workers getting better wages, protections and conditions in the "new" economy is old-fashioned collective bargaining.

Among the largest of the computer-based corporations are the Uber and Lyft taxicab companies. They offer consumers a computer app by which they can directly contact a taxi that's on the road near them. The Task Rabbit and Up Work corporations offer similar apps through which customers can hire workers to do everything from highly complex technical jobs to handyman tasks.

The corporations contend they are the wave of the future; a future in which most people will "work for themselves." They call this future by various names: the "on-demand economy," the "gig-sharing economy," or the "peer-to-peer economy."

This "new" economy also includes "permatemps." These are people who do the same

work in manufacturing plants as full-time employees but are classified as "temporary" workers and "independent contractors." They receive no benefits and less pay than their full time co-workers.

Employers try to get away with these schemes all across the economy. Walmart, for example, calls its warehouse workers "independent contractors" by paying low wage firms that it contracts to hire people for warehouse jobs, pay them low wages and allow itself to take no responsibility for working conditions, salary or benefits.

California truck drivers working on the docks have also been called "independent contractors" with no rights as workers. At the EPI seminar, economic researcher Steven Hill explained that workers in the so-called "new" economy are only paid for actual time worked. They must pay for their own training. Furthermore, they are often forced to bid against each other for jobs. The cheapest bid wins. The result: a spiralling race to the bottom.

Hill's latest book is called *Raw Deal: How the "Uber Economy" and Naked Capitalism Are Screwing American Workers*.

## Technology is not to blame – greed is

Many analysts say that the drift toward the "new" economy is an inevitable product of new computer technologies. However, at the seminar, EPI President Larry Mishel showed it is a product of policies that allow the wealthy and powerful to run roughshod over working people in order to pump up profits.

In fact, Mishel said, there are so many other ways that corporations are being allowed to



destroy workers' rights and to give lower pay and benefits that the so-called "new" economy has accounted for only 10 or 12 percent of the whole economy since 1995.

Mishel said that "new" economy workers can only be protected by policies that protect all workers.

These policies include enforcing existing state and federal laws that clearly define the differences between an "employee" and an "independent contractor." In fact, many states are already cracking down on employers who try to avoid their responsibilities by mis-classifying workers as independent contractors.

Furthermore, Mishel said, "A necessary condition for ending wage suppression is economic policies that ensure every worker who wants a job can find one. In the absence of full

employment, employers do not need to offer significant wage increases to attract and retain employees."

Mishel said that the most important tool for protecting workers rights remains what it's always been: collective bargaining.

"Collective bargaining," he said, "is the central feature of a re-invigorated economy."

Working people, he said, should continue to push for laws and regulations that encourage, instead of discourage, collective bargaining.

Participants in the seminar pointed out that even without new laws there is a resurgence of union organising in all sectors of the economy and that this will help workers who find themselves stuck in the "new economy."

*People's World* ✪

## WA stolen pay shock

Andy Parks

**When the Western Australian government offered just \$2,000 as compensation to Aboriginal workers who had their wages withheld for decades up until 1972, many thought it was another insult to Aboriginal people. The compensation was paid under the WA Stolen Wages Scheme from March to November 2012 and only people born before 1958 who lived on a mission or hostel and could show they had wages withheld were eligible to apply.**

But one of the Aboriginal advisers to WA's Stolen Wages Taskforce, Howard Riley, recently revealed to the ABC that the State Treasury had initially agreed to individual payouts of \$78,000.

The taskforce's report was released in 2008, yet the compensation scheme wasn't introduced until 2012, and Riley also told the ABC's *Background Briefing* program that it was shelved for four years because "they were waiting for the people to die ... They wanted those people to die so that the state coffers weren't being emptied out on black people whose wages they deserved to have back".

Documents obtained under Freedom of Information by the Kimberley Community Legal Service and sent to the *Koori Mail* show the taskforce recommended to the Minister of Indigenous Affairs that a fund of

\$71.2 million to \$101.2 million be set up. The total payment made under the 2012 scheme was \$2.5 million.

The briefing note from the acting director of the Department of Indigenous Affairs to the Minister said: "While no amount of money can ever compensate for the past economic and personal impact of government control over individual people's money, an individual ex-gratia common experience payment of \$15,000 could be seen to comprise:

- \$10,000 is for the actuarial calculation of actual loss and is based on actuarial logic; and
- \$5,000 additional monetary compensation as an act of reconciliation to acknowledge the personal and family impacts beyond the actuarial calculation."

An actuarial calculation is a mathematical model regarded as the best estimate based on available numerical and policy information.

The WA government has maintained that the difficulty in setting up any compensation scheme is a lack of surviving records to accurately demonstrate what happened to the money that was held in trust funds for Aboriginal people who were essentially rented out to work on pastoral stations.

But Steve Kinnane, a researcher at the University of Notre Dame (WA), whose grandmother Jesse Smith worked as a domestic servant, has been able to access her personal files.

He said the 350 pages document every aspect of her life from when she was raised on a mission and then incarcerated at Moore Creek Native Settlement and rented out as a domestic servant.

Those records (and others) show up to 75 percent of Aboriginal workers' wages were held in government trust accounts and the remainder was paid to them as "pocket money or finger money".

Mr Kinnane said the records show even the pocket money was not always forthcoming "depending on how well they'd behaved". His grandmother's files reveal money was denied when she wanted to buy clothes, was deducted to pay for bed and board (that was often greater than her wages) and was deducted for things like mandatory health checks and paying for police to escort her back to Moore Creek.

Mr Kinnane said actuarial calculations for individuals could be done based on the number of years they'd worked and the likely deductions made based on the records that do exist.

The Aboriginal Legal Service WA is currently considering a class action to try to address the compensation issue.

The 2008 Stolen Wages Taskforce report also made a number of other recommendations regarding injustices to Aboriginal people.

*Koori Mail* ✪

Sydney

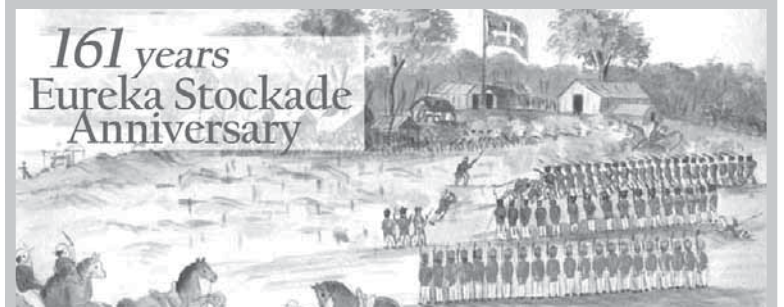
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# Abbott's rivers of blood

Anna Pha

Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott used his invitation to deliver the second annual Margaret Thatcher Lecture in London on October 27 to thump his own chest and tell European leaders to “turn the boats back”. “More than ever, Western countries need the self-confidence to stand up for ourselves and for the universal decencies of mankind lest the world rapidly become a much worse place,” Abbott tells European leaders. The speech was so rabidly racist and reactionary that many in his conservative audience were winching.

More than 700,000 refugees are estimated to have arrived by sea so far this year according to the International Organisation for Migration. Many others have come by land such as from Kosovo.

By far the largest number of people seeking asylum in the European Union are from Syria. Other major sources include Kosovo, Afghanistan, Albania, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen and Libya. Abbott attempted to play down the life-and-death circumstances they have fled, instead claiming they are economic migrants.

As would be expected, he also fails to acknowledge the US's and Australia's role in the wars that are behind the crisis. Instead Abbott recommends escalating the military presence of Western forces in Syria.

## Force

Naturally, Abbott sang the praises of the Iron Lady and her determination to bring about change. “The lesson of Margaret Thatcher's life is that strong leaders can make a difference...” He even went as far as suggesting “there was at least a hint of Thatcher about my government in Australia”.

He continues, “... as Margaret Thatcher so clearly understood over the Falklands: those that won't use decisive force, where needed, end up being dictated to by those who will.”

“It will require some force ... it will gnaw at our consciences – yet it is the only way to prevent a tide of humanity surging through Europe and quite possibly changing it forever,” Abbott continued.

“We are rediscovering the hard way that justice tempered by mercy is an exacting ideal as too much mercy for some necessarily undermines justice for all,” he says, giving gratuitous advice to European leaders who are grappling with a crisis the likes of which Australia has never experienced.

“This means turning boats around, for people coming by sea. It means denying entry at the border, for people with no legal right to come; and it means establishing camps for people who currently have nowhere to go.”

Under the Refugee Convention to which Australia is a signatory, it is illegal to return a refugee to a place where “their life or liberty would be threatened.”

## “Devout Catholic”

He turns to the Bible, or more accurately turns the Bible on its head. First he makes a reference to “the imperative to ‘love your neighbour as you love yourself’” as “at the heart of every Western polity ... It's what makes us decent and humane countries as well as prosperous ones, but – right now – this wholesome instinct is leading much of Europe into catastrophic error.”

