

Tax "mix"

Hitting battlers hard

Bob Briton

"Everything is on the table" is the over-worked official expression to describe the looming "reform" of Australia's taxation system. If only that were true. The options on government tables at the moment have certain features in common – they will further benefit and empower the corporate sector, they won't touch the wealthy and they will clobber workers' incomes and other interests. They will combine with other changes, such as the implementation of the TPP (see Editorial), to strengthen corporate dictatorship.

While the federal government won't confirm increasing the GST or broadening its application as its preferred approach, it is clearly part of the reactionary "mix" about to be foisted on the Australian people. Turnbull & Co are taking part in a phoney "conversation" about taxation and how to fund what governments provide to the people of the country. There's a White Paper on taxation on the way and the Productivity Commission will have much more to say on the issue.

Workers would be mistaken, however, to believe the propaganda about the coup being hatched, that it is being done to find the money needed to fund items like Medicare or a National Disability Insurance Scheme. This government, and its predecessors, have been implementing a global strategy to reduce the number of services provided by governments to the people and to turn those services into sources of private profits. "Self-provisioning" – for health, education, pensions and aged care – is the by-word of "reformers" in capitalist countries in the current era. The "reforms" being proposed are about boosting profits and making workers bear the brunt of the sluggish economy and worsening economic conditions to come.

Federal Treasurer Scott Morrison nearly lets the cat out of the bag. He insists Australia has "a spending problem, not a revenue problem." He doesn't want a bigger overall tax take; he's a true blue neo-liberal, after all. He and the Prime Minister and every other servant of capital participating in the "conversation" taking place at the moment agrees that companies need to be "incentivated" to invest. Australia needs to be competitive in the international context to attract foreign investment. So if the tax take isn't going to increase and the corporates will be paying less tax, where will the revenue come from?

Morrison *et al* say it will come from the increased business activity that will flow from

the tax changes. Not many share the government's declared optimism. After decades of de-industrialising capitalist globalisation, Australia's economy has been left very vulnerable to fluctuations in commodity prices. Mineral prices are down on global markets.

"The RBA has revised down its forecast for economic growth this financial year to an average of 2.25 percent, a full half a percentage point below the budget forecast of 2.75 percent.

"Sensitivity analysis in the May budget indicated that a cut of half that size would add \$5.6 billion to next year's deficit if it was brought about by lower export prices," as Peter Martin, economics editor of *The Age* points out. Wages growth is also down, thanks to attacks on the trade union movement. Governments are committed to lowering personal income tax, in any case. Negative gearing won't be touched; it helps the wealthy. Superannuation tax concessions are untouchable for the same reason. Reducing the deficit and balancing the budget is going to be harder in future.

On the spending side, the Coalition won't consider abolishing the hugely expensive Private Health Insurance Rebate or the diesel fuel rebate so helpful to the resource sector. It won't cut military spending. There are more wars on the horizon.

So the government is left with the GST; the one "big tax on everything" that neo-liberals love. Workers don't. Everyone knows it is a regressive tax that consumes much, much more of low income earners' weekly budget than that of the wealthy. While the government plays down the role of the GST in worsening income inequality in Australia, it knows that the "Robyn Hood in reverse" aspect of the tax will need a sweetener. The idea of compensation through the tax system is being floated. This sets up a future debate about whether the government can continue with the current level of compensation or will need to reduce or scrap it.

Plans for how GST income will be passed on to the states are also "on the table". States are struggling to keep public health and education systems running. But increased revenue from a GST jacked up by 50 percent or extended to basic items will come with strings attached. Contributions at a conference hosted by Melbourne University recently made this plain.

The Productivity Commission has been called the government's "independent economic advisor" but it whistles the same tune on this and other fundamental economic questions.

"It seems reasonable to ask, if tax reform in the form of the GST is going to extend



once-in-a-generation benefits to the states, as some have suggested, whether state-based policy and regulatory restrictions should not once again be on the table," Productivity Commission chairman Peter Harris said. Treasurer Scott Morrison, who also spoke at the Melbourne conference, lapped it all up. The way the states deliver services in the fields of health and education, for example, will have to meet the federal government's expectations. Look out for even more privatisation! "Barriers" to investment and hiring and firing will be considered.

Big business' whip hand over workers, their wages and conditions will be strengthened considerably with these likely changes. An economic approach favouring workers and other exploited people would be to do the opposite of what is being "discussed" at the moment. The parliamentary Labor Party will have to be held to its stance in opposition to an increase in the rate of the GST or its extension. Throwing the direction of policy into reverse will require major political change in Australia, a strengthening of left and progressive forces and unprecedented unity. It's a challenge but the consequences of failure will be dire. ☆



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Guardian

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Not just a trade agreement

As the *Guardian* neared press time the transcript of the Trans Pacific Partnership trade deal was made public. But even a cursory reading of it confirms the manifestly devastating effect it will have on the people of the countries entering into it.

Even limited democratic rights were denied during the negotiations of the TPP. This so-called "architecture for these 21st century trade agreement" is designed to serve US corporate and strategic interests and to act as a model for future agreements.

The big corporations were at the table, consulted on every move but the public were kept in the dark. If it were not for WikiLeaks we would have had little idea of how the Australian government was signing away our democratic and sovereign rights.

The Senate had called on the government to release details but it flatly refused, treating this democratically elected, representative body with total contempt.

US corporations, in particular, are driving the agenda – Big Pharma, big financial institutions, the mining corporations and so on.

The TPP might be referred to as a trade agreement, but only about five of the 26 chapters are about trade. The remainder go to the heart of the powers and role of government, in particular, they seek to override the government's sovereign powers and responsibility to legislate in the interests of its people, its economy and environment.

The government's capacity to act or likelihood of not acting because of fear of being sued for hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars covers almost every aspect of life including: price of prescriptions; environmental protection; workers' rights; local content on TV; foreign investment rules; food and tobacco labelling; coal seam gas mining; financial regulation; internet privacy; environmental protection; government procurement, and much more.

The government claims it is committed to protecting the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Australia's interests. Its promises mean nothing.

One of the most dangerous, amongst many, policies is the investor-state disputes settlement (ISDS) provision, which the government is supporting.

ISDS gives foreign corporations the power to sue the Australian government for potential (what they might miss out on), not even actual, losses in profits resulting from government legislation or policy relating to health, environmental and other policies. Already under trade agreements with these clauses there are more than 500 such cases involving 98 countries.

Cases under the ISDS will not be heard by an Australian court but by international tribunals whose decisions override Australian courts.

Decisions in these closed door tribunals are made by three investment lawyers working on a for-profit basis with no obligation to balance the public interest with the profit-making interest of corporations.

There is already a lot of resistance to many of these developments. Across Europe there have been strikes against privatisation of the public sector, the cuts to social spending, and the decimation of agriculture. The opposition to the TPP is global.

There is a need to do much more to tackle the various capitalist myths being used to justify privatisation: that private enterprise is efficient while public enterprise is inevitably inefficient; that prices will go down with privatisation; that "competition", de-regulation, self-regulation, etc, are good for the community; that self-provision, meaning individualism, is better than community interests and collective participation and provision; that the budget deficit has to be eliminated; that there isn't enough money, and so on.

Finally, there is the need to promote the public sector itself – the advantages it offers and the potential it has if expanded and democratised. The public sector can play a major role in job creation, financing government projects and providing the government with the means to influence the whole economy so that it puts the needs of the community first, not corporate greed and power.

PRESS FUND

Having failed to implement its horror budget initiatives, the federal government now wants to increase the punishing goods and services tax, and/or impose it on fresh food, education and health services. Yet one report shows that increasing it to 12.5 percent would not only hit every family, it would also cost three times as much to implement as Labor's tax on carbon polluting industries, which the government axed even though it would now raise almost as much revenue as the GST increase! The *Guardian* is committed to exposing the government's intention to do anything it can, and at any cost, to stay in power and serve the interests of the big corporations. However, we really need Press Fund contributions, so please send us something if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

Eric Durston \$10, Llew Kiek \$20, Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$50 Progressive total \$5,630

Taking issue – Steven Katsineris

Support the Palestinian peoples struggle

What you can do to help

Many of us feel upset about the appalling situation that's still happening in Palestine, it's deeply saddening and distressing. The brutal Israeli occupation and repression continues to cause deaths, injuries and so much suffering and destruction. The ongoing injustice and its dreadful consequences, the numerous atrocities committed against the Palestinians and their dispossession and displacement is one of the key problems confronting the world. This crucial moral issue demands a just and viable solution. Only the active participation of many people will compel the entrenched forces that support the colonial settler state of Israel to alter their policies and positions.

People contact me or I read of people stating how they feel angry, frustrated and helpless in the face of the deep-rooted political, commercial and media pro-Israel bias in Australia, the USA, etc.

I firmly believe that the perceptions and viewpoints of a lot of decent people of Israel have indeed changed greatly in the past 10-15 years or so. Israel's former image of blamelessness has largely evaporated and its zealous lobby are under enormous challenge from many people

waking up to the Israeli facade and now see the real ugly face of Israel and its occupation and oppression. Many people are no longer listening to the Israeli version of events and do not believe the Israeli lobbyists and mainstream medias lies on the Palestine struggle anymore.

And I have faith that we can continue this process and increase our impact to get changes in people's attitudes on this issue. As more people become aware of the truth regarding Palestine and do something to support the Palestinians, the more the pressures grow on Israel and its backers. We must do whatever we can to help this development. Each person has various abilities and skills so some can do more than others, but everyone can do something and can contribute. And I believe that every act however small, combined with thousands of other peoples' efforts makes a positive difference.

Talk to your family, friends, workmates, people you know and meet about Palestine, give them books or leaflets to read, post information on Facebook, write letters (to blogs, newspapers, magazines, to your friends, etc), message people, make a leaflet, even just a few and put them on notice boards, or prominent places or leave them around

where people will see them and read them, or join a support group, go to a solidarity protest.

Send letters expressing your concerns to your local politician. Boycott Israeli products and companies that support Israel and encourage others to do so. Promote the Boycott, Disinvestments and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Get a couple of enlightening DVD's that you can lend people when they express an interest in finding out more about the Palestine issue. Send messages of solidarity to Palestinians and their organisations, this heartens their resolve.

Just do what you can and little by little this is how we get people thinking about the issue, change their minds and embolden them. And this is how we achieve real change. And never forget you are not alone, there are millions of us working resolutely towards the same aim, to help free Palestine. So don't give up, be optimistic and remain steadfast, because we can and are making a difference by what we say and do. Together our efforts will end this terrible injustice.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead. ✪

That's capitalism ... They said it

The campaign against Transfield which manages the concentration camps on Nauru and Manus Island is working. Some funds have sold off their Transfield shares and the company is hitting back.

Transfield's CEO Diane Smith-Gander says, "I am proud of what Transfield is doing."

How could anyone be proud of the rape of children and women, the murder of an asylum seeker, of the

appalling subhuman conditions that asylum seekers are subjected to in these camps.

