



As racism mobilises

Multiculturalism must be defended

Bob Briton*

Protests by racist group Reclaim Australia took place in several Australian cities last Sunday. In every case small crowds were outnumbered by people attending to register their disapproval of the anti-Islam, anti-refugee agenda of this latest manifestation of right-wing extremism in Australia. Participants from racist groups hammered the idea that they were defending the Australian way of life, its culture to which people arriving in the country, whether as migrants or refugees, must “assimilate” in every way. A reduction in the number of people permitted to settle or seek refuge in Australia was another common and very ugly theme.

Unfortunately, while these ideas are not endorsed by most Australians, they are not “fringe”, either. In fact, they are simply the crudely expressed spirit of current Australian government policy for a fortress Australia holding up Anglo-Saxon cultural values and folkways and capitalist institutions inherited from the British colonial past.

Official racism is not new. It used to be overt in the form of the White Australia Policy adopted soon after federation in 1901 and scrapped only in 1973. Regrettably, the policy was embraced by many Australian workers, who were manipulated against workers from other countries to defend “their” jobs, wages and conditions. In fact, the jobs belonged then and belong now to the bosses. The echoes of this era can still be heard in the community.

Inspiration for this mobilisation of ignorance has always come from the “top” of the political heap. In recent times, it has been fanned by Coalition politicians, in particular. Former Prime Minister John Howard’s most memorable quote while in office followed the Tampa incident that kicked off the whole “Pacific solution” to the refugee crisis. “We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come,” leaving open the question of who “we” are.

While leading the opposition, Howard declared that the government should set quotas for arrivals of people of various ethnic origin to ensure social harmony. The racism of this notion was deemed too blatant for the modern servant of capital seeking the top job and he was obliged to withdraw the plan. His disciple, Tony Abbott, followed in the footsteps of Howard with dog-whistling appeals to

xenophobic Australians of Anglo-Saxon background. The word “assimilation” made a comeback. More and more demands were to be made on migrants to prove this assimilation, such as the speedy attainment of English language proficiency and knowing who Don Bradman was.

Malcolm Turnbull is the latest Liberal to front the federal government. His background in merchant banking sets him apart. He would rub shoulders with representatives of the capitalist class who don’t care what the colour or religion of the people they exploit are, so long as they as cheap, capable and compliant. While Turnbull projects a less culturally defensive image, he still speaks of Australia as a “tolerant” society. The word “tolerant” suggests he is exercising self-discipline to endure something he and people like him would rather not.

White-anting multiculturalism

Multiculturalism was one of the progressive social reforms of the Whitlam government. It encouraged migrant communities to maintain their language and culture. This would enable migrant communities to flourish and embrace their new homeland and reduce potential alienation from it. It wasn’t intended to isolate communities in linguistic and cultural ghettos. The coming together and integration of different cultures worked to produce a new, distinctive and vibrant Australian culture. It was an effective, widely accepted but often misunderstood policy.

The Communist Party of Australia endorsed the policy and defended it from attacks and misrepresentations. The CPA’s support was natural. It is an internationalist party that recognises that, in spite of our different ethnic, language and religious backgrounds, we comprise one working class. We are exploited by the same capitalist system and have the same interest in replacing that system with a socialist one.

The CPA supported land rights for Aboriginal people and the abolition of the White Australia Policy from its foundation in 1920. It was attacked in those early years as a “coloured party” for including members from all backgrounds. Our support, in word and deed, for a multicultural Australia has never waned.

After an initial embrace, conservative politicians and reactionary elements in society now seek to undermine and discontinue the policy. In the face of its demonstrable success, they claim it is a disaster. They single out the



Part of the counter-demonstration in Sydney’s Martin Place last Sunday. (Photo: Tom Pearson)

Muslim community in Australia and elsewhere for special blame for its supposed failure. They insist that, uniquely, Muslim Australians won’t “assimilate” and that they present a life and death challenge to the “tolerant” nature of Australian society.

It’s a familiar refrain. Before the Muslims of various national backgrounds, it was the Indo-Chinese. Before them it was southern Europeans and before that it was the Chinese workers who came during the gold rush of the 1850s. The latest wave of ignorance will subside but it will need conscious and practical effort on the part of progressive Australians.

A special role in this can be played, and in some instances has already been played, by the trade union movement. The temptation to adopt dubious slogans such as “Aussie jobs for Aussie workers” must be resisted and the resources of the organised labour movement must be directed