Not surprisingly this brought a strong reaction from a number of Church leaders in Australia who were appalled, ashamed and offended by Abbott's use of the Bible to try to justify his anti-immigration policy. Human Rights lawyer and Jesuit priest Frank Brennan cited Pope Francis's first visit outside Rome to the Italian migrant island Lampedusa in 2013 when he called for a “reawakening of consciences”.

## Enoch Powell

Abbott also made a reference to Enoch Powell, an extremely racist and reactionary former conservative MP who served in the government of



Tony Abbott at the Margaret Thatcher Lecture in London.

Powell became notorious for what is referred to as the “Rivers of Blood” speech delivered in 1968. In it he not only opposed immigration but proposed the mass repatriation of all non-white people from Britain. The uproar was so great Heath had to sack him from his shadow ministry and he left the Conservative Party.

There are strong parallels with a great deal of what is implied by Abbott's speech and policies and what Powell put forward in the 1960s and '70s.

## White superiority

“We are told that the economic achievement of the Western countries has been at the expense of the rest of the world and has impoverished them, so that what are called the ‘developed’ countries owe a duty to hand over tax-produced ‘aid’ to the governments of the undeveloped countries. It is nonsense – manifest, arrant nonsense; but it is nonsense with which the people of the Western countries, clergy and laity, but

country more prosperous than their own.

He also describes asylum seekers fleeing for their lives as illegal which under the Refugee Convention is not true. He inflates the rate of “illegal” arrivals claiming they were “running at the rate of 50,000 a year – and rising.” The highest figure was around 20,500 – less than a single week for the number reaching Europe's external borders.

Abbott boasts how the numbers were reduced under the Howard and Abbott governments to the point where the “immigration detention centres have all-but-closed ... That's why stopping the boats and restoring border security is the only truly compassionate thing to do.” All but closed?!

According to Australian Human Rights Commission figures, 2,013 people are being held in immigration detention centres, including 127 children. Abbott omits to mention the appalling, inhumane nature of conditions where they are being held or the attempted suicides, self-harm, rapes and other incidents (see page 1).

## Getting things done

“On Soviet missiles aimed at Europe, she didn't see nuclear annihilation to be averted at all cost but an evil empire to be shown that aggression would not pay,” Abbott said, misrepresenting the crucial role the Soviet Union played in striving for peace.

“On council houses, she did not see a government service but a neglected asset that would better be looked after by owner-occupiers taking pride in their own homes.

“She didn't see unions protecting workers so much as bullying their employers into bankruptcy. She didn't see state-owned enterprises as ‘national champions’ so much as an endless burden on taxpayers,” Abbott said.

With Thatcher he said, “it was about getting things done. It wasn't about achieving consensus; it was about doing the right thing.”

“Today, we best honour her life and legacy by bringing the same tough-mindedness to the problems of our time that she brought to the problems of hers.”

“Her focus – were she still with us – would be the things of most consequence: managing the nation changing, culture-shifting population transfers now impacting on Europe ...” The neo-fascist Enoch Powell couldn't have made it clearer. ★

**Abbott omits to mention the appalling, inhumane nature of conditions where asylum seekers are being held or the attempted suicides, self-harm, rapes and other incidents.**

Harold MacMillan and the shadow cabinet of Edward Heath.

Thatcher was an admirer of Powell: “He had a rare combination of qualities all founded on an unfaltering belief in God, an unshakeable loyalty to family and friends and an unswerving devotion to our country. He was magnetic. Listening to his speeches was an unforgettable privilege. He was one of those rare people who made a difference.”

“The nation has been, and is still being, eroded and hollowed out from within by the implantation of large unassimilated and unassimilable populations – what Lord Radcliffe once in a memorable phrase called ‘alien wedges’ – in the heartland of the state ...,” Powell said in a speech given in Southampton, April 9, 1976.

Like Abbott, Powell opposed multiculturalism.

clergy especially – have been so deluged and saturated that in the end they feel ashamed of what the brains and energy of Western mankind have done, and sink on their knees to apologise for being civilised and ask to be insulted and humiliated,” Powell said in an election speech in 1970.

“Naturally, the safety and prosperity that exists almost uniquely in Western countries is an irresistible magnet. These blessings are not the accidents of history but the product of values painstakingly discerned and refined, and of practices carefully cultivated and reinforced over hundreds of years,” says Abbott 45 years on.

Abbott refers to “the notion of civilisation”, and “the heritage she'd (Thatcher) been elected to preserve and strengthen.

“She believed in Britain – in its history, in its institutions and in its values – and, by acting on her beliefs, she helped others to believe as well.”

The message is clear – accepting asylum seekers poses a threat to those values, to Western civilisation and that white heritage.

## “Stop the boats” deception

Abbott again stretches the truth by asserting that the people fleeing in boats are just seeking to live in a

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# The legal noose tightens

Felicity Arbuthnot

“Did the government believe the claims about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction or was the aim regime change, which has no basis whatsoever in international law? Was this the real motivation? Secondly, when was the decision taken to go to war? Was it at Crawford or Camp David, in April 2002?”

Lord Morris of Aberavon,  
House of Lords, October 22, 2015

“Why did Tony Blair have those embarrassing exchanges in 2002 [with GW Bush] when there was no question of there being any declaration of war? Why did the then government ignore the instinct and feelings of 1.5 million people marching down Piccadilly to protest about what was still an illegal war?”

Lord Dykes,  
House of Lords, October 22, 2015

## “Sir Cover Up”

Just five days after it was revealed that former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and then President George W Bush had made a pact to attack Iraq and overthrow the country’s sovereign government a full year before the invasion took place – as Blair continued to mislead government and populace stating that diplomacy was being pursued and no decisions made – another snake has slithered from under the hay (as the Arab saying goes) in the form of Sir Jeremy Heywood.

Sir Jeremy who has been unkindly dubbed “Sir Cover Up” by sections of the media, is Prime Minister David Cameron’s Cabinet Secretary, thus the UK’s top Civil Servant.

According to the *Daily Mail*, Sir Jeremy has “insisted he did not deserve his reputation as the secretive and manipulative power behind the throne” and was “frustrated” at his public portrayal.

However:

“Sources close to the Iraq Inquiry claim it was held up for months while chairman Sir John Chilcot argued with Sir Jeremy about which documents could be put in the public domain.

“In the end, Sir Jeremy insisted that 150 messages between Tony Blair and George Bush in the run-up to the 2003 war must be censored. Only the ‘gists’ of the messages and selected quotes will be released.

“Former Shadow Home Secretary David Davis said it was ‘wholly inappropriate’ that Sir Jeremy had been involved in decisions on the Iraq Inquiry, given his role as Mr Blair’s Private Secretary at the time of the war.”

Sir Jeremy was Principal Private Secretary to Tony Blair from June 1999 to July 2003 and would thus have been party to every step of the scheming and untruths about the invasion and surely the plotting between Bush and Blair to attack, during their April 2002, three day meeting at the Bush ranch in Crawford, Texas.

Subsequently Heywood stepped in to the same position when Gordon Brown became Prime Minister after Blair’s resignation, a post he held between January 2008 and May 2010, so would also have been party to the plans for and structure of the Chilcot Inquiry in to the war, which was set up by Brown. Thus those involved in the bloodbath and invasion convened the Inquiry into the illegality.

Gordon Brown, as Blair’s Chancellor of the Exchequer, wrote the cheques for the years of illegal UK bombings of Iraq and for the UK’s participation in “Operation Iraqi Liberation” (OIL.) He also wrote the cheques for Britain’s part in the disastrous invasion of Afghanistan.

According to Ministry of Defence figures, the total cost of the UK military operation in Iraq, 2003-2009, was £8.4 billion – ongoing since they are back bombing, with Special Forces in Northern Iraq – and it would be unsurprising if also elsewhere in the country, given Britain’s duplicitous track record. To 2013 the cost of UK operations in Afghanistan reached £37 billion, also ongoing.

David Cameron, who voted to attack Iraq, told a news program at the time: “You’ve got to do what you think right, even if it’s unpopular ...”, near mirroring Blair’s “I know I’m



Sir Jeremy Heywood.

right” of the same time. Cameron admires Blair, regarding him as a “mentor.” At every level of government past and present, there are vested interests in the truth on Iraq never coming out.

Cameron’s words on his election as Prime Minister come to mind again: “We’re all in it together.”

Of Sir Jeremy, political commentator Peter Osborne has written: “Heywood is a perfect manifestation of everything that has gone so very wrong with the British civil service over the past 15 years.”

On October 22, in a debate in the House of Lords, Tony Blair’s former Attorney General (May 1997-July 1999) Lord Morris of Aberavon cited the “scandalous delay” in producing the Chilcot Report.