And now the return of a pregnant rape victim to Nauru.

Smith-Gander passes off the criminal mismanagement of these camps as government policy, so blame the government, treat it as a political issue. It probably is government policy. So what! That does not absolve the company which is raking in whopping profits

overseeing the suffering of human beings fleeing for safety and seeking our assistance.

The company ducks questions about specific cases of abuse.

Smith-Gander cold-heartedly says, "For us it's about the business element, and I see the business element as in very safe hands."

That says it all. It's just business, nothing personal. ✪



Letter Z says LGBTIQ and A have ostracised other members of the English alphabet

Speaking from the alphabet's spiritual home in Oxford, England, the letter Z said its exclusion from what is now believed to be the English language's longest acronym was hurtful and in fact constituted discrimination.

"I don't understand it," said Z.

"It was Christian missionaries who first brought us Alphabetians to England, and Christians are meant to be all about kindness and inclusion, regardless of class or social stature. Yet here we have a clear cut example of alphabet bigotry,"

it said. "It's hard enough being the last letter in the alphabet and being constantly overlooked by most English words," said Z. "On top of this there's the confusion about my pronunciation, and now I've been left out by those who should know what it feels like to be marginalised."

Z told *Common Tern* it had decided to speak out after the recent inclusion of the letter A in the acronym. "When the acronym got to Q, I felt things were looking up. Then I find out last week that A

has managed to weasel itself into the limelight yet again.

"There are clearly some who think they have more rights than others and I'll be considering a legal challenge to these A-listers and any others that are added," Z said. It's also rumoured that chromosomes X and Y are considering joining Z in any legal action due to their obviously bizarre omissions. *Common Tern* flies over the heads but beware not to take him too seriously ... ✪

Medicare privatisation at full tilt

Anna Pha

The federal government now has six different reviews into different aspects of the health system as it embarks upon a complete “revamp” of the system. The latest is a review of private health insurance. The government is hell-bent on the destruction of Medicare and the privatisation of all health services – the Americanisation of Australia’s health care system. The private health insurance (PHI) sector will be deregulated and the cost of premiums will rocket as the PHIs extend their coverage. The only healthcare the government is committed to is the health of the PHIs and the corporate sector.

The major PHIs, including the now privatised Medibank, and other corporates such as Serco, are lined up to take the pickings. The Business Council of Australia has also got into the act.

The government is going through the motions of holding a public consultation on private health insurance and gaining a feeling for public opinion to enable it to sell what amounts to the privatisation of Medicare.

Health Minister Sussan Ley speaks in terms of the need to “find inefficiencies of unnecessary regulatory burdens in the system that will free up private health providers.” It won’t save patients any money – quite the contrary.

Like the taxation review (see page 1), “everything is going to be on the table”, says Minister Ley, referring to the various reviews. And it will be. Every element of Medicare will be on the table for grabs by the private sector. And like the taxation review, the government already knows what the outcomes will be.

End of bulk-billing

The freezing of Medicare rebates by successive governments has already seen many doctors abandon bulk-billing. The standard fee in many practices is now \$70-\$78 for a Level B 15-minute consultation with a rebate from Medicare of \$37.05.

Private health insurance premiums have been rising at a rate twice that of inflation while wage rates for

many have fallen. PHI is increasingly unaffordable for families.

This is reflected in the fact that Australians downgraded the level of or cancelled half a million policies last year. Downgrading means either increasing the excess they pay for hospitalisation or not covering themselves for the full range of eventualities.

In the name of removing “unnecessary regulatory burdens” the government is set to abolish the compulsory community rating where everyone is charged the same rate for the same product. The funds have long lobbied for its abolition so that they can charge aged-related premiums.

The average amount the funds pay out to hospitals and for other services per annum varies considerably between ages:

\$440 for 20-24 year-olds
\$630 for 40-44 year-olds
\$3,360 for 70-74 year-olds.

The government is also bowing to health fund demands to be able to vary the premium according to risk factors such as smoking or non-smoking, gender, obesity, state of health, health risk factors as well as age.

It amounts to treating people like a car – the make, model, where it is garaged, who was responsible for the accident, etc, determines the cost of the policy.

Everyone will be hit

At first glance, it would appear that those who do not have PHI should have nothing to fear. That is not the case. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has indicated that the private health insurance funds should be able to offer cover for medical and other out of hospital services such as xrays, pathology, etc. At present they are limited to private hospital coverage.

In fact, the government wants to hand over the whole administration of Medicare benefits to the private sector, just as they did the Commonwealth Employment Services.

Companies like Serco are looking to take over the administration of Medicare and public hospitals. The PHI funds are seeking coverage of Medicare items which up to now they have been denied. They will receive payments from the government per



member instead of Medicare directly providing rebates.

The government tries to defend privatisation, which would spell the virtual end of what remains of bulk-billing, by saying it would be cheaper for patients! They would not be out of pocket by as much if they had private insurance to cover such medical services. There is some discussion about a safety net for concession card holders.

“Public consultation”

At the same time a questionnaire on the Department of Health’s website seeks people’s views on the extension of PHI to cover areas which they are not presently allowed to cover. These include GP consultations, specialist consultations, diagnostic imaging, CAT scans, pathology, radiation therapy, medial oncology, renal dialysis, and community based palliative care.

The government’s questionnaire warns: “If insurers were permitted to extend coverage to health care services not currently covered, and knowing that this would lead to an increase in the price of premiums, which services should be covered?” A list is offered to choose from.

So instead of the present co-payment, a patient would pay premiums to a PHI which include a layer of profits. It would cost more.

Amongst the many other, often loaded questions, the public is asked

to name up to three factors they value most about private hospital treatment cover.

Amongst the six options is: “By purchasing private health insurance I am taking pressure off the public system and Medicare.”

This question not only repeats the myth that PHI takes the pressure off the public system but reads as though PHI companies have already taken over Medicare’s areas of coverage!

What PHI does is divert funds from the public system. Without the \$6 billion per annum taxpayer funded rebate on PHI on premiums, the private hospital system would collapse. As a system in its own right it is unsustainable.

Patient costs rising

The Business Council of Australia, representing the largest corporations in Australia, has joined the chorus of demands for cuts to health spending, with references to “unsustainable growth rates in health expenditure.”

The BCA noted in a paper presented to a health roundtable in Sydney last month that, “The share of total health expenditure met by individuals via out-of-pocket expenses is growing. It now accounts for 20 percent of overall costs, which ranks as the highest of all comparator countries.”

These expenses include medicines, co-payments where doctors do

not bulkbill and private health insurance premiums. There is also the Medicare Levy paid by individuals through the taxation system.

Out-of-pocket spending on health has grown at an average annual rate of 6.2 percent over the decade 2003-04 to 2013-2014, 17.8 percent of total health expenditure in 2013-14.

The government is preparing to hand over the running of Medicare to the private, for-profit sector. The cost cutting is not to reduce the cost to people, but to reduce government spending and for the benefit of the private, for-profit sector.

The cost of health services for the public is about to go through the roof. Accessibility and quality will be the casualties.

Over time patients will find they have little choice in hospital or specialist or even what treatment they will be covered for – yet choice is one of the key rationales used to defend the private system. That is if they can afford to use the privatised, deregulated system. Welcome to America!

Australia, in the original Medicare, had one of the best health systems in the world, with some of the best outcomes. It was funded centrally by government revenue, there was universal access with bulkbilling and quality public hospitals.

Medicare is worth fighting for. ✪

Pete's Corner



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Struggle at Uluru

The small community of Mutitjulu, on the eastern side of Uluru, is still struggling 30 years after the rock was officially handed back. It was expected that jobs and development opportunities would follow, but that hasn't been the case, even as tourist dollars have poured into Yulara, on the other side of Uluru.

The small tourism township has reaped most of the benefits of 300,000 people flocking annually to see the spiritual heart of the country.

But of 250 Aboriginal people employed at the Ayers Rock Resort, only five are Anangu people from Mutitjulu, and, of the town's 400-odd population, 254 are on the dole and struggling to make a living.

At the 30th anniversary of the handback of Uluru and Kata Tjuta in Mutitjulu on October 26, locals were keenly aware of the disparity, as executive member of the Central Land Council (CLC) Vincent Forrester explained.

"It's a good thing that happened that day 30 years ago, but I tell you what, we have a long way to go as a nation of people," he said. "We had visions of developing our own economic base, using industry. But I'm afraid those sorts of things have been a bit short-changed."

Mr Forrester said "the mistakes of successive Labor and Liberal federal and territory governments were on display in Mutitjulu".

"Still living in third-world conditions here," he said. "You people from the city, your eye will tell you no lie; it's there for all the world to see." Mr Forrester called on governments to empower the locals, and to fulfil the hope he saw on the faces of those families who received the title deeds from then Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephen three decades ago.

Barbara Tjikatu, whose husband received the title deeds, said she was happy to celebrate the long, difficult fight that Elders faced in the years leading up to the handback.

"We want government and Anangu to work together," she said. Northern Territory Labor senator Nova Peris said it was the role of politicians to ensure the Anangu culture could sustain what was inherited.

"We have gathered here at Mutitjulu, a community of 400 people struggling to make a living in the shadow of this international tourism icon, the spiritual heart of Australia," she said.

"And Yulara is down the road, glittering in prosperity from the tourism developments over the last 30 years; the differences between the two places are stark."

Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion said governments and communities needed to work together-to-continue-to advance the interests of local Aboriginal people. Locals will be employed in the redevelopment of an adult education



Mutitjulu women and children. (Photo: Kia Mistilis)

centre, he said, and more ranger jobs would be available to work on a neighbouring, newly-declared Indigenous protected area of five million hectares.

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park board chair Sammy Wilson said there was a lot of interest in the park, but the Anangu people seemed to be missing out.

The park employs 14 rangers. Of these, five are Aboriginal-identified positions, three are filled by Anangu, with two vacant.

Parks Australia staff said barriers to employing Anangu were lack of literacy, numeracy and English speaking skills, and access to training opportunities.

Mr Wilson criticised the federal government for directing most of its funding to the Ayers Rock Resort.

"It seems like a big vacuum cleaner is sucking everything away," he said.

"This place (Uluru) is our culture here, but it's ending up over there (at the resort); it should be here."

Mr Wilson said Anangu wanted to be treated as equals by the government, saying that when promises by prime ministers are made, they are in "two tongues".

"He'll promise me and then there's the other one, where he's got two tongues," Mr Wilson said. He said he wanted to see young people take over leadership of the tour company owned and run by residents from Mutitjulu.

AAP, with Jillian Mundy
Koori Mail ☘

Strike hits airports

Immigration and Border Force workers took 24-hour strike action at Australia's eight international airports and other key sites on Monday, as part of their campaign against the federal government's unfair attack on their rights, conditions and take-home pay.

The all-day industrial action, which started just after midnight on Sunday, is an escalation on the 10 days of rolling two-hour stoppages that caused substantial disruption to international air passengers and businesses in September.