Sir John Chilcot’s Inquiry took evidence between November 2009 and February 2, 2011. Costing £10 million (and rising) the final report is now not expected until summer 2016 and maybe even sometime in 2017.

The families and friends of the 179 British service people who died had been “badly let down” by the delays, stated his Lordship. Indeed, but, tragic as the whole Iraq horror is for the UK’s bereaved, their sons, daughters, relatives, signed up to join the armed forces, trained extensively in killing other human beings and had the lawful right, if in conscience they believed it wrong, illegal, to refuse to serve.

In their debate their Lordships devoted no time to the grief of the relatives of the over one million Iraqi dead, the 800,000 Iraqi children who have lost one or both parents, the million widows, the maimed, the limbless, those who lost their minds, homes, all, in the horror, who also are “badly let down”, their need for answers paramount. Only Lord Dykes in just two lines referred to “... the fate of Iraqi civilians. That should be a substantial part of this report.”

Lord Dykes also encapsulated the hitherto unspoken questions:

- “Why was it so important for them to turn on Saddam Hussein if regime change was not the main driver?”
- “Why did Tony Blair have those embarrassing exchanges in 2002 when there was no question of there being any declaration of war?”
- “Why did the then government ignore the instinct and feelings of 1.5 million people marching down Piccadilly to protest about what was still an illegal war?”
- “Why did the Americans and the British ignore the wise advice of the French government under President Chirac and Foreign Secretary Dominique de Villepin about the mistake of going to war on that occasion?”

In a surely clear reference to Sir Jeremy Heywood, Lord Morris said that “... the saddest

feature of the inquiry process was the ‘strenuous effort’ of the Cabinet Office to block the committee from having access to ‘swathes of vital documentation,’ including notes from Blair to Bush” adding: “Respect for good governance is undermined if reports don’t see the light of day before issues become dimmed in public memory.”

Lord Parekh also referred to the “delay” caused by “the dispute over access to various documents”; Sir Jeremy’s spectre stalked the Chamber:

“For example, it took nearly a year to obtain the Blair-Bush correspondence and the notes Mr Blair is supposed to have left with Mr Bush, to read them and to decide whether to include them in the report.”

Baroness Falkner was surely also referring to Blair and Cameron’s ally, “Sir Cover Up” when she said:

“Looking at the sequencing of events, it is clear that there was some kind of stand-off between the Cabinet Secretary and the Inquiry team, which lasted for a while ... it took from July 2012 to January 2015 to reach an agreement on publishing the Blair-Bush correspondence.”

And does that refer to the “censored” version?

Lady Falkner made a vital point regarding David Cameron’s desire to emulate Blair in visiting a full scale “Shock and Awe” on another devastated country which poses Britain no threat and which would be as unlawful as Iraq:

“I want to pick up the issue of our continuing intervention in the Middle East. Let us go back to the August 2013 vote on not intervening in Syria. We as a country cannot, and should not, make a decision on that until we know of our hand in setting that region ablaze in the first instance. That is the least we owe the country.”

Earl Attlee had hands-on experience having served as a Territorial Army Officer in Iraq during the Invasion had clearly had enough of prevarications:

“I do not believe that democratic leaders can lead a country to war without being held to account for the decisions that they made on our behalf. I could see the ‘dodgy dossier’ for what it was ...”

## “Grave mistake”

Baroness Williams was equally scathing, demanding “... the truest possible account of this, which I think is the second-gravest mistake ever made in the history of the United Kingdom’s foreign policy after the end of the Second World War.”

Comparing the Iraq disaster to the 1956 Suez crisis in “scale” and “effect”, she stated:

“Today, when we look at what has been tragically not only an attempt to try to invade Iraq but, perhaps more crucially, an attempt to

see the Middle East fade away into a situation where there is almost no legally available support, let us not forget that an invasion based on the argument that you need regime change has no place in international law and no place in the United Nations.”

In context, Suez has been described as “... one of the most important and controversial events in British history since the Second World War. Not only did Suez result in deep political and public division in Britain, it also caused international uproar.”

“It has come to be regarded as the end of Britain’s role as one of the world powers and as the beginning of the end for the British Empire.”

Suez led to the downfall of Prime Minister Anthony Eden whom, it was widely believed, had misled Parliament over the degree of collusion between Britain and Israel.

Tony Blair also misled Parliament, including over the extent of his collusion with George W Bush. Ironically he has also been described as: “having an unremitting record of bias toward Israel.” (*Electronic Intifada*, June 29, 2007.) When he was – Orwellianly – appointed “Middle East Peace Envoy”, he was described as: “A true friend of the State of Israel” by then Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and: “a very well appreciated figure in Israel” by then Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni.

Eden and Blair may have more in common regarding their actions in the Middle East than meet the eye. Eden however simply sunk into obscurity whereas the clamour for Blair to account for his actions grows ever louder. The petition to Parliament for his arrest for war crimes and misleading the nation has nearly reached the required 10,000 when it is mandatory for the Prime Minister to respond. At 100,000 a Parliamentary debate can be called.

## Towards a war crimes trial?

The leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn told BBC Newsnight that Blair could see a war crimes trial over the: “illegal Iraq invasion.”

The site [arrestblair.org](http://arrestblair.org) established by journalist George Monbiot “offers a reward to people attempting a peaceful citizen’s arrest of the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, for crimes against the peace.” So far five credible attempts have been made and around £13,000 paid out.

As events are unfolding there may soon be no more wriggle room for all those involved in the lies and cover ups. Their Nuremberg may yet await. It is owed to those who lost their lives for a pack of lies. For the people of Iraq it is a sacred accounting, a debt of ultimate honour and a woefully inadequate apology which might at least demand reparations.

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# Getting off the chemical treadmill

Colin Todhunter

A peer-reviewed study published last year in the *British Journal of Nutrition*, a leading international journal of nutritional science, showed that organic crops and crop-based foods are between 18 to 69 percent higher in a number of key antioxidants such as polyphenolics than conventionally-grown crops. Numerous studies have linked antioxidants to a reduced risk of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular and neurodegenerative diseases and certain cancers. The research team concluded that a switch to eating organic fruit, vegetable and cereals – and food made from them – would provide additional antioxidants equivalent to eating between one and two extra portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

Moreover, significantly lower levels of a range of toxic heavy metals were found in organic crops. For instance, cadmium is one of only three metal contaminants, along with lead and mercury, for which the European Commission has set maximum permitted contamination levels in food. It was found to be almost 50 percent lower in organic crops. Nitrogen concentrations were also found to be significantly lower in organic crops. Concentrations of total nitrogen were 10 percent, nitrate 30 percent and nitrite 87 percent lower in organic compared to conventional crops. The study also found that pesticide residues were four times more likely to be found in conventional crops than organic ones.

The research was the biggest of its kind ever undertaken. The international team of experts led by Newcastle University in the UK analysed 343 studies into the compositional differences between organic and conventional crops.

The findings contradict those of a 2009 UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned study which found there were no substantial differences or significant nutritional benefits from organic food. The FSA commissioned study based its conclusions on only 46 publications covering crops, meat and dairy, while the Newcastle University-led meta-analysis is based on data from 343 peer-reviewed publications on composition difference between organic and conventional crops.

## Concern

There has been for a long time serious concerns about the health impacts of eating food that has been contaminated with petrochemical pesticides and fertilisers. Over the past 60 years, agriculture has changed more than it did during the previous 12,000. And much of that change has come about due to the so-called “green revolution”, which has entailed soaking crops with petrochemicals. Coinciding with these changes has been the onset and proliferation of numerous diseases and allergies.

The global agritech/agribusiness sector is in effect poisoning our food and the environment with its pesticides, herbicides, GMOs and various other chemical inputs. Journalist Arthur Nelson has written that as many as 31 pesticides could have been banned in the EU because of potential health risks, if a blocked EU paper on hormone-mimicking chemicals had been acted upon.

Christina Sarich recently reported that there are currently 34,000 pesticides registered for use in the US. She states that drinking water is often contaminated by pesticides and more babies are being born with preventable birth defects due to pesticide exposure. Chemicals are so prevalently used that they show up in breast milk of mothers.

Illnesses are on the rise too, including asthma, autism and learning disabilities, birth defects and reproductive dysfunction, diabetes, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases and several types of cancer. Sarich says that their connection to pesticide exposure becomes more evident with every new study conducted.

Important pollinating insects have been decimated by chemical herbicides and



**“India has to restore and nurture her depleted, abused soils and not harm them any further, with dubious chemical overload, which is endangering human and animal health.”**

pesticides, which are also stripping the soil of nutrients. As a result, for example, there has been a 41.1 to 100 percent decrease in vitamin A in six foods: apple, banana, broccoli, onion, potato and tomato. Both onion and potato saw a 100 percent loss of vitamin A between 1951 and 1999.