Among those giving up a day's pay to participate in the 24-hour strike will be hundreds of Border Force officers in freight areas who were harshly stood down and docked all pay for implementing limited and fully approved work bans.

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) national secretary Nadine Flood said: "These Border Force officers work on the front line in keeping Australia safe and they take no pleasure in disrupting travellers' plans. They're giving up a day's pay to strike because the federal government and the Department are not listening to them and are continuing to push unreasonable cuts to rights, conditions and take-home pay."

"These workers are angry because their boss is trying to cut their pay by \$8,000 a year – and then accusing them of not living in the real world when they object. More than 10,000 Immigration and Borders staff have already voted against this proposal, but the government's not listening."

She said the workers are ordinary mums and dads worried about losing their rights and paying their bills. "Border Force officers have

copped this attack all year and they want Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Minister Michaelia Cash to fix it. We are asking the government to drop these attacks, sit down and talk to find a fair and realistic outcome, which maintains workers' rights with a reasonable pay offer around 2.5% to 3%.

"We expect Border Force to continue their heavy-handed tactics in response to workers' concerns, including the expensive use of managers who are flown around the country to act as strike breakers. We hope they don't cut corners just for the sake of limiting delays."

As with previous industrial action at airports and other key locations, the CPSU agreed to exclude staff in some roles from striking to protect counter terrorism and national security.

Meanwhile, the fight to protect public sector rights, conditions and real wages has landed on Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's own doorstep, with the CPSU seeking a ballot allowing protected industrial action in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

The CPSU has lodged an application for a Protected Action Ballot with the Fair Work Commission. If the ballot is successful it will give CPSU members working within PM&C the legal right to strike and implement a range of internally focussed work bans designed to put pressure on the agency and government over unfair cuts to rights and conditions.

The move towards industrial action follows last month's clear 78 percent No vote by PM&C workers to an enterprise agreement that would have cut their rights and conditions.

Nadine Flood said: "Our members in Prime Minister Malcolm

Turnbull's own department have been saying for some time that they want to step up their fight against the government's unfair bargaining policy. We decided to hold off and give Prime Minister Turnbull and Minister Michaelia Cash a chance to fix this mess. The government's bargaining policy still makes a resolution almost impossible and, based on their feedback, members will now have the opportunity to vote on industrial action."

The clear 78 percent No vote from PM&C staff on the Department's unfair enterprise agreement last month makes it clear the workers will not accept having their rights and conditions stripped in return for an 18-month wage freeze and then a sub-standard pay offer.

Workers in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet are dealing with the bargaining mess at the same time as they have had to cope with major restructuring that brings together staff from 10 separate agencies who are all on different terms and conditions. The government's bargaining policy has only added to the pressure of what was already a difficult challenge.

"Immigration and Border Force workers – 91 percent of whom voted No to another unfair agreement – have shown they won't be intimidated by proceeding with work bans despite management's decision to stand them down and dock their wages," said Ms Flood.

"Prime Minister Turnbull and Minister Cash shouldn't need any more convincing that public sector bargaining is a real-world problem that needs fixing. We are asking them to genuinely consider our proposals for fair and realistic outcomes by moving to maintain rights and conditions and providing a reasonable pay offer." ☘

Sydney

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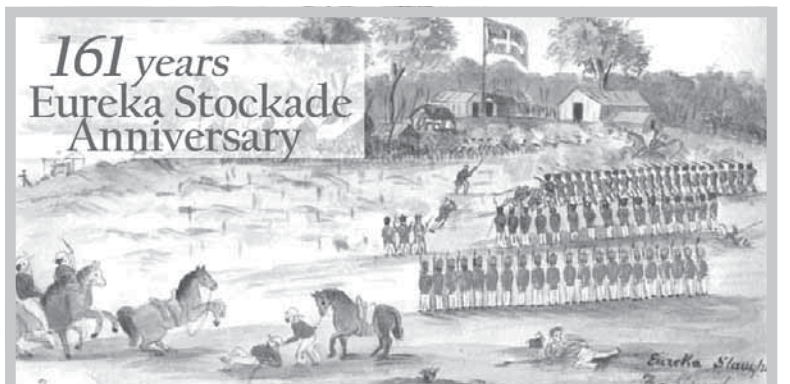
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Why we remember the Russian Revolution

On Saturday November 7 the Sydney Central Branch held a successful function to mark the date of the Great October Revolution. Branch secretary Rob Gowland spoke of the continuing significance and relevance today of that world shaking development.

The Great October Socialist Revolution took place in November of 1917, almost 100 years ago. The new society and the country it created, the USSR, was extinguished in 1989, more than two and a half decades ago. So why bother to remember it, let alone celebrate it?

Because it did something momentous: it changed the world forever. It signalled at last the birth of a new form of society, Socialism.

Recognised as the successor to – and replacement for – capitalism, the exact way the new society would be achieved and how it would function had been debated – as a theoretical concept – throughout the previous century. There had even been two attempts to bring it about, by revolutionary action, but both were tragically premature and were crushed by the military forces of the imperial powers.

The first was the heroic but short-lived Paris Commune of 1870, a popular rejection of the outcome of the imperialist war between France and the new imperial kid on the block, Germany. Thirty-five years later, there was another, more determined attempt, this time in Russia, also as a popular response to defeat in an imperialist war, this time between Tsarist Russia and the rising Empire of Japan.

That was the Revolution of 1905. It too was premature and was crushed with relative ease, although in parts of Southern Russia, thanks to the region's wide open spaces, poverty and lack of industry, Stalin and a group of Bolsheviks around him were able to keep it alive for another two years before the revolutionaries were finally defeated and imprisoned.

Then, in 1914, inter-imperialist rivalry finally erupted in a world war. The First World War was a man-made catastrophe on a scale never seen before. It was a war waged by imperialist blocs to redistribute the great powers' colonial possessions and markets. Romanticised last year on its centenary, it was in fact nothing more noble and glamorous than a trade war.

And yet it took a horrendous toll in human lives and economic loss, as well as devastating many parts of the globe, from Europe to the Pacific. One of the worst hit was Tsarist

Russia. Its economy was saddled with a huge collection of feudal aristocrats who saw no reason why the War should interfere with their luxurious and hedonistic lifestyle. A largely agrarian country, the bulk of Russia's huge army was drawn from the ranks of the peasantry, so, as the War dragged on, their farms were neglected and their families starved.

The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, waged a strong and vigorous campaign of agitation to change the imperialist war into a revolutionary one, under the slogan "Peace to the villages, war on the palaces!"

By February of 1917, both the more well-off peasants and the small but growing capitalist class had had enough of the war. They were also aware that if they did not act, the workers and the poor peasants, who were already talking revolution, would take action themselves. So they overthrew the Tsar and installed their own bourgeois government. But it was not nearly enough.

The "Provisional Government" they set up was still imperialist, continued the ruinous war, and tried to back it up with repression. By November of 1917, (October according to the faulty, antiquated calendar used in Russia under the Tsars and still used under Kerensky's Provisional Government) Lenin judged that the time for a successful socialist revolution had finally arrived. Armed workers, supported by revolutionary soldiers and sailors, arrested the Provisional Government and ushered in a new stage in human history.

It did not have an easy birth: the imperialist powers hastily brought their world war to a close, so that their soldiers, expecting to return home in a world at peace found themselves being used to crush the socialist revolutions that had followed the Russian Revolution in Hungary and Germany. The revolution in Russia embodied the hopes and desires of working people around the world. The capitalist powers responded by sending troops from 14 imperialist countries (Australian military forces amongst them) to invade Revolutionary Russia itself, to "strangle the socialist baby in its cradle" as Churchill so charmingly put it.

Thanks to the sheer size of the country, and the incredible tenacity of its people who at last were fighting for themselves not their feudal masters, and also thanks to the spread of an international movement demanding an end to this new war against the workers and peasants of Russia, the counter-revolution was defeated after several years of intense fighting, privation and destruction. The

revolutionaries won but inherited a country in ruins.

Undaunted, in what has been called "the Russian miracle," they went on to turn a backward agrarian country into one of the world's two superpowers, the country that saved the world from fascism, the country that took humanity into space, and which developed a form of society free of unemployment, exploitation, racial hatred and war mongering.

Despite constant imperialist acts of aggression, subversion and sabotage, the new society created by the October Revolution was able to stand up to imperialist attempts at intimidation, to economic boycotts and non-stop propaganda, and to support socialist revolutions in Eastern Europe, in Asia, in Africa and Latin America. The largely successful movement against colonialism was as successful as it was because of the inspiration and support it received from the USSR.

The capitalist world opposed the spread of revolution with every weapon at its command, and in many countries the people's hopes and dreams were snuffed out by covert and overt wars to prevent capitalism being overthrown or to restore it where the people had temporarily succeeded in getting rid of it.

The successful counter-revolution of 1989 in Russia itself has brought the Russian people such "benefits" of capitalism as unemployment, inflation, sky-rocketing prices, the catastrophic diminishing of the state sector of the economy and a burgeoning number of profit-driven entrepreneurs. Just recently, thousands of doctors were laid off, as part of a "reform" of the health system to bring it into line with the predominantly private health care system of Western capitalist countries.

With a ramped up Cold War, and numerous actual wars being fought all around the world, and the economies of the major capitalist powers now dependent on an extraordinary doctrine of constant war, while millionaires and billionaires spring up like mushrooms after rain, the bulk of the capitalist world's population faces growing unemployment, poverty, food shortages and epidemics. Big corporations are seeking control over not just the world's energy resources but also its food and water, its trade and its health care – over everything that's vital to life.

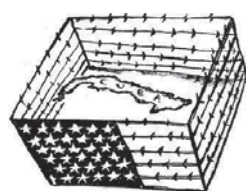
The Great October Socialist Revolution showed us the way. Our task is to complete the journey it began, and once again *change the world!* ☺



About 100 protesters turned up at the Sydney Mint where Transfield's AGM was held. Chanting "free free the refugees", they held placards which said: "Transfield has blood on their hands – Broad Spectrum of Human Rights Abuses"; "Turnbull show respect for raped refugee women, close Nauru now". Protesters objected to Transfield providing services to Australia's offshore detention centres. Kate Lee, executive officer of Union aid Abroad – APHEDA, the overseas humanitarian aid agency of the ACTU – said the union "strongly disagreed" with offshore detention services and did not think companies should be making profits from them. Diane Smith-Gander, Transfield Services chair, said that "many of the arguments here are political arguments and we don't see politics as our business". Transfield investors approved the company changing its name to BroadSpectrum at the AGM but there was no intention to change the company's profiteering at the expense of refugees.

Baiada is the largest chicken supplier in Australia. It employs about 2,200 people. In May this year the ABC's *Four Corners* program reported on the widespread exploitation of migrant workers by contractors at Baiada's worksites. Workers were paid as little as \$11.50 an hour for shifts up to 19 hours a day. Workers were told to rent only from labour hire contractors who deducted rent from their wages. The accommodation was overcrowded and with poor facilities. Many workers were on 417 working-holiday visas and recruited through Chinese newspapers, Taiwanese backpacker websites and Facebook. When Fair Work inspectors started to look into the company they were refused entry to the factory floor and could not speak directly to the workers about work practices. The company failed to produce documents on the nature and terms of its labour contract arrangements. The Fair Work Ombudsman was not amused and a scathing report followed. The publicity that followed was embarrassing enough for the company to agree to pay \$500,000 towards compensating the underpayment of workers. Under an agreement reached with the Fair Work Ombudsman, Baiada is assuming limited responsibility for the underpayment of contract labour employees. It is limited to any current or former workers found to be underpaid from January this year. The agreement does not apply to underpayments that occurred before this year.

Prime ministers change but policies remain the same. More than 130,000 single parents stand to lose family benefits part B once their youngest child turns 13 if the Turnbull government gets the green light from the Senate for the package. Under the package announced last Wednesday, single parents of teenagers would have their payments reduced from more than \$3,000 a year to \$1,000. Grandparent carers would also have their payments cut when their grandchild reaches 13. This measure will affect 3,900 grandparents. A further 76,000 couple families would also have their family tax benefit B cut completely when their youngest child turns 13.



Sydney

Vigil demanding that the USA stop the blockade on Cuba

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Syria

US invasion has begun

Tony Cortalucci

President Obama is sending a small number of Special Operations troops to northern Syria, marking the first full-time deployment of US forces to the chaotic country.

The mission marks a major shift for Obama, whose determination to defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has been balanced by an abiding worry that US troops not be pulled too deeply into the intractable Syrian conflict.

The latest deployment will involve fewer than 50 Special Operations advisers, who will work with resistance forces battling the Islamic State in northern Syria but will not engage in direct combat, Obama administration officials said.

While the US claims this move is to “defeat the Islamic State (ISIS),” it is instead clearly a move to establish long-sought “buffer zones” or “safe zones” in Syria where the Syrian government can no longer operate. US airpower will also undoubtedly be used to cover these special forces, creating a defacto no-fly-zone wherever they operate.

The map accompanying a *Washington Post* article clearly shows ISIS territory straddling the last remaining supply corridor being used to supply the terror group as well as others including Al-Qaeda’s al Nusra Front from NATO-member Turkey’s territory. US special forces will likely begin operating in these areas, and zones carved out as US operations expand.

The eventual outcome, if these operations are successful, will be the division and destruction of Syria as a nation-state. This is more than mere speculation – this is a conclusion drawn by signed and dated policy papers produced by the Brookings Institute, who has called for such zones since as early as 2012, but under different contrived pretexts.

In the March 2012 Brookings Institute Middle East Memo #21 “Assessing Options for Regime Change” it is stated specifically:

“An alternative is for diplomatic efforts to focus first on how to end the violence and how to gain humanitarian access, as is being done under Annan’s leadership. This may lead to the creation of safe-havens and humanitarian corridors, which would have to be backed by limited military power. This would, of course, fall short of US goals for Syria and could preserve Assad in power. From that starting point, however, it is possible that a broad coalition with the appropriate international mandate could add further coercive action to its efforts.”

More recently, in a June 2015 Brookings document literally titled, “Deconstructing Syria: A new strategy for America’s most hopeless war,” it is stated that:



“The idea would be to help moderate elements establish reliable safe zones within Syria once they were able. American, as well as Saudi and Turkish and British and Jordanian and other Arab forces would act in support, not only from the air but eventually on the ground via the presence of special forces as well. The approach would benefit from Syria’s open desert terrain which could allow creation of buffer zones that could be monitored for possible signs of enemy attack through a combination of technologies, patrols, and other methods that outside special forces could help Syrian local fighters set up.

“Were Assad foolish enough to challenge these zones, even if he somehow forced the withdrawal of the outside special forces, he would be likely to lose his air power in ensuing retaliatory strikes by outside forces, depriving his military of one of its few advantages over ISIL. Thus, he would be unlikely to do this.”

Unfortunately for US policymakers, it is no longer only Syria that US special forces and accompanying airpower must worry about. Russia, by invitation of Damascus, is now operating militarily across Syria, including along Turkey’s border where the US has long sought to establish its “safe zones”.

The US has openly committed to the invasion and occupation of Syrian territory. It does so with the intent of carving Syria up into a series of dysfunctional, weak zones to literally “deconstruct” Syria as a functioning nation-state. It is doing this unable to cite any credible

threat Syria poses to US national security and without any semblance of a mandate granted by the United Nations. It also does so with the prospect of triggering direct war with nuclear-armed Russia in a region Russia is operating legally.

Bankrupt foreign policy

America’s latest actions are a desperate move sought by an increasingly hysterical political and corporate-financier establishment in Washington and on Wall Street. Recent hearings conducted by the US Senate Committee on Armed Services have struggled to produce a credible response to America’s unravelling criminal conspiracy aimed at Syria, particularly in the wake of Russia’s recent intervention. The committee and witnesses brought before it have struggled to formulate a response – however, no-fly-zones and US troops on the ground have been discussed at length.

It is a poorly calculated bluff. The presence of US special forces and US airpower operating illegally in and above Syria, meant to deny Syria access to its own territory will take time to implement. The official number of US special forces being sent into Syria is said to not exceed 50. Syria and its allies could insert an equal or larger number of forces into these same areas to essentially create a “safe zone” from “safe zones”. Bringing America’s illegal actions before the UN would also be a sound measure ahead of potential confrontations with US forces operating uninvited in Syria.

The premise that ISIS must be fought and defeated by striking them in Iraq and Syria is betrayed by America’s own admission that the organisation has already spread far beyond the borders of either nation. ISIS is clearly not supporting itself on the limited resources found within either country. Were the US truly interested in stopping ISIS, it would strike at its sponsors in Ankara and Riyadh. Of course, it was clear, well over a year ago, that the appearance of ISIS would be used intentionally to accomplish US geopolitical objectives in both Syria and Iraq, serving as a pretext for wider, long-sought after direct Western military intervention.

The myth that dividing and destroying Syria while deposing its sitting government will somehow alleviate the violence in Syria and reduce the ongoing migrant crisis Europe faces, is betrayed by the fact that a similar premise used to sell intervention in Libya has only led to greater chaos in North Africa, and the creation of the migrant crisis in the first place.

If the world, including Europe, seeks to prevent the spread of ISIS and the expansion of an already growing migrant crisis, stopping the United States and its partners before they create another “Libya” in the Levant must become top priority. And while it is unlikely that Europe will show any resolve in doing so, it would be hoped that Syria and its allies realize the consequences of failing now, at this juncture, and to whose borders the chaos will attempt to cross over into next.

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Lampedusa: Battered by wind, gaspi

Antoine Cassar

In the final days of September, while European Union (EU) national security ministers were discussing refugee quotas and Frontex budgets in Luxembourg, the wind-swept and increasingly militarised island of Lampedusa hosted the Forum Controfrontiere (“against borders”), bringing together more than 40 grassroots activists from across the Mediterranean and Europe to share experiences and best practices of direct support to refugees, the blocking of deportations, and active resistance to the tightening of borders.

The tiny island of Lampedusa, named after the Greek word for “rock”, or “oyster”, or “torch”, lies 113 kilometres east of the fish-processing town of Mahdia on the tip of Tunisia’s eastern bulge. Its population of 6,304 is concentrated between the old and new ports, overlooking a natural shallow harbour on the south eastern flank of the island. The area is

made up of an imperfect grid of streets that all lead out of or towards the noisy Via Roma. A stroll down this high street can be a lesson in the acute self-awareness of small islands, with walls, market stalls, vehicles punctuated by hundreds of *lampedusine* – the intriguing shape of the island posing as a bar or business logo, a keychain or magnet, a tablecloth map splattered with drops of ice-cream, even as a tattoo on the forearm or nape of some of the locals.

DLampedusa may market itself as a remote paradise, but there is little feeling of escape – you always know exactly where you are, even at night, when the red lights of the island’s military installations indicate its three main capes. These are not the “torches” that Lampedusa may be named after, but radars and transmission towers, constant reminders of the use and abuse of the island as an outpost for forces on the continent. Anxiety hangs in the air: outside the town, every third passing vehicle is an army jeep, or a vehicle

belonging to one of Italy’s two police forces, the *carabinieri* and *guardia di finanza*. Neither is it easy to find peace on the island’s beaches or coves: Frontex ships plough the horizon. Sometimes, at night, the telegrams of crickets become confused with bizarre electrical noises heard in the sky.

Acts of protests

During the week of 22-26 September, PortoM, the grotto above the old port of Lampedusa that serves as an archive of objects left behind by migrants, an anarchist library, and the headquarters of grassroots Askavusa collective, hosted an anti-borders forum, the *Forum Controfrontiere*, as part of the 7th edition of the annual Lampedusan Festival. While EU home security ministers were playing the numbers game of refugee quotas, deciding how much more money and personnel to throw at Frontex, and discussing how to further secure the EU’s external borders, more than 40 no-border activists from

Lampedusa, Tunisia, Melilla, Ventimiglia, eastern Greece and other frontier zones in the Mediterranean and beyond (including Calais) were sharing their experiences and methodologies, debating ways to resist the militarisation of borders, to stop deportations, and to raise public awareness of the existence of migrant detention centres (often blurred out or simply unidentified by Google Maps, for example), some of which have now officially been renamed “Hotspots” by the European Council.

Aside from debates, film projections, concerts and poetry readings, the festival program included two significant acts of protest. The first was a visit to the LORAN radar station, situated at Albero Sole, the highest point of the island at 133 metres on the western cliffs, where a crucified Jesus stands in front of a heavily guarded 190-metre tall transmission tower, originally installed by NATO. A talk was given by Antonio Mazzeo, an expert on border militarisation, and a banner reading

Against war and fascism

The 17th International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties has been successfully held in Istanbul on the topic “The tasks of Communist and Workers’ Parties to strengthen the struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation, imperialist wars and fascism, for workers’ and peoples’ emancipation, for socialism”.

The meeting was attended by 104 delegates, representing 58 communist and workers’ parties from 48 countries. Six parties could not attend the meeting against their wishes but sent their greetings and written contributions.

After the extraordinary meeting in Damascus and the 14th meeting in Beirut, it was the third of IMCWP meetings held in a Middle East country, Asia Minor being the junction point of unique spheres of political class struggle. The meeting took place during the heyday of the parliamentary elections in Turkey, in which the hosting Communist Party of Turkey took part, under intense oppression by the government.

The meeting provided an opportunity for an exchange of opinions and information on the latest developments of imperialist restructuring, escalation of fascist movements in different regions and the quest for emancipation opening up opportunities for a vigorous working class struggle. The perspective to develop joint and convergent action was shared.

The parties that attended the meeting gave information on their activities and the progress of the communist movement in their countries. The speakers expressed their concern towards the escalating prohibitions, persecutions and discrimination against Communist Parties.