In Punjab, India, pesticides have turned the state into a “cancer epicentre”, and Indian soils are being depleted as a result of the application of “green revolution” ideology and chemical inputs. India is losing 5,334 million tonnes of soil every year due to soil erosion because of the indiscreet and excessive use of fertilisers, insecticides and pesticides. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research reports that soil is becoming deficient in nutrients and fertility.

## Organic

We can carry on down the route of chemical-intensive, poisonous agriculture, with our health and the environment continuing to be sacrificed on the altar of corporate profit. Or we can shift to organic farming and investment in and reaffirmation of indigenous models of agriculture as advocated by the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge Science and Technology (IAASTD) report.

In this respect, botanist Stuart Newton states:

“The answers to Indian agricultural productivity is not that of embracing the international, monopolistic, corporate-conglomerate promotion of chemically-dependent GM crops ... India has to restore and nurture her depleted, abused soils and not harm them any further, with dubious chemical overload, which is endangering human and animal health.” (p24).

Newton provides insight into the importance of soils and their mineral compositions and links their depletion to the “green revolution”. In turn, these depleted soils cannot help but lead to mass malnourishment. This is quite revealing given that proponents of the “green revolution” claim it helped reduce malnutrition.

Newton favours a system of agroecology, a sound understanding of soil and the eradication of poisonous chemical inputs.

Over the past few years, there have been numerous high level reports from the UN and development agencies putting forward similar arguments and proposals in favour of small farmers and agroecology, but this has not been translated into real action on the ground where peasant farmers increasingly face marginalisation and oppression.

According to Vandana Shiva, for instance, the plundering of Indian agriculture by foreign corporations is resulting in a forced removal of farmers from the land and the destruction of traditional communities on a scale which has not been witnessed anywhere before throughout history. On a global level, not least because peasant/smallholder farming is more productive than industrial farming and because it feeds most of the world, this is undermining the world's ability for feeding itself. It is also leading to denitrification: not only in terms of specific items containing less nutrients than before, as described above, but because people are being forced to rely on a narrower range of foodstuffs and crops as monocropping replaces a biodiverse system of agriculture.

## Globalised

The increasingly globalised industrial food system is failing to feed the world but is also responsible for some of the planet's most pressing political, social and environmental crises – not least hunger and poverty. This system – not forgetting the capitalism that underpins it – and the corporations and institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO) that fuel it must be confronted, as must the wholly inappropriate and unsustainable urban-centric model of “development” being forced through at the behest of these corporations in places like India.

Organic farmer and activist Bhaskar Save describes how this urban-centric model has

served to uproot indigenous agriculture in India with devastating effect:

“The actual reason for pushing the ‘Green Revolution’ was the much narrower goal of increasing marketable surplus of a few relatively less perishable cereals to fuel the urban-industrial expansion favoured by the government. The new, parasitical way of farming ... benefited only the industrialists, traders and the powers-that-be. The farmers’ costs rose massively and margins dipped. Combined with the eroding natural fertility of their land, they were left with little in their hands, if not mounting debts and dead soils ...

“Self-reliant farming – with minimal or zero external inputs – was the way we actually farmed, very successfully, in the past. Barring periods of war and excessive colonial oppression, our farmers were largely self-sufficient, and even produced surpluses, though generally smaller quantities of many more items. These, particularly perishables, were tougher to supply urban markets. And so the nation's farmers were steered to grow chemically cultivated monocultures of a few cash-crops like wheat, rice, or sugar, rather than their traditional polycultures that needed no purchased inputs.”

Even if proponents of the “green revolution” choose to live in a fool's paradise by ignoring the ecologically and environmentally unsustainable nature of the system they promote and merely mouth platitudes about organic being less productive, they might like to look at the results Bhaskar Save achieved on his farm.

These proponents have already paved the way for extending the corporate control of agriculture and the “green revolution” with their GMOs and further chemical inputs – all underpinned of course by endless deceptions and neo-liberal ideology wrapped up as fake concern for the poor.

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# UN once more rejects US blockade of Cuba

WT Whitney

**The United Nations General Assembly on October 27 voted on Cuba's resolution calling for "an end to the economic, commercial, and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba." Approval was almost unanimous: 191 nations voted in favour and two nations, the US and Israel, voted against. There were no abstentions.**

This was the 24th year for such a vote and the 24th time overwhelming approval was expressed. Cuba's Foreign Ministry had earlier provided delegates and the international media with a comprehensive summary of the blockade's harmful effects on both Cuba's economy and people.

The report, issued every year, indicated the US blockade violates both Cuban independence and international law. Taking inflation into consideration, its authors say that the half-century-long blockade has deprived the Cuban economy of US\$834 billion.

Voting this year took place under new circumstances. The US and Cuba in July re-established diplomatic relations after having exchanged key political prisoners. The US State Department in May removed Cuba from its list of terrorist-sponsoring nations, and restrictions on US travel to Cuba have been eased.

Certain US financial institutions and businesses, particularly telecommunications ones, operate legally on the island now.

Although Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama on December 17, 2014 jointly announced their shared goal of improved bi-national relations, Cuba has declared that for

normalisation to occur the US must end its blockade.

President Castro made that point in his address to the UN General Assembly on September 28 and declared also that territory occupied by the Guantánamo Naval Base must be returned, US attempts to build a political opposition inside Cuba must stop, and US-instigated human and economic damages must be compensated.

In the weeks prior to the Assembly's vote, reports circulated that the US might abstain. That posture would have been consistent both with President Obama's announcement on December 17 and with his urging the US Congress to exercise power gained with the Helms Burton Law of 1996 to end the blockade.

Congressional Republicans opposed the idea of abstention, and Cuban diplomats refused to modify their resolution to suit US tastes.

In the weeks preceding the vote, Cuban media critics of the blockade had a field day. "The blockade is the air," claimed one of them. He explained that since 1959 "130 radio stations sponsored by 43 Florida-based counter-revolutionary organisations" or by the US government have been broadcasting to Cuba. The US government's "Televisión Martí" broadcasts began in 1990. The International Telecommunications Union of the United Nations condemns such radio and television broadcasting as violating international norms.

Cuban spokespersons emphasised that education, accounting for 13 percent of Cuba's GDP, is under the gun just as are the medical and financial sectors. The necessity to import education supplies from distant countries instead of from the



Cuba Blockade Vigil – Sydney Town Hall, Saturday October 17, 2015.

United States leads to increased costs, for example, US\$771,600 between April 2014 and March 2015.

Critics have focused on blockade manifestations newly evident during the past year. A Cuban reporter indicated that "from March 2014 to the same month of 2015, the US blockade has cost Cuban agriculture ... US\$451,520,000 dollars."

The US Gen Tech Scientific company recently refused to sell gas chromatography units for use by Cuban researchers and medical diagnosticians. In June 2015 Sigma-Aldrich Company refused to supply essential chemicals to Cuba's Quimimpex Company and the Colombian Boiler Company denied Quimimpex the pressurised containers it needs for shipping chlorine used for water purification.

In late 2014 the Commerzbank of Germany agreed to pay a US\$650

million fine to the US Treasury Department because of its financial transactions with Cuba, and with Iran, Myanmar, and Sudan.

Similarly, US authorities in October 2015 announced a US\$787 million fine imposed against the French bank Crédit Agricole for forbidden transactions with the same countries.

New York District Attorney Cyrus R Vance Jr explained that "financial institutions must comply with sanctions against rogue nations." On the day of the vote, AFP news service described children dying of cancer in Cuba who need chemotherapy agents available only from the United States.

In the end, the UN vote marks the beginning of one more year of the blockade hanging on despite wholehearted worldwide rejection. Also despite majority disapproval in the US. Analyst Sergio Rodríguez had

already highlighted the contradiction between the General Assembly's expected approval of the Cuban resolution and President Obama's talk.

It would have been better, he indicated, if the US had abstained or if its delegates had left the chamber. US opposition to the resolution will serve as "an expression of the weakness that has been manifest in [Obama's] recent foreign policy decisions."

Well-known Cuban political writer Esteban Morales looked farther afield. He condemned "the historic messianic tendency of the United States and its high-handedness allowing it to regard the rest of us as fools. They are so used to manipulating others ... that they sometimes end up displaying a foolish diplomacy."

People's World ✪

## Hospital attack was deliberate

Stephen Lendman

**Changing US explanations following the October 3 Kunduz hospital attack were all lies – wilful deception, covering up a deliberate attack on a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) facility.**

Pentagon officials knew it was a hospital, yet attacked it anyway – multiple times for over an hour, killing 24 doctors, other medical staff and patients, injuring 37 others.

Make no mistake! This was a deliberately planned war crime. An AP report said "US analysts knew (the) Afghan site was (a) hospital."

They'd been gathering intelligence on it for days – the strike authorised on the phoney pretext of it being used by "a Pakistani operative...coordinating (with) Taliban activity," said AP.