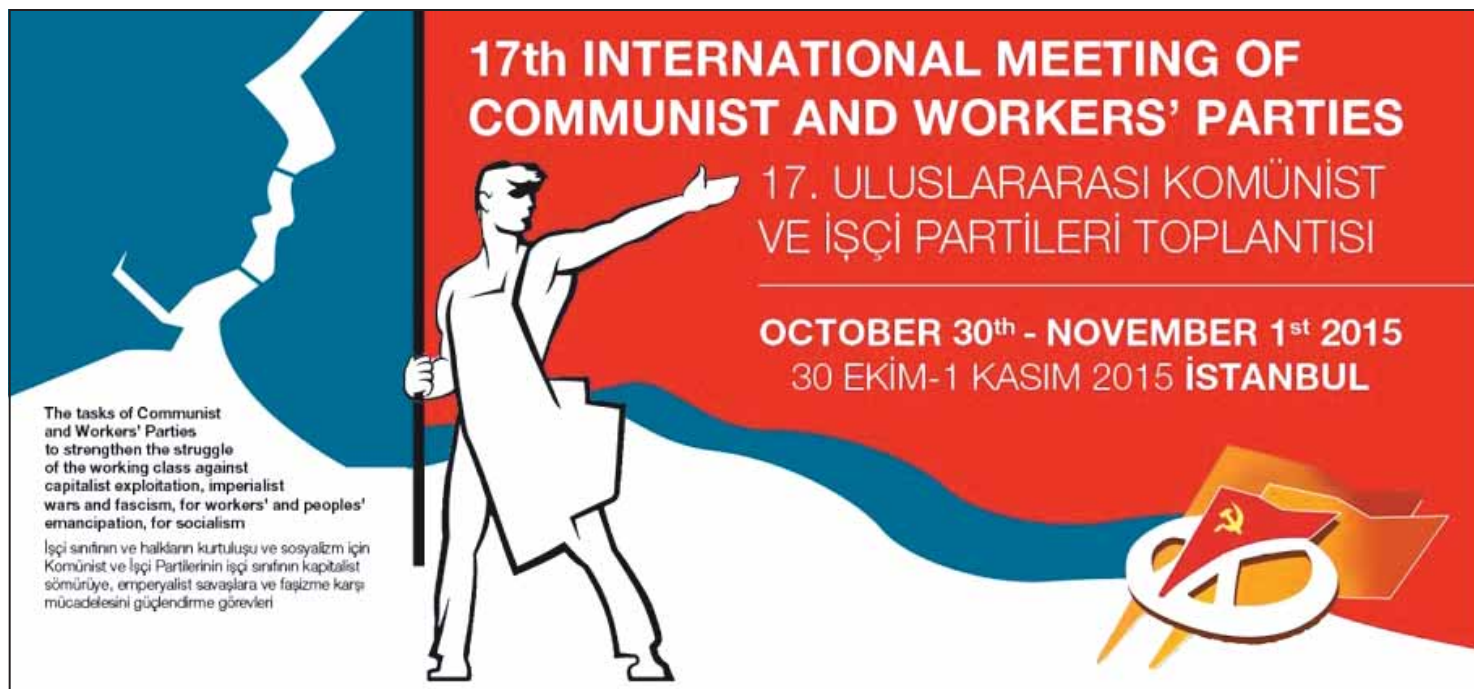
The responsibility of the communist and workers’ parties to strengthen the working class struggle in regions under imperialist threat and intervention was underlined. Likewise stressed was the concern about rivalries among capitalist powers, aggravated by their regional collaborators. The dangers posed by militarisation and the concern to fortify anti-imperialism in such regions of competition was expressed.

Capitalist crisis

The refugee crisis came to the agenda and the need for promoting not only internationalist solidarity but also class consciousness against discrimination policies and abortive patronage policies was pointed out.

Due to the restructuring of capitalism exhausted by crisis and the restoration of imperialism, the meeting drew attention to the rise of erroneous expectations of reforming the capitalist order in favour of the people and of establishing peace under the patronage of imperialism.

The timeliness and urgent necessity for promoting socialism was resolved as the sole answer for the quest of peoples against barbarism and impoverishment. There was a confirmation on breaking away from the hegemonic capitalist modus vivendi.



The particular importance of orienting patriotic resistances against military aggression and popular struggles against austerity measures towards a class confrontation was pointed out. This was reiterated with the emphasis to mobilise the working class in order to lead these struggles towards socialism.

Coordinating communist and workers’ parties’ struggles on all these issues in order to stir up the class movement on a revolutionary basis was highlighted.

Participants saluted the struggle of the peoples in Latin America and the central role of communists in these struggles for independence and socialism, strengthening the anti-imperialist and progressive forces of the region. Solidarity with Cuba and its socialist revolution, as well as with the Venezuelan people and their Bolivarian revolution was reassessed.

The meeting assessed the struggle of the European peoples against their governments’ imperialist policies and domestic exploitation of workers and enslavement of migrants. The determination of the working class in Greece to reject subordination to the blackmail of EU, ECB and IMF, including the rejection of negotiations with the Troika, was valued. The election results in Greece and Portugal for the communists were hailed, qualified as hopeful and encouraging.

Anti-imperialist struggle

The consequences of intercontinental confrontations and alliances between imperialist centres were dealt by the participants. NATO’s intention to open new military bases in Hungary and Slovakia and Russia’s interventionist policy towards Syria, beside the confrontation

in Ukraine, emerge as a change in power balances, both paving the way for a reinforced anti-imperialist struggle and also increasing the precision of communists to keep independent from mainstream power politics.

Fascist paramilitary forces are deliberately backed by liberal governments, shifting the context of struggle to identity politics and stimulating the dilemma of cosmopolitanism and nationalism which pushes back the internationalist stance of the working class. On the other hand, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations, which will provide a basis for a new wave of attacks on the working classes, was called to attention and taken as an agenda of struggle for the forthcoming period.

The dual threat in the Middle East and North Africa caused by the jihadists and the Israeli state was confirmed, both corresponding to a de facto coalition against secular and patriotic forces. Not only ISIS but also other Islamic reactionary groups, notably the components of the FSA in Syria, have a counter-revolutionary character and their role in legitimising military interventions, has to be deciphered. The Gulf states’ support for these jihadist groups and Saudi Arabia’s assault in Yemen was vigorously condemned as well as the threat posed by the Israeli state towards Syria.

More revolting is the increasing attacks of Israel on the Palestinian people, bombing residential areas, carrying out arrests. The meeting declared its solidarity with the people resisting these attacks, particularly in Palestine and in Syria, calling for an uncompromising struggle against imperialism and fundamentalism.

The growing need to strengthen the ideological struggle against the infiltration of bourgeois ideology within the ranks of communist movement had been stressed in the previous communist and workers’ parties’ meetings. The current meeting updated the facts and warnings. The artificial revival of social democracy nourished by populism, narrowing the opposition to neo-liberal policies, obsolete dictatorships and military aggression sets a trap for the communist movement rendering the class struggle blind against the real sources of these attacks.

While it is imperative to challenge all efforts to criminalise communists and condemn their historical legitimacy, there is a further need to demarcate the revolutionary and class based line of the communist and workers’ parties from the conformist and opportunist tendencies within heterogeneous opposition movements focused on mutant aspects of contemporary capitalism.

During the three-day meeting, the participant parties had the opportunity to develop their bilateral relations, to contact other parties and to exchange views.

We believe that the international meeting contributed to the consolidation of the communist and workers’ parties’ policies in triggering the working class movement in each country and will initiate their common action against imperialism and fascism by raising up socialism as the concrete solution for emancipation.

The meeting’s issues of action were adopted by the parties as guidelines to be implemented, materialised and to be monitored by the Working Group until the 18th IMCWP meeting. Istanbul, November 2, 2015 ✪

ing for air

“No Radar, Si Scuole” (no to radars, yes to schools) was pegged to the barbed wire. The second protest took place in front of a detention centre hidden away in the centre of the island. This protest quickly morphed into a spontaneous concert: on one side of the barrier at the detention centre, activists sang traditional Sicilian songs to the tune of Giacomo Sferlazzo’s guitar; on the other, a group of women and girls from Gambia and Eritrea, mostly dressed in white, clapped along to the music, laughing and dancing.

The women and girls had been rescued from the waves the previous weekend, and had been separated from their male relatives, who had already been shipped to mainland Italy. Poetic “passports” were thrown over the fence. The police inside the camp recorded the entire scene on video without taking action; towards the end, one officer broke into a dance. But the activists left with heavy hearts: half an hour of solidarity and merit, and then back to the silent, absurd

“normality” for themselves and for the girls they left behind.

Says activist and songwriter Giacomo Sferlazzo: “I would have liked to cut open the net and tell those women and girls: ‘There, you can now leave, together we’re stronger than the state and this evil world, we’re stronger than the TV, than the Pope, than the mayor, than Europe, than Nato...’ I would have liked to tie a balloon to each girl so they can fly freely, to disarm the police and tell them that they’re slaves to capital and to the state mafia. But all we could do was sing and talk to this little piece of Africa and show them some love – this word which has started to disgust me but which we need to turn into a manifesto, a thousand-page manifesto written with this single word in the ink of our own blood.”

A week after the protests, politicians descended on Lampedusa to mark the second anniversary of the October 3 shipwreck between Cala Galera and Isola dei Conigli,

in which 366 people from the Horn of Africa lost their lives. A day before the commemorations, the women and girls inside the detention centre joined forces with new arrivals and staged a protest, demanding to be taken to the mainland and throwing stones at the police. Some of the women and girls managed to escape.

So much wind, so little air

Time is oppressive on Lampedusa. Too little time to start or finish anything, all one can do is wait. The island population lives in a permanent state of standby, awaiting the next scheduled surprise, a surprise which is always on its way. Waiting, for example, for the next boat arrival – media attention may have been diverted to the Syrian exodus, but Africans continue to be rescued in their thousands, or to drown, in the waters south of Lampedusa. Waiting, perhaps, to see what the EU’s next step will be. Waiting to see what will become of Lampedusa, particularly in the wake of

suspensions that have been circling since 2009, of plans to depopulate the island and turn it into a large-scale military base. The fact that Lampedusans no longer have a hospital or clinic, that no-one is born on the island (pregnant women due to give birth are flown to Palermo), that the local school is understaffed, not to mention that the local cancer rate is significantly above average (attributed by local and foreign scientists to the military radars), are interpreted as methods to encourage inhabitants to emigrate.

Lampedusans address each other endearingly with a phrase, “O scia!”, short for “sciato”, literally meaning “my breath!”, but used to mean “my friend”, “my love”. With most of the island’s olive and acacia trees chopped down for carbon in the 19th century, the arid surface is battered by the wind. Air may be the most precious thing on Lampedusa, yet despite the strong winds, there doesn’t seem to be enough of it to breathe.

New Internationalist ✪

Germany

Refugee crisis exposes political crisis

Victor Grossman

BERLIN: How the world changes! Last spring many Europeans, especially Greeks, were so angry at a tight-fisted, cruel Angela Merkel and her acceptance of people's sufferings that they scribbled Hitler moustaches on her public portraits. Only weeks later she was celebrated around the continent, indeed the world, as a symbol of generosity and humanity. Which judgement is correct, that until July or that since late August?

What defies any clear appraisal is the on-going wavering of her government, her party and herself! The German political scene is in turmoil, with echoes all over Europe! Such turbulence has on occasion opened the way to healthy change. Now, in my view, it can lead to great dangers.

The remorseless driving element is the tidal wave of human beings, over 200,000 in October alone, risking their lives to reach Europe, especially the fabled Utopia, Germany. And didn't Merkel say they are welcome, that Germany is open to refugees fleeing death and destruction?

It would be nice to believe that Merkel was guided by altruism and humanitarian impulses, perhaps thanks to her pastor father or (as some whisper) to a spirit of internationalism learned in her East German youth. Maybe she was.

More cynical critics point to Germany's demographic problems: more and more pensioners, far too few births; a flood of young people urgently hunting for any jobs could weaken pressure from the labour movement to maintain benefits and achieve higher wages.

But the numbers are exceeding all expectations. For a large proportion – from Iraq, Afghanistan, from Syria and soon Yemen – most blame for their flight must be directed at Washington, which openly started or indirectly supports the never-ending conflicts in all four. But Germany has also engaged in vicious bombing in Afghanistan, and while US

weapon-makers have been raking in a giant share of the profits from the bombing, droning and destruction, German weapons, heavy and light, have also meant billions of Euros, with sales to Gulf monarchies, large, small but always wealthy, of everything from small arms to howitzers and Leopard tanks, which often end up further demolishing towns and cities in Syria and Yemen.

Two other conflict area states, Israel and Turkey, have never been exempted from such lucrative exports, and the latter was just rewarded with a highly-celebrated state visit to Ankara by Merkel, thus aiding Erdogan's roughneck election campaign.

The visit also raised questions about what they did aside from reviewing elite troops. Did they make or re-shuffle deals about refugees, about feeding and sheltering them in Turkey, perhaps even about finally dissuading – or preventing – them from the short, simple but very dangerous voyage from Turkish shores to nearby Greek islands and then on northwards. Have bribery or blackmailing been involved here? We can only speculate.

Straining government coalition

It is far clearer that the seemingly endless waves of immigrants are straining a German government coalition which had ruled thus far with almost unexpected coziness, considering that Social Democrats and Christian Democrats were once presumed to be principled opponents.

Actually, the first big attacks against Merkel's "welcome all refugees" policy came rather from her usually more placid sister party in Bavaria. Called the Christian Social Union (CSU), it is usually at one with its far bigger sibling in all the other states, Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

But it always stands a shade or two further to the right, like a majority of Bavarian voters in this biggest, most prosperous state in Germany,



It would be nice to believe that Merkel was guided by altruism and humanitarian impulses.

with its wealth of profitable industry, especially of the weapons variety. Its Alpine regions, known for lederhosen, dirndls, plumed hats and yodeling, are scenic but hard-bitten.

As the map shows, all immigrants who cross over from Turkey, then trek somehow through the states of one-time Yugoslavia and Austria, first reach a German border at Bavaria. Horst Seehofer, the Bavarian leader, relying on and encouraging resentment against them, pushed hard against Merkel in harshly challenging tones, insisting on more limitations and tougher policies.

He was soon joined by further-right elements in Merkel's own CDU in the first incipient rebellion to challenge her hitherto virtually total domination. And the poll figures for her party dipped disturbingly.

While this dispute simmered, Social Democratic vice-chancellor Sigmar Gabriel weighed in, challenging Merkel's partial abandonment of her "welcoming" policies to meet the challenge from the right. Last week the dispute came to a head. Merkel, bowing in many ways to Seehofer's Bavarian CSU, approved a compromise between the two allied "Christian" parties, one which was not all too Christian in nature.

All coalition leaders had previously agreed that refugees from Balkan areas, mostly miserably discriminated Roma ("Gypsies"), would be rejected and sent back to their shacks and hovels. They were not "refugees" – and few of them had the skills sought after by German industrial employers. Now, in line with Bavarian demands, it was agreed that "transit zones" should be set up on the Bavarian borders, weeding out "undesirable non-refugees" before they even arrived.

As for the others, some were more privileged, some less so – and could stay conditionally but not fetch wives or children for two years. Vitally necessary lessons in German would not be free but must be paid for out of meagre allowances granted "asylum seekers", if possible in rations not money.

But the stout Social Democrat Sigmar Gabriel rejected fenced-in "transit zones" which evoked nasty recollections of Germany's past. After two hours he left the planned conciliatory meeting in a huff.

Immigrants should be sent to the 16 German states before being separated and perhaps sent home.

They could thus enjoy at least a little salubrious German air. All decisions are up in the air for several days at the least, here too a compromise will emerge, but the splits may not heal so easily, deepened as they are by early posturing for the elections of 2017 – and earlier ones on a state level.

Violent actions increasing

The political scene is visibly changing, with many, many thousands of Arab, African and Afghani refugees being lodged in emergency quarters all over Germany. Whereas countless people went out of their way to welcome them and assist them, with everything from food aid and plush toys for the children to free medical assistance by doctors – often outdoing by far the slow-moving, even reluctant authorities – the almost inevitable backlash has been even nastier than in some areas in south western USA or other places around the world.

Reports on violent actions are increasing, there are fires in buildings which were to house immigrants – or already did – and now we read horrible stories of gang attacks, often black-masked and armed with baseball bats and the like, against individual refugees.

Such attacks, already in the hundreds, are scattered throughout the country but most frequent in eastern Saxony, in and around its capital of Dresden, where the insecure economic situation typical for most of East Germany, distrust of all current parties, the hitherto rarity of contact with non-German groups plus a provincial local patriotism are all cleverly cultivated by a particularly vicious group of fascist-minded leaders.

Their Monday PEGIDA marches, 5,000-15,000 strong and based on Muslimophobia, are continuing, though countered, as with countless smaller racist marches and demonstrations all over Germany, by large groups of people who reject their racism and carry "Immigrants welcome" signs.

Polls in Dresden indicate that 40 percent in Dresden sympathise with

the refugees, 20 percent are strongly against them, while the remaining 40 percent are wavering, but perhaps tending toward the right, especially since some mass media have gradually altered earlier support for Merkel's "Welcome".

PEGIDA may run candidates in future but is as yet not a party. Most of its dumb and misled adherents will probably vote for the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which after a split and a dip in strength, is now growing again, far too quickly.

In the polls it averages 8 percent (about 13 percent in the eastern states), edging it closer to the two opposition parties in the Bundestag, the Greens, wavering between 10 percent and 11 percent and the LINKE (Left) between 9 percent and 10 percent. The Social Democrats remain at a steady, dismaying 25 percent, while the two "Christian Union" parties led by Merkel have dropped sharply from 43 percent to 38 percent.

Thus an almost openly pro-fascist party may well make it into the Bundestag in 2017, giving it government financial support and a stronger media presence. And its curve seems to be moving upward.

One million approaching

The other European Union members, whose statesmen love grandiose statements about continental unity, lasting cooperation and friendship, have been almost totally unwilling to accept more than a token number of the nearly one million immigrants in or approaching Germany.

Especially those great new democracies created on the ruins of the Eastern Bloc, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and the three Baltic states, refuse to take any newcomers. (Slovakia might accept a few hundred temporarily, but only if they are Christians. The others have echoed this wish).

The fabric of the European Union is wearing very thin – and hungry harpies, far-right or fascist parties from Austria to Sweden, from Greece and Italy to France and Flanders, are just waiting to pick its bones – and are truly awakening bitter memories of the past.

People's World ✪

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Forgotten Lesbos?

Worsening refugee crisis on Greek island

British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn joined campaigners at a "Refugees Welcome Here" rally in London last week. The protest came as the mayor of Lesbos claimed the Greek island had run out of room to bury refugees' bodies.

Corbyn joined the Shadow Secretary of State for International Development Diane Abbott and hundreds of activists to rally in support of refugees.

Activists are calling on European governments to find a political solution to the crisis that will offer refuge to hundreds of thousands of people fleeing war zones and repression in the Middle East and Africa.

The rally comes days after the mayor of Lesbos, in the east Aegean Sea, told local radio the island cannot handle the numbers of refugees arriving.

Mayor Spyros Galinos told Greece's Vima FM radio there are more than 50 bodies in the Lesbos morgue and he was still trying to find a burial location for them.

A record 27,000 refugees arrived in Lesbos this month, according to a Save the Children worker based on the island. Greece overtook Italy as the European country with the most new migrants arriving per day in late July.

Days before, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras signed a bailout package with European creditors which forced a new round of draconian budget cuts on the country. The

fresh austerity policies made what limited funds were already available for refugees almost non-existent.

Dutch volunteer Merel Graeve, who is helping at the refugee centre in Moria, told RT that the camp cannot accommodate all the people arriving.

"Moria has been very quiet for a few days but has been booming again since this morning. The ticketing system is a little better than before, but it is still very flawed and creates a lot of problems still.

"With the sudden influx of people today, Moria is full again so we left this evening with many people and families sleeping outside, including babies. There were not enough blankets, not enough food and the small amount of shelter is an ongoing problem."

Graeve, who is a set decorator in the Netherlands, said new shelters are being built, but not quickly enough. "The sanitation is also a huge problem, we've started seeing cases of scabies. The toilet and shower facilities are incredibly, unbelievably bad and dirty. Moria needs sanitation, more sheltering and better organisation before the winter hits."

"We have repeatedly said for months that the reception conditions in the Greek islands are inadequate and the government and European Union must do more to improve it. The government operates the centre – UNHCR is there to support and advise. We are in Greece at the invitation of the government,"



A Syrian refugee girl is seen in the arms of her father as they depart the passenger ferry *Blue Star Patmos* arriving from the island of Lesbos, at the port of Piraeus, near Athens, October 21. (Photo: Alkis Konstantinidis)

Ron Redmond, a spokesman for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) said.

In a recent *Huffington Post* UK blog, journalist Lliana Bird quoted a volunteer doctor on the ground in Lesbos describing the dire situation in the camp last week, when rains swept the island.

"There are thousands of children here and their feet are literally

rotting, they can't keep dry, they have high fevers and they're standing in the pouring rain for days on end. You have one month guys, and then all these people will be dead," the doctor said.

Humanitarian groups say thousands of people are attempting to enter Europe before the winter comes, undeterred by the increasingly harsh conditions.

"Winter and rough seas won't stop desperate people from trying to reach Europe. [But] in the winter, seas will become much more treacherous, likely resulting in greater numbers of deaths," the International Red Cross said.

Corbyn was one of the politicians who joined union activists and religious leaders at the Refugees Welcome Here rally in central London on Wednesday evening.

According to a Facebook page promoting the event, the

demonstration highlights the lack of action by European governments in response to the humanitarian disaster.