MSF stressed doctors, other medical staff and patients alone were in the facility – no Taliban, Taliban supporters, or other US-installed Afghan puppet regime opponents.

According to AP, US "special operations analysts had assembled a dossier that included maps with the

hospital circled, along with indications that intelligence agencies were tracking the location of the Pakistani operative and activity reports based on overhead surveillance, according to a former intelligence official who is familiar with some of the documents describing the site."

Claiming the "intelligence suggested the hospital was being used as a Taliban command and control centre and may have housed heavy weapons" was a complete fabrication.

Nothing of the sort was there. It was solely a hospital, providing vital medical services for thousands of Afghan victims of US imperialism, now with nowhere to go because of Washington's horrific war crime.

US General John Campbell in charge of Afghan operations lied, calling the strike a mistake, changing previous phoney explanations, stopping short of saying who authorised it.

Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook compounded his Big Lie, claiming US forces "would never intentionally target a protected medical facility. We have confidence that the ongoing investigations into

this tragic incident will uncover exactly what happened and why this hospital was mistakenly struck."

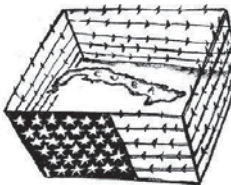
Ongoing US, NATO and Afghan investigations will all whitewash Washington's wilful war crime when released – exercises solely in cover up and denial of what's obvious from what's already known.

MSF needs approval from US and puppet Afghan authorities to proceed with the independent investigation it demands – unwilling to accept the results of phoney ones now being conducted.

On October 15, it launched a petitions drive, urging worldwide support, saying:

MSF "today launched a petition urging citizens to call on President Obama and the United States to consent to an independent investigation into the bombing of MSF's trauma hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, on October 3."

MSF called for an independent investigation by the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC) into the repeated US air strikes on the hospital. [GlobalResearch.ca](http://GlobalResearch.ca) ✪




Sydney

## Vigil demanding that the USA stop the blockade on Cuba

54 YEARS IS ENOUGH

Tuesday November 17 at 5.30 pm  
Outside the US Consulate in Martin Place

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



Shake your Maraca for Cuba with the ACFs

Fremantle Navy Club – 64 High Street Fremantle  
Saturday November 14 – doors open 7pm for dinner – band from 8pm  
Latin music, dance and food – tickets [acfsperth@gmail.com](mailto:acfsperth@gmail.com)



# Extension of US-led war on Syria

Finian Cunningham

**Russia's military intervention in Syria is proving a decisive turning point in stabilising the government of Bashar al-Assad, while racking up serious defeats against the sundry extremist mercenary groups. That is the assessment of US top military officer General Joseph F Dunford. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Senate Armed Services Committee this week: "The balance of forces right now are in Assad's advantage".**

As the *Los Angeles Times* noted, Dunford's assessment "appeared to contradict upbeat assessments by the White House last month that indicated Assad's government had suffered a series of military losses and was losing control".

Meanwhile, in a hasty diplomatic foray, US Secretary of State John Kerry managed to get Washington's regional allies to attend talks in Paris and Vienna to discuss a political solution to the four-year-old Syrian conflict. Among the attendees were Britain, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates. At Russia's insistence over Saudi objections, Iran was invited to the high-level discussions – the first time that Tehran has been admitted to the table.

An Associated Press (AP) report carried by the *Huffington Post* gave Kerry's shuttle diplomacy a positive spin, saying: "... all previous international mediation efforts have done nothing to stop the fighting, and Kerry is trying to unite all sides with influence in the Arab country around a common vision of a peaceful, secular and pluralistic Syria governed with the consent of its people".

But that's AP being economical with the truth. As Moscow has previously noted, the internationally brokered Geneva Communiqué in the summer of 2012 had already established the principle of "a peaceful, secular and pluralistic Syria governed

with the consent of its people". Why the fighting has not stopped over the ensuing three years from the Geneva accord is because Washington and its regional allies did not desist from their covert war for regime change in Syria to oust President Assad.

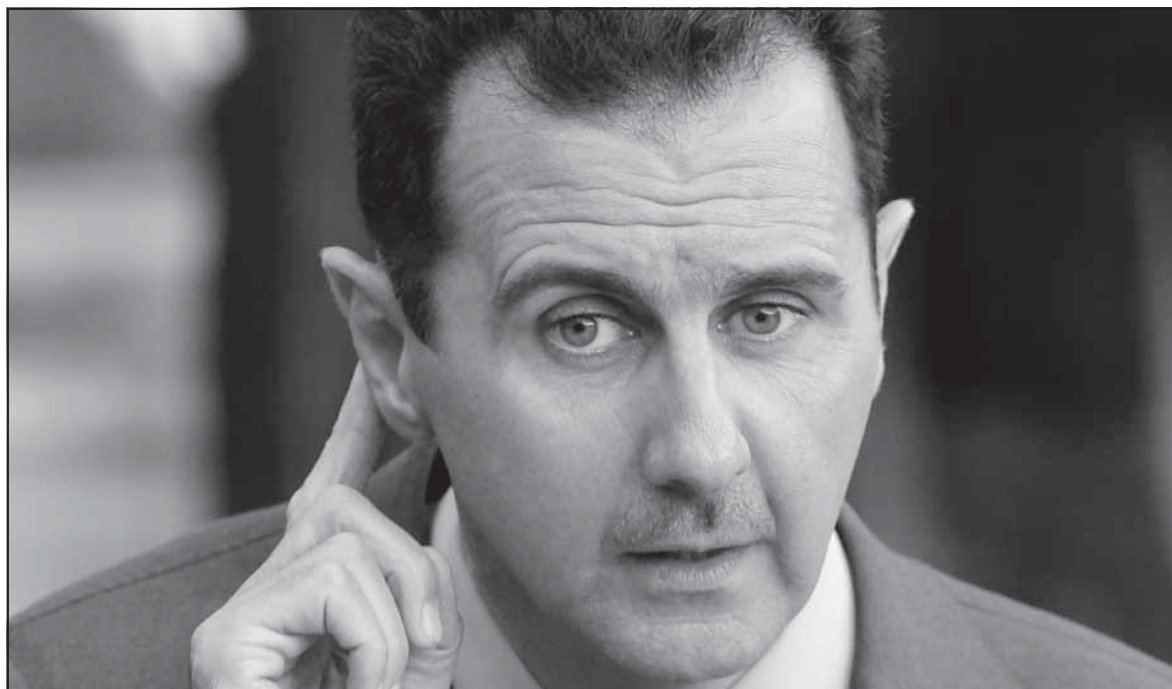
One wonders therefore what is to be gained by rehashing old diplomatic ground when Washington and its allies are still insisting on regime change – in contravention of the stated principle of "Syria governed with the consent of its people"?

Admittedly, Washington and London have dialled back on their erstwhile insistence that Assad "must go". They are holding out the possibility now of a transition period to a new government in Damascus during which Assad might still retain power. France, on the other hand, appears to be still implacably demanding that the Syrian leader has to stand down. On that score, Paris shares the same headline position of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab states.

Iran, a staunch ally of Assad, has sided with Russia in its view that the issue of governance in Syria is the sovereign prerogative of the Syrian people. The Russian position and that of Iran is wholly consistent with the Geneva Communiqué.

That is why renewed talk of "elections" in Syria by the various parties attending the Vienna summit must be handled with caution. If Washington and its allies were sincere about a political resolution to the conflict then why don't they reaffirm their commitment to the Geneva Communiqué?

What objective is being served by re-working that accord with some new condition of elections to be held? After all, Syria held presidential elections in June 2014, which were won resoundingly by Assad. So why should war-torn Syria be compelled to conduct an unprecedented new round of elections? It sounds like an external demand for a re-run, during



Bashar Hafez al-Assad is the President of Syria, commander-in-chief of Syrian Armed Forces, General Secretary of the ruling Ba'ath Party.

which foreign powers can perhaps pull off a "colour-style" revolution to achieve the result that they want: regime change.

Assad during his meeting in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin last month clearly said that his administration is willing to engage with all political opponents. However, quite reasonably, the Syrian president said that the order of priority was for his country to defeat the threat of foreign-backed subversion.

The astounding demand by Washington's allies in Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab absolute monarchies for "free elections" to be held in Syria is perhaps the most salient giveaway that the renewed diplomatic thrust belies their real and only agenda. Namely, regime change in Syria.

It would appear that what the Washington axis is striving for is

to achieve by political means what it failed to do by covert military means. By engaging Russia and Iran in diplomacy, the question is: are the foreign enemies of Syria attempting to set up a political framework in order to undermine the legitimacy of the Syrian government?

Russia's bold military intervention in Syria has turned the tables on the US-led foreign conspiracy to overthrow the Damascus government. The latest assessment by US top general Joseph F Dunford is testimony to that. And that would explain why Washington and its allies are inclined now – in spite of their belligerence – to engage with Russia and Iran over Syria.