"There remains no political agreement on finding a solution to the biggest migration of refugees to Europe since WW2," the Facebook post reads.

"Recent EU summits have focused on seeking agreement with Turkey on stopping the flow to Europe of refugees, but no agreement on how [to] provide protection to many thousands still stranded in Hungary, Calais and other parts of the EU. With winter approaching, people are desperate," it read.

Trade union representatives from the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Union of Students (NUS) also took part in the rally, along with religious leader Rabbi Lee Wax and Talha Ahmad of the Muslim Council of Britain.

RT

Venezuela re-elected to UNHRC

Venezuela was re-elected to a second consecutive term on the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) with the backing of 131 countries on October 28. The South American nation will serve on the 47-member inter-governmental human rights body until 2018 alongside Ecuador and Panama.

In addition to backing from its fellow UN member states, Venezuela also received firm support in its re-election bid from 100 civil society groups from diverse countries across the globe, including Bolivia, Mexico, Argentina, Switzerland, Germany, Kurdistan, Chile, Palestine, Colombia, France, as well as Venezuela.

"In the last 15 years, with the adoption of the Bolivarian Constitution, Venezuela has been exemplary in its advances in the promotion and protection of human rights," read a public statement signed by the grassroots organisations.

Venezuela's accomplishments, the groups noted, include dramatically reducing poverty, guaranteeing access to healthcare as a social right for all, maintaining social spending at approximately 60 percent of GDP, among other advances.

"We consider that the re-election of Venezuela to the UNHRC is a guarantee for the defence of human rights of all peoples as well

as a voice for the victims of war and the oppressed," the statement concluded.

Venezuela's re-election to the human rights organ was claimed as a victory by its UN Ambassador Rafael Ramirez who emphasised that the Bolivarian nation prevailed in spite of what he termed a media campaign "full of lies directed by the United States" and aimed at tarnishing the South American country's human rights record.

Nonetheless, not all countries were pleased with the re-election decision, namely staunch US-ally Israel whose government has virulently opposed Caracas's championing of Palestinian rights internationally.

Following the vote, Israeli UN Ambassador Danny Danon lashed out at Venezuela and the UNHRC, accusing the latter of practicing double standards in criticising Israel while supposedly turning a blind eye to what he alleged to be violations of political and press freedoms by the Venezuelan government.

Speaking during a press conference, Ramirez hit back at his Israeli counterpart, denouncing Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian lands, which has been repeatedly condemned in binding UN Security Council resolutions, notwithstanding 41 vetoes by the United States.

"Really, I believe Israel has a lot of things to review [in its own human rights record], their

behaviour against the Palestinian people... thousands of [Palestinian] children in Israeli jails and now this violence in Jerusalem," he stated, referring to the ongoing Israeli crackdown on Palestinian resistance in the occupied territories that has left 65 Palestinians dead since the beginning of October.

In defending his country's human rights record, Ramirez took aim at the United States, which has been accused of sponsoring repeated destabilisation efforts against the Bolivarian government, including a 2002 coup that temporarily ousted then President Hugo Chávez and led to massive human rights violations.

"In my country there is no death penalty, there is nothing similar to what we see in Guantánamo, we repudiate torture... Our army has never left our borders to attack, only Simon Bolívar led an army out of Venezuela and it was to liberate countries [from Spanish colonialism]," the UN ambassador asserted, referencing the US military's infamous torture facility located on illegally-occupied Cuban territory.

The re-election decision came one day after 24th annual UN General Assembly vote on the Cuban embargo, in which 191 of 193 countries – with the exception of the US and Israel – voted in favour of a non-binding resolution calling for an end to the illegal 55-year US blockade of the island.

Venezuelanalysis.com

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Murdoch grabs National Geographic

Climate change denier Rupert Murdoch just bought National Geographic.

You read that right: one of the world's most notorious climate change deniers, whose Fox media empire spreads misinformation on a massive scale, just got control of National Geographic.

The National Geographic Society does incredibly important work on climate change – from publishing groundbreaking stories to giving grants to scientists. But the new deal hands 73 percent ownership of its media operations to Fox.

Top publications enforce editorial independence by appointing Public Editors who represent the public and

investigate complaints of editorial interference.

The US\$725 million deal marks the end of 127 years of non-profit science journalism for National Geographic. The deal includes its magazines, maps, books, TV channels, digital media platforms, and a whole lot else.

The new Fox-controlled company, National Geographic Partners, will be run for-profit, and it will answer to Murdoch's shareholders – via its board.

Fox CEO James Murdoch has said that he has no interest in the editorial affairs at Nat Geo, but his father Rupert has a well-documented history of editorial meddling.

From interfering in elections to hacking the phones of murdered teenage girls, Rupert Murdoch's media empire has shown time and again that it will do anything for profit and power. But his most dangerous legacy by far will be his scientific illiteracy – and his quest to ensure that human-caused global warming is dismissed as a conspiracy. Just two weeks ago he called climate change concerns "endless alarmist nonsense" and last week, he blamed "extreme greenies" for hindering economic growth.

National Geographic is a well-

respected and global retail brand – meaning it will take notice if we speak up. But our voices need to be as loud as possible if we want to be heard.

SumOfUs members have been crucial in keeping the media accountable. Last year, after thousands of us came together and spoke out, we got one of the most widely read newspapers in the UK to withdraw an offensive, sexist ad that offered up a topless woman as a raffle prize.

Now, let's stop Murdoch from ruining National Geographic's objectivity and excellent environmental reporting.

Taren and the rest of the SumOfUs team

ISDS takes away rights and sovereignty

"Trade must be made to work for human rights and development and not against them," the United Nations Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, Alfred de Zayas said.

In his fourth report to the UN General Assembly, Mr de Zayas focuses on the adverse human rights

impacts of free trade and investment agreements and calls for the abolition of Investor-State dispute settlement mechanism (ISDS) that accompanies most of these agreements.

Over the past 25 years bilateral international treaties and free trade agreements with investor-state-dispute-settlement have adversely impacted the international order and undermined fundamental principles of the UN, State sovereignty, democracy and the rule of law. It prompts moral vertigo in the unbiased observer.

The Independent Expert noted the European Commission's recent proposal to create an Investment Court System for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership – TTIP. However, he warned that it suffers from fundamental flaws and can only be adopted if the primacy of human rights is guaranteed, and those essential areas of State regulation including tobacco control, labour standards and environmental protection are carved out, i.e. excluded from the Court's jurisdiction.

The Independent Expert also called for the organisation of a World Conference on trade and investment agreements with a view to making them compatible with the UN Charter and human rights norms.

Recalling that States are treaty-bound by regional and universal human rights treaties, Mr de Zayas called for a reaffirmation on the legal priorities, which should be issued by the International Court of Justice by way of an advisory opinion.

He said the General Assembly should refer pertinent legal questions to the ICJ requesting an advisory opinion on the priority of human rights treaties over other agreements, with due application of article 103 of the UN Charter which stipulates that in the event of a conflict the UN Charter prevails over any other international agreement.

Besides the International Court of Justice, he also called on regional courts including the European Court of Human Rights, the American Court of Human Rights and the African Court of Human and Peoples Rights to test the compatibility of free trade agreements with their respective Conventions.

The violation of human rights norms could also be tested by way of inter-State complaints procedures of the Human Rights Committee and Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.

T Southern Brisbane

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

The new Vietnam War?



Master Sergeant Joshua Wheeler.

If you watched the TV news near the end of October, you could not have missed the coverage of the death of Master Sergeant Joshua Wheeler, a US soldier and acknowledged member of the elite Delta Force who was allegedly killed during a raid on an ISIS facility in Iraq.

We not only saw footage of the supposed raid, conveniently videotaped, but also of course the arrival of his body back in the USA. A colour studio portrait of his stern, shaven-headed visage accompanied every story. The coverage was surprisingly extensive given that Delta Force specialises in covert, ultra top secret operations "behind enemy lines" to extricate hostages or simply to "take out" (i.e. assassinate) people the US government or military regards as significant enemy personnel.

As former US State Department official Peter Van Buren wrote in his Washington-based blog, *We Meant Well* about the Middle East, "The United States does not formally acknowledge the existence of Delta Force, and rarely mentions the names of any of its members, even after they leave the service. ... Most of the unit's actions abroad are never mentioned publicly, and when an operator is killed in combat, often the death goes unmentioned in the press, or [is] attributed sometime later to a training accident."

Van Buren found the extensive – and explicit – coverage given to Wheeler's death to be most unusual. He should know: he spent a year in Iraq as a State Department Foreign

Service Officer. He wrote about that in his book, *We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People* (The American Empire Project, Metropolitan Books). In his blog he noted that "Wheeler was not only acknowledged as having fought with Delta, but his photo was widely published. That in itself is usually a no-no, for fear of linking him to others and outing active duty Delta."

The US has supposedly withdrawn all its ground troops from Iraq, yet as Van Buren also noted, "[Wheeler's] place of death, on the ground, deep inside Iraq, on a strike mission, was explicit, with only a little bullshit thrown in about how Delta was present to provide security for the Kurdish raiding forces seeking to free some hostages". This Van Buren does not believe for a moment: "Nobody in their right mind believes America's finest special forces are sent out to provide security for a bunch of gussied up militiamen."

In fact, as you read Van Buren's summation of the "mission" on which Sergeant Wheeler allegedly lost his life, the whole thing smells. "He was fighting the most evil enemy of America (for now), Islamic State. He was on a successful rescue mission; hostages were freed, prisoners released, some IS bad guys dispatched. And the whole thing was conveniently videotaped – a videotaped special-forces raid. How often do you see that? You don't."

Instead, Van Buren ponders the significance of all the public attention to Wheeler's death. "The president of the United States has made

it explicit that his war against Islamic State would not involve any American 'boots on the ground'. Well, Sergeant Wheeler most definitely was an example of boots on the ground." Van Buren, however, saw a much deeper and more worrying significance: "We, the public, are being readied for a larger US combat role in Iraq and Syria, one big enough that it will be hard to keep hidden."

The US has been waging an undeclared war against Syria for several years now. At first they used the so-called Free Syrian Army, the proxy "rebel" army they cobbled together from disaffected Syrians, special forces from the US, UK, Turkey and Israel plus "volunteers" from Saudi Arabia. When the actual Syrian army defeated them, they were pulled out and sent to regroup in Jordan. With plentiful Saudi money, and under US supervision, they re-emerged as Islamic State and were sent into Iraq and back to northern Syria. The destruction they have wreaked in Syria has forced four million people to flee as refugees (giving former Prime Minister Tony Abbott – knifed by his own Party – the opportunity to lecture European leaders on how to deal with the refugee crisis by "turning them back").

Less than 24 hours after Van Buren wrote his article, his prediction of how Washington would use the death of Sergeant Wheeler as a propaganda tool to enable the US to escalate its war against Syria, came true. US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter unveiled a "new strategy", supposedly in the war against Islamic State.