In short, the Western axis is not to be trusted. It has devastated Syria with a war that has claimed 250,000 lives and turned half the population into refugees. The axis has absolutely no moral right to impose

political conditions on a future Syria. Indeed, in a sane world these same powers should be threatened with criminal prosecution for the murderous destruction they have wrought through their varying support for extremist mercenaries in Syria.

Syria, Russia and Iran have the upper hand, legally, morally, politically and militarily. Why should they accede to any demands from Washington and its allies who refuse to abide by what is already agreed upon in the Geneva Communiqué from three years ago? These powers are merely demonstrating, cynically, the maxim of Prussian military theoretician Karl Von Clausewitz.

War is a simply an extension of policy by other means, wrote Clausewitz. The same applies in reverse for Washington and its acolytes: politics is just another form of war against Syria.

Information Clearing House ☸

## Twenty-five years of German "unification"

Jenny Farrell

**Chancellor Helmut Kohl's prediction in 1990 of flourishing landscapes springing up everywhere following German unification may have come true – but definitely not in East Germany. Instead there has been massive depopulation: two million of a former population of 17 million have left their home regions and migrated to Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg in western Germany.**

The populations of all East German regional states have shrunk, while the Western ones have grown. For example, Saxony-Anhalt has lost more than 20 percent of its population, and, like most East German regions, it is ageing. The young, highly qualified – and especially women – are gone. The population loss in the East will most certainly continue.

What about the people of East and West Germany? How have they

practised unification? If East-West marriages are anything to go by, the relationship remains uneasy: only 1.6 percent of all new marriages are "mixed". This corresponds approximately to the rate of marriages between Germans and people with a migration background.

There are dramatic discrepancies between East and West in all kinds of areas. A far greater percentage of people in the East are affected by obesity and alcohol-related death. In the West there is a much higher purchasing power for watches and jewellery. This is, of course, due to poverty and unemployment, as income levels in the East have never averaged more than three-quarters of those in the West. The employment rate in the Eastern states is not likely to match that of the West in the foreseeable future.

Very few of the GDR's achievements have survived. Child care is one example. Despite a decline in the number of day-care centres in

the East, and an increase of these in West German cities, there is still a substantially higher quota of 52 percent in the East – almost double the West German norm.

Another instance is non-membership of religious denominations. The policy of the governing Socialist Unity Party seems to have been a long-term success; even in the West a kind of catching up can be observed, as secularisation approaches Eastern levels. Three-quarters of East Germans do not belong to the major churches, while in the West the ratio is – still – the exact opposite. However, in 2012 alone four times as many people left the church as joined it in Germany as a whole.

Twenty-five years after unification, the territory of the former German Democratic Republic has become an impoverished internal colony in the heart of one of the richest countries in the world. Communist Party of Ireland ☸

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## Thanks for taking issue

It is most refreshing to read Rob Gowland's article in the "Taking Issue" column. As an avowed Stalinist I have seen the opponents of socialism, from the so called social democratic parties that first arose at the time of Marx and Engels to the capitalist imperialist propaganda since the Bolshevik revolution in Russia.

After Lenin's death, Stalin continued the program of appropriation of the great landowners, the nascent capitalists, and Kulak class. Stalin presided over the legacy of the war of intervention, a ruined economy and the resistance of the old bourgeoisie.

His leadership and the great revolutionary leaders of legendary fame who stood with him, inspired the great Soviet people, as Lenin said, to pull Russia up by the boot straps, with the unstinting sacrifice of the Soviet working masses. Russia was

beginning to establish an industrial and agricultural base for socialism.

The international capitalist countries conspired to launch the most brutal devastating war on the Soviet Union. Stalin and his comrades led the Soviets through that terrible war.

As a result of which no less a person than Winston Churchill said, quote: "The Red army tore the guts out of Nazi Germany". In that war-time period Uncle Joe was the friend and ally of us all.

It did not take long, however, for the demonisation of Stalin to begin and as my late comrade, Alan Miller said, anti-Stalinism is anti-Socialism, pure and simple.

Now after 70 years of unrelenting propaganda, designed to turn the masses of the people against the socialist objective, i.e. freedom from exploitation, those who denigrate Stalin are only echoing the words of the exploiters who use every avenue to spread their anti-working class lies.

Thanks to Rob Gowland for Taking Issue.

Les Purkis  
Adelaide

## Judgement day on penalty rates

The true and living almighty God ordained the 7th Day to be

the Day of Rest from Toil and Labour after 6 days of work. The 7 days weekly cycle is the design of God for man to work and to rest. Therefore, nobody should be allowed to destroy that because God has the best interests for all men, whether it be, for employers or workers.

Penalty rates in place set Australia apart from other nations which often fail to understand why they are important for industries, workers, family units and society as a whole.

Workers in Australia have been much better protected than many others living in Asia, Central Asia, Middle East, South East Asia, and beyond. This always should be so for workers deserve their proper wages; anyone seeking to undermine that God Almighty will judge them and ask them to pay back in due course.

Workers should not be asked to work in the middle of the night at 3am, 4am or other odd hours without being fully compensated by employers. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

While we acknowledge the needs of certain workers in place for emergencies such as police officers, doctors and nurses, ambulance officers and air traffic controllers, other workers can be exempt from work over the weekend, public holidays and overnight shifts so that employers need not to pay penalty rates if they work

around their operation's schedules so that workers can have decent time for rest, with families and friends, for worship and be involved in community participation such as rallies, demonstrations, festivals etc.

Having said that, workers should not be allowed to exploit penalty rates for unjust gain at the expense of the employers either. Therefore, I urge the authorities concerned to allow penalty rates to flourish for the good reasons and purposes whilst cracking down on those who misuse or exploit them, either employers or employees.

Bienne Tam

## Palestine: end the injustice

The ongoing conflict and brutality occurring in Palestine is heart wrenchingly sad to witness. The western powers whose funding and support permits illegal Israeli settlements, home evictions, land seizures and the occupation to continue have a lot to answer for and should be held accountable by world opinion and the international law courts.

Despite hundreds of UN Resolutions condemning Israeli settlement building, the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, the refusal of Israel to allow the return of

Palestinian refugees and the denial of Palestinian national, human, civil and other rights, some dating back to 1948, the Palestinian issue remains unresolved, with tragic consequences.

The UN, EU and the rest of the world community should be utterly ashamed that 67 years after the establishment of the colonial settler state of Israel, that resulted in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, the destruction of hundreds of villages, the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the dispossession and displacement of millions of Palestine's people, the oppression of the Palestinian people and the callous, horrendous crimes against them continue unabated.

Only the indignant will-power of millions of people saying they have seen and had enough and demand action on this issue will have the impact of forcing the powerful interests that ignore and negate this issue and stifle enforcement of Israel's criminal behaviour will affect a just solution of this sordid situation.

I hope there are now sufficient aware and concerned people who are outraged enough to do something constructive to end this terrible injustice and bring a viable peace.

Steven Katsineris,  
Vic

# Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

## Prisons, propaganda and fascism

I was once told, in that authoritative, take-no-prisoners tone adopted by people who don't know what they are talking about, that there were "50 million people in concentration camps in the USSR". That absurd claim was, and still is, generally believed among people who are quick to assure you that, unlike a lot of other people, they have not been "taken in" by Communist propaganda.

That they have most definitely been taken in by anti-Communist propaganda, however, is indisputable, however strenuously they deny it. The Cold War, of course, never ended, and its recent resurgence has been supported by a huge investment of imperialist funding and the application of a host of bright young graduates to the task of waging it.

Pumped up with patriotic fervour for the fight against "Godless Communism", that terrible threat to "American freedom", astonishing numbers of them are recruited straight from US colleges to enthusiastically work at using and enhancing every propaganda tool that imperialism has come up with in the almost 100 years since the October Revolution of 1917. That event sent shock-waves through capitalism everywhere: the writing wasn't just on the wall – it was actually coming to life and being put into effect, for all the world to see.

It was imperative for capitalism that this alternative, non-capitalist system be denigrated, derided and condemned. Despite the success of the counter-revolution in Eastern Europe and

the USSR at the end of the '80s, support for the socialist alternative not only persists, but is sufficiently alive that in a number of countries around the world – a distressingly large number of countries from capitalism's point of view – communists are at least part of the government and in some they are the governing Party. Not surprisingly, imperialism's ideological war against socialism also persists, with more than a hint of desperation these days.

Some of the lines of this renewed propaganda attack are easily identified. The equating of socialism with fascism, the labelling of the eradication of the Nazi fifth column in the USSR in the late 1930s as Stalin purging his critics, the oft-repeated assertion that "socialism doesn't work" accompanied by a suppression of its achievements, the claim that it is a "police state". (I was travelling with a group from Serbia into Hungary, before the NATO coup that ousted the government of Slobodan Milovic and the Socialist Party of Serbia. An anti-Communist "progressive" in our group even saw the act of inspecting our visas at the border as proof that the country was "a police state!")

There were many reasons for the success of Gorbachev's counter revolution in the Soviet Union, but one contributing factor was undoubtedly the fact that Soviet people had had no direct experience of capitalism for at least a couple of generations. They were easily convinced that accepting bourgeois democracy would deliver exactly what it promised: the retention of all the benefits they had under

socialism plus loads of consumer goods and the freedom to travel at will. They did not want the overthrow of the Soviet Union or the end of socialism. But that's what they got.

Today, after experiencing the "benefits" of capitalism – inflation, unemployment, high prices, deteriorating living standards and increasing NATO military threats right on their doorstep – it is not surprising that many are looking back nostalgically at what they lost.

*Newsweek*, the US "current affairs" journal published by *The Washington Post*, reported in dismay earlier this year: "On May 9, during Russia's commemoration of the 70th anniversary of victory in World War II, Stalin seemed to be everywhere: veterans carried portraits bearing his unmistakable image through Red Square, while state television screened documentaries hailing his achievements as supreme commander in chief of the Red Army. Among the souvenirs on sale in Moscow are Stalin T-shirts, cups and decorative dishes.

"It's not only images of Stalin that are gaining popularity. The language of Stalinist terror has made a startling return to Russian political life." Now what could the good folk at *Newsweek* mean by that? They are quick to tell us: "Putin has labelled Kremlin critics 'national traitors' and a 'fifth column'". The devil you say!

But *Newsweek* has more: "Then there are the increasingly frequent show trials. In late August, Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov was jailed for 20 years on terrorism charges that were widely seen [at least by *Newsweek*] as

revenge for his involvement in protests against Russia's seizure of Crimea."

Hang on a minute. "Russia's seizure of Crimea"? The people of Crimea voted – yes, voted – overwhelmingly to rejoin Russia after the US-backed fascist takeover of Ukraine. Apparently, self-determination by plebiscite is now "Stalinist terror!" The Russian "human rights" campaigners who are popular with the West like Sergei Parkhomenko actually say so. "Russia is heading once more towards totalitarian terror."

That these "human rights campaigners" have a definite anti-Soviet and anti-Communist political agenda is shown by the fact that they never attack the colossal human rights abuse known as the US penal system. Far more people are languishing in that system than in Russia's. A scandalously high percentage of young Black males and other poor Americans are jailed under a punitive system that sees them incarcerated in privately run prisons, forced effectively to work as slave labour for companies that complain if the number of people being sent to prison – their labour force – falls below what the prison operators regard as an acceptable level.

That was the system the Nazi concentration camps exemplified: slave labour for the profit of big corporations. No wonder US propaganda tries so hard to persuade people that Russia is a "totalitarian" state. Because you don't have to look too long at the USA to see evidence of creeping and growing fascism. ☹



Counter-revolution: Gorbachev with George Bush (Senior).

# Toronto

## The world as captured on film

Bill Meyer

**TORONTO:** Three new films from Palestine premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) this October.

*3000 Nights* is a brilliant metaphor for the people's resistance under the brutal ongoing Israeli Occupation. A young pregnant woman is arrested for no apparent reason, imprisoned without being charged, and locked up for 3,000 days, forced to give birth behind bars. But the community of women prisoners organise and rebel against the inhuman prison system in a fiction film that is too close to the tragic realities facing Palestinians today.

*Dégradé* is the feature debut of twin brothers born in Gaza, Arab and Tarzan Nasser, and stars an audacious ensemble of women trapped in a beauty salon while guns are blazing right outside the door, a fiction film also not far from the reality of Gaza. (A full review will be forthcoming in coverage of the Chicago Film Festival).

And a third film that is also not far from the realities of Gaza is *The Idol*, the latest film from Oscar-nominated Palestinian director Hany Abu-Assad (*Paradise Now*, *Omar*). It's an uplifting and heart warming true story about triumph over extreme adversity. All of Abu-Assad's films address the suffocating effects of the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian land, but this story approaches from another direction, bringing a sense of hope and victory and should appeal to a wider audience.

Sharing the joys of a *Slumdog Millionaire* and the popular appeal of TV's American Idol and its offspring around the world (the director admits to never having watched these type shows), *The Idol* reaches ecstatic heights. Mohammad Assaf, a 22-year-old wedding singer from Gaza, is played by two actors throughout the course of the film, and both are charming and believable. An unlikely candidate for the hugely popular Arab Idol TV show broadcast from Beirut with auditions in Egypt, Assaf realises it's almost impossible to get out of Gaza, let alone to Egypt

and Lebanon. Without a visa, with opposition from the fundamentalist government and police who consider contests like this decadent, and with barely any money, Assaf almost surrenders despite the urging of his friends and family.

But through a string of circumstances, with help from his friends in getting inside help dodging the fundamentalists, luck at the border crossing and overcoming other seemingly insurmountable obstacles, he actually makes it to the auditions. Finding out that he has arrived too late for the auditions, he climbs the hotel roof in Cairo and is discovered, while singing in the bathroom, by another astounded applicant who gives him his place in line.

The real-life Assaf has a gifted voice. When he sings, all hearts are moved, sensing his voice embodying the struggle of his people. Assaf had actually been considered to play himself in the movie, but the selected actors couldn't have done better, capturing the honesty and humility of this natural singer. Assaf now has two new hit songs and tours worldwide as a UN Goodwill Ambassador while spreading the message of peace and understanding for Arabic culture.

Director Abu-Assad said his other political dramas left him frustrated and disheartened, but this one was a pleasure. Professional film crews ventured into Gaza for the first time in over 30 years. He reacted to what they saw: "You won't believe the amount of destruction there. I just can't believe that humanity's allowing these kinds of crimes."

This is a rare and joyous telling of the Palestinian reality, along with *The Wanted 18*, that needs to be seen by the world.

### And now from Bangladesh ...

The small country of Bangladesh, the poorest nation in Asia, is the location for a couple of interesting films shown at TIFF. *Meghmalar* is a drama that recreates the time leading up to the 1971 Bangladesh War of Liberation from Pakistan. It's a low-budget minimalist film, but



*Journey of a Thousand Miles: Peacekeepers.*

with an assured sense of the history and people.

It follows the story of a chemistry teacher who accidentally gets misidentified as a rebel fighter, while all the villagers are forced to make fateful decisions in the advancing struggle. This first feature from Zahidur Anjan promises a new voice in Asian cinema, telling a tale that is rarely heard or properly understood, addressing the meaning of nationalism and patriotism and its complex relation to love and family.

*Journey of a Thousand Miles: Peacekeepers* is directed by two women, an American and Pakistani, and takes place mostly in Haiti, but it's all about several young inexperienced Bangladeshi policewomen who are hired by a UN agency to assist for a full year in the devastated regions of Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. The task is far beyond the capacity of these young untrained women, many of whom had never left their country, let alone their families, for a term as long as this.

The film could be a lesson on how *not* to send aid to a needy country. Untrained in the necessary police functions, the history of the country and the language of the people, but simply driven by the desire to give assistance when needed (for a decent salary), these altruistic workers run into one obstacle after another. The UN has been suspected of bringing the cholera epidemic.

They have overstayed their welcome as the people want them out. Violence and misunderstanding confront these Muslim women who seem like fish out of water. Their homesickness aside, they can't wait to return to the security of their homeland. They manage to get out alive, and their husbands and children are waiting anxiously at the airport upon their arrival, hoping they'll never choose an adventure like this again.

### And from China...

The largest Asian nation, with one of the fastest growing economies in the world, China also has one of the world's largest and quickly expanding film industries. With TIFF presenting no fewer than seven

new brilliant features, viewers had a chance to see many stunning aspects of this burgeoning culture.

Many themes are addressed, like the trend of today's Chinese youth who are choosing the excitement and vitality of big city life over the traditional countryside (*A Promised Land*); the Tibetan spiritual quest (*Paths of the Soul*); the changing landscape of the gangster underbelly of Beijing (*Mr Six*); the effects of the economic boom and materialism on family and traditional life (*Mountains May Depart*); a song and dance musical about corporate corruption and the burgeoning class of wealth (*Office*).

One of the most elaborate productions is an epic about Jackie Chan's parents that spans several epochs in Chinese history. *A Tale of Three Cities* is a stunning cinematic testament to the power of love overcoming social upheaval and tremendous hardships. From the war with Japan in the 1930s through WW2, the formation of Mao's Communist China, the Cultural Revolution and mainland versus Hong Kong, the film pulses with life and drama, utilising the massive resources of film production and labour available in a country that does everything big.