"For the first time, American military advisors will overtly be on the ground in Syria, some of the existing 3,200 advisors in Iraq will be moved closer to the front lines [i.e. closer to or even into Syria], and American special forces will be sent into direct combat in both locations." – *Common Dreams*.

However, as Jon Rainwater of US group Peace Action pointed out, "With [Obama's] 'no boots on the ground' promise broken there's no telling how many US troops will ultimately be sent to Iraq and Syria."

Although the immediate target of the latest escalation is clearly Syria, the USA's main target remains Russia and China, its political, military and above all economic rivals. Russia has a naval base in Syria, and both Russia and China support Syria diplomatically as well as militarily.

The US has bombed targets in Syria since September 2014, spending over US\$4.75 billion on more than 6,059 air-strikes in Iraq and Syria. They have not stopped ISIS, but then, despite the hype, they were never meant to. The US economy and foreign policy are now hitched to the strategy of continuous war as well as a ramped up Cold War. Unable to oust Syrian leader Assad and install instead a compliant strongman of its own choosing, the USA's plans for the region now seem focused on turning the fighting in Syria into another Vietnam War. But the US leadership should remember, it lost that one. ✪

At this time in history

Communist poet Pablo Neruda wins Nobel Prize

It was at this time of year in 1971 that world-famous Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (pen name of Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto) won the Nobel Prize for Literature “for a poetry that with the action of an elemental force brings alive a continent’s destiny and dreams.”

Neruda (1904-1973) was born in the Chilean town of Parral. He spent his childhood and youth in Temuco, where he knew the poet Gabriela Mistral, head of the girls’ secondary school, who took a liking to him. He started publishing at the age of thirteen. In 1920 he began writing under the name of Pablo Neruda, which he adopted in memory of the Czech poet Jan Neruda (1834-1891). His first published book was *Crepusculario (At Twilight)*, 1923, followed the next year by *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada (Twenty Poems of Love and a Desperate Song)*, one of his best-known and most translated works.

Between 1927 and 1935, the government put him in charge of a number of honorary consulships, which took him to Burma, Sri Lanka, Java, Singapore, Buenos Aires, Barcelona, and Madrid. His poetic production during that difficult period included, among other works, the collection of surrealist poems *Residencia en la tierra (Residence on Earth)*, 1933, which marked his literary breakthrough.

The Spanish Civil War and the murder of Federico García Lorca, whom Neruda knew, affected him strongly and made him join the Republican movement, first in Spain, and later in France, where he started working on his collection of poems *España en el corazón (Spain in Our Hearts)*, 1937. This volume had a great impact by virtue of its being printed at the front during the Civil War. The same year he returned to Chile, to which he had been recalled. His poetry during the following period showed an orientation toward political and social matters.

In 1939, Neruda was appointed consul for Spanish emigration, residing in Paris, and, shortly afterwards, consul general in Mexico, where he rewrote his *Canto general de Chile*, transforming it into an epic poem about the whole South American continent, its nature, its people and its historical destiny. This work, entitled *Canto general*, was published in Mexico in 1950, and also underground in Chile. It consists of approximately 250 poems brought together into 15 literary cycles and constitutes the central part of Neruda’s production. Shortly after its publication, *Canto general* was translated into some ten languages.



Pablo Neruda.

Returning to Chile, in 1945 Neruda was elected senator of the Republic, also joining the Communist Party. Due to his protests against President González Videla’s repressive policy against striking miners in 1947, he had to live underground for two years until he managed to leave in 1949. After living in different European countries he returned home in 1952.

Neruda’s 1952 stay in a villa on the island of Capri was fictionalised in Antonio Skármeta’s 1985 novel *Ardiente paciencia (Arduent Patience)*, later known as *El cartero de Neruda*, or *Neruda’s Postman*, which inspired the popular 1994 film *Il Postino (The Postman)* and an opera by Daniel Catán which starred Plácido Domingo as Neruda.

In the 1950s he published *Las uvas y el viento (Grapes and the Wind)*, regarded

as a diary of exile. In *Odas elementales (Elemental Odes)*, 1954-1959 the subjects of his poems – things, events and relations – are duly presented in alphabetic form.

Neruda’s extensive production has been gathered into numerous volumes of collected works. Saluting the anti-fascist victory at Stalingrad he wrote “*Canto a Stalingrado*” and “*Nuevo canto de amor a Stalingrado*” and later poetry honouring his political heroes. Aside from the Nobel, he also received the International Peace Prize in 1950, the Lenin Peace Prize and the Stalin Peace Prize in 1953.

Neruda died of cancer only days following the coup that overthrew his compañero, socialist President Salvador Allende of Chile, although the circumstances of his death have been debated.

People’s World ✪

They Receive Instructions Against Chile

But we have to see behind all these, there is something behind the traitors and the gnawing rats, an empire which sets the table, and serves up the nourishment and the bullets. They want to repeat their great success in Greece. Greek playboys at the banquet, and bullets for the people in the mountains: we’ll have to destroy the flight

of the new Victory of Samothrace, we’ll have to hang, kill, lose men, sink the murderous knife held to us from New York, we’ll have to use fire to break the spirit of the man who was emerging in all countries as if born from the earth that had been splashed with blood. We have to arm Chiang and the vicious Videla, give them money for prisons, wings so they can bomb their own populations, give them a hand-out, a few dollars, and they do the rest, they lie, bribe, dance on the dead bodies and their first ladies wear the most expensive minks. The suffering of the people does not matter: copper executives need this sacrifice: facts are facts: the generals retire from the army and serve as vice-presidents of the Chuquicamata Copper Firm, and in the nitrate works the “Chilean” general decides with his trailing sword how much the natives may mention when they apply for a raise in wages. In this way they decide from above, from the roll of dollars, in this way the dwarf traitor receives his instructions, and the generals act as the police force, and the trunk of the tree of the country rats.

Adapted from Nobel Lectures, Literature 1968-1980, Editor-in-Charge Tore Frängsmyr, Editor Sture Allén, World Scientific Publishing Co, Singapore, 1993; biography.com; and Wikipedia. “They Receive Instructions Against Chile” appears in *The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse*, ed. Alan Bold, 1970.

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Advances amid the degradation

Notes on a visit to northern England during autumn 2015

Richard Titelius

In early September 2015, I was asked if I wished to accompany my partner on a family visit to Bradford in northern England for two weeks as well as a trip to the Lakes District. With some foreboding I was on a flight to England via Dubai as I had heard that it had rained all summer there and after landing in Manchester on a cloudy though rain-free afternoon we were collected and taken to East Bierley, an outer suburb of the former wool milling and coal mining city of Bradford.

In and around Bradford there are lots of former woollen mills. We still saw many sheep in the countryside around Bradford and in a drive to the Lakes District through the Yorkshire Dales via The Pennines. My host advised me that there are now only two mills in the whole of England which process English wool while the rest is exported for processing.

All the bus and train services have long been privatised and at least ten different bus companies operate out of the Bradford Interchange in the centre of the city. The trains which operate out of the adjacent train station are also privatised and one train was operated by a company owned by Deustches Bundesband, the rail company of the German government. Public transport is not cheap in Bradford and the shortest bus ride costs £2.50 or about A\$5.00.

As we travelled around Bradford and surrounding countryside we could see a lot of the public housing and other public infrastructure, especially in the inner city, was in need of repair as were private housing, shops and factories. It was evident there was a housing crisis and a need for new quality yet affordable housing to meet the housing needs of all, not just those who could afford to buy their dwelling.

Some roads and bridges were also quite bumpy and in need of repair as was the occasional canal with its system of locks.

Public hospitals which are part of the National Health Service (NHS) have been under-funded and run down by the Conservative government of Prime Minister David Cameron. The situation is very similar to that in Australia.

Major parties

While we were there the two major parties held their national conferences in successive weeks. The British Labour Party was first, from September 27-30 in Brighton on the south coast of England.

Their new leader Jeremy Corbyn caught the public imagination with pledges to fix the NHS and to abolish university tuition fees which are currently running at £9,000 (close to A\$20,000) per annum for undergraduate courses. He also pledged to scrap the Trident Submarine defence program which involves nuclear warheads, and to re-nationalise public transport.

The increase in government expenditure would be funded by increases in corporate taxation and a system of national insurance for those who earn more £50,000.



Low water levels at Keswick on Lake Windemere in northern England.

The Conservative Party chose the northern industrial city of Manchester for their National Conference from October 4-7. The Trade Union Congress organised a mass rally and march at the opening. It attracted tens of thousands of people from diverse backgrounds, yet all united in their opposition to Tory austerity measures.

The announcement from the Tory Conference of the abolition of tax credits for working families received widespread condemnation, even from amongst the ranks of fellow Tories. So too did Cameron's plan to build houses which people can buy rather than rent, which favours the rich rather than the working class. The Conservatives do not have a plan to combat climate change and are seen as climate change saboteurs. They have drastically cut subsidies for wind and solar power and ceased support for energy efficiencies in homes.

When formally influential economically developed nations such as England and Australia turn their backs on climate action it discourages less developed nations from committing to strong and effective targets and policies to reduce the effects of climate change.

Perhaps the British Conservatives don't believe the effects of climate change will affect their temperate shores. They need to get out more in the English countryside.

Unseasonably dry

On a four-day visit to the Lakes District there was no rain and barely a cloud in the sky when normally a day would not pass in the English autumn without some form of rain.

A strong persistent high pressure cell over England was causing not only unseasonably dry conditions but it was also quite warm. When we climbed England's highest peak, Scafell Pike, we were warned to dress with coats and not to be disappointed if cloud closed in on the summit in the afternoon.

The only clouds we encountered as we strolled up in t-shirts and shorts were the vapour trails of the many jet planes that crisscrossed the blue sky overhead. Down below on Lake Windemere, England's largest lake, a ferry boat operator remarked that he had not seen the water level, which was down "two and half feet" or more than 70 cm, so low it exposed darkened rocks and black mud.

On the return to the Yorkshire city of Bradford we noticed the rain had not returned either and we continued to enjoy sunny and even warmer temperatures for England in the lead-up to winter. The British Met Office is forecasting a warmer than usual winter and is not optimistic about sufficient snow falling for any lasting duration.

The English were fighting back under the new Labour Party leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, who was being openly recognised as a socialist and unnerving the Tories and the ruling class that props them up.

Everywhere in England people are either joining the Labour Party or cautiously considering it after many years. There is very little one could commend of our own Labor Party and its current leader Bill "Bi-partisan" Shorten.

The English people know what a more egalitarian looks and feels like and they haven't had one since the leadership of vicious anti-worker Conservative PM Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. Since then successive Conservative and Labour governments have let them down badly.

In the next 12 months Australians will go to the polls to choose a new government. In the mean time we must take up the struggle in all areas of social, economic and political endeavour.

Postscript: The unseasonable warm and dry weather in England, saw the warmest November day on record on November 1, 2015 when the temperature hit 22.4C at Trawsgoed, Ceredigion in mid Wales – not too far from the Lakes District in north western England. ✚



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