But there is also one small film from China that stands out from the rest in its simplicity and effect. The concept of "patriotism" is challenged in a probing study of a young high school advocate of Mao's Communist China. It covers five years in the life of a young man who is consumed and amazed by the accomplishments of his country's hero, Chairman Mao Tse Tung. *A Young Patriot* opens with scenes of paintings and statues of Mao that are prevalent all around China, and then follows Zhao Chantong as he eagerly waves a large red flag leading a small parade down the streets of his village.

It's hard to tell how people are reacting to this young man's zeal, if they support his idealism or consider him eccentric. But his beliefs are sincere, and his innocent charm is appealing. He has support and comfort from his family and friends, but apparently is failing in his high school studies. He is forced to work the summer as a hotel valet in order to retake some classes and finally graduate to a community college.

Zhao is zealous in his drive to spread the word of Mao in a country that is quickly forgetting its history. He sees patriotism as a virtue, and it becomes his own personal pursuit. His dedication to family is shown in his futile attempts to save his grandfather's house from demolition, by standing on the roof as the machines tear into the walls.

He sings patriotic songs of the Mao era with his whole heart, containing lyrics such as: "Beijing's Golden Mountain shines with brilliance, Chairman Mao is that golden sun. Its warmth and kindness light up this heart of a slave."

Zhao's military service is complicated, as he discovers few have the same dedication as he has for Mao's teachings. And the changing economic landscape of a fast growing country is producing systemic greed and corruption that are hard for him to accept.

The film ends with him walking through a tunnel coming out into the light, walking past a giant advertisement sign that reads, "Agricultural Credit Union would like to be the bridge...for thousands of families towards enrichment."

And while the credits roll, there's a scene of a large white statue with its head covered in red material, most likely meeting a fate similar to Lenin's statues in the former Soviet Union.

*People's World* ✪

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## Sydney

# POLITICS

## IN THE PUB

November 5

**THE COMMONWEALTH HOMELESSNESS BILL – PROGRESS, RESISTANCE AND RHETORIC: WHY NEITHER SIDE OF POLITICS UNDERSTANDS THE URGENCY**

Katherine McKernan, CEO Homelessness NSW;  
Mary Perkins, Shelter NSW;

November 12

**THE ONGOING SAGA OF OPPRESSION OF TIBETANS: WHY CHINA'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD CONTINUES TO DECLINE**

Tenpa Dugdak, Free Tibet Movement;  
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# Health effects of the Fukushima nuclear disaster

In summing up the toll from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in terms of deaths, suicides, mental health and suffering, Ian Fairlie warns that the scale of the disaster was far worse than what the official figures indicate and that the ill-effects will linger for a long time into the future. Despite this and strong public opposition, in August, the Japanese authorities restarted one of the country's nuclear power reactors after a two-year suspension.

## Deaths from necessary evacuations

Official data from Fukushima show that nearly 2,000 people died from the effects of evacuations necessary to avoid high radiation exposures from the disaster, including suicides. The uprooting to unfamiliar areas, cutting of family ties, loss of social support networks, disruption, exhaustion, poor physical conditions and disorientation can and do result in many people, in particular older people, dying.

Increased suicides have occurred among younger and older people following the Fukushima evacuations, but the trends are unclear. A Japanese Cabinet Office report stated that, between March 2011 and July 2014, 56 suicides in Fukushima Prefecture were linked to the nuclear accident. This should be taken as a minimum, rather than a maximum, figure.

## Mental health consequences

It is necessary to include the mental health consequences of radiation exposures and evacuations. For example, Becky Martin has stated her PhD research at Southampton University in the UK shows that "most significant impacts of radiation emergencies are often in our minds".

She adds, "... imagine that you've been informed that your land, your water, the air that you have breathed may have been polluted by a deadly and invisible contaminant. Something with the capacity to take away your fertility, or affect your unborn children. Even the most resilient of us would be concerned. Many thousands of radiation emergency survivors have subsequently gone on to develop PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], depression, and anxiety disorders as a result of their experiences and the uncertainty surrounding their health."

It is likely that these fears, anxieties and

stresses will act to magnify the effects of evacuations, resulting in even more old people dying or people committing suicide.

The above should not be taken as arguments against evacuations: they are an important, life-saving strategy. But, as argued by Martin, "we need to provide greatly improved social support following resettlement and extensive long-term psychological care to all radiation emergency survivors, to improve their health outcomes and preserve their futures".

## Untoward pregnancy outcomes

Recently, Dr Alfred Korblein from Nuremberg in Germany noticed a 15 percent drop (statistically speaking, highly significant) in the numbers of live births in Fukushima Prefecture in December 2011, nine months after the accident. This might point to higher rates of early spontaneous abortions. He also observed a (statistically significant) 20 percent increase in the infant mortality rate in 2012, relative to the long-term trend in Fukushima Prefecture plus six surrounding prefectures. These are indicative rather than definitive findings and need to be verified by further studies. Unfortunately, such studies are notable by their absence.

## Cancer and other late effects from radioactive fallout

Finally, we have to consider the health effects of the radiation exposures from the radioactive fallouts after the four explosions and three meltdowns at Fukushima in March 2011. Large differences of view exist on this issue in Japan. These make it difficult for laypeople and journalists to understand what the real situation is.

The mass of epidemiological evidence from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986 clearly indicates that cancer, etc, increases will very likely also occur at Fukushima, but many Japanese (and US) scientists deny this evidence.

For example, much debate currently exists over the existence and interpretation of increased thyroid cancers, cysts and nodules in Fukushima Prefecture resulting from the disaster. From the findings after Chernobyl, thyroid cancers are expected to start increasing 4-5 years after 2011. It's best to withhold comment until clearer results become available in 2016, but early indications are not reassuring for the Japanese government. Other solid cancers are



Fukushima nuclear disaster – ill-effects will linger for a long time into the future.

expected to increase as well, but it will take a while for these to become manifest.

The best way of forecasting the numbers of late effects (i.e., cancers etc) is by estimating the collective dose to Japan from the Fukushima fallout. We do this by envisaging that everyone in Japan exposed to the radioactive fallout from Fukushima has thereby received lottery tickets, but they are "negative" tickets: if your lottery number comes up, you get cancer. If you live far away from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, you get fewer tickets and the chance is low; if you live close, you get more tickets and the chance is higher. You can't tell who will be unlucky, but you can estimate the total number by using collective doses.

A 2013 report by the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) has estimated that the collective dose to the Japanese population from Fukushima is 48,000 person-Sv: this is a very large dose.

Unfortunately, pro-nuclear Japanese scientists also criticise the concept of collective dose as it relies on the stochastic nature of radiation's effects and on the Linear No Threshold (LNT) model of radiation's effects which they also refute. But almost all official regulatory bodies throughout the world recognise the stochastic nature of radiation's effects, the LNT and collective doses.

## Summing up Fukushima

About 60 people died immediately during the actual evacuations in Fukushima Prefecture in March 2011. Between 2011 and 2015, an additional 1,867 people in Fukushima Prefecture died as a result of the evacuations following the nuclear disaster. These deaths were from ill health and suicides.

From the UNSCEAR estimate of 48,000 person-Sv, it can be reliably estimated (using a fatal cancer risk factor of 10 percent per Sv) that about 5,000 fatal cancers will occur in Japan in future from Fukushima's fallout. This estimate from official data agrees with my own personal estimate using a different methodology.

In sum, the health toll from the Fukushima nuclear disaster is horrendous. At the minimum:

- Over 160,000 people were evacuated, most of them permanently.
- Many cases of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety disorders arising from the evacuations.
- About 12,000 workers exposed to high levels of radiation, some up to 250 mSv.
- An estimated 5,000 fatal cancers from radiation exposures in future.
- Plus similar (unquantified) numbers of radiogenic strokes, cardiovascular diseases and hereditary diseases.
- Between 2011 and 2015, about 2,000 deaths from radiation-related evacuations due to ill health and suicides.
- An as yet unquantified number of thyroid cancers.
- An increased infant mortality rate in 2012 and a decreased number of live births in December 2011.
- Non-health effects include:
  - Eight percent of Japan (30,000 km<sup>2</sup>), including parts of Tokyo, contaminated by radioactivity.
  - Economic losses estimated between US\$300 and US\$500 billion.

## Conclusions

The Fukushima accident is still not over and its ill-effects will linger for a long time into the future. However, we can say now that the nuclear disaster at Fukushima delivered a huge blow to Japan and its people. Some 2,000 Japanese people have already died from the evacuations and another 5,000 are expected to die from future cancers.

It is impossible not to be moved by the scale of Fukushima's toll in terms of deaths, suicides, mental ill health and human suffering. Fukushima's effect on Japan is similar to Chernobyl's massive blow against the former Soviet Union in 1986.

Has the Japanese government, and indeed other governments (including the UK and US), learnt from these nuclear disasters? The US philosopher George Santayana (1863-1962) once stated that those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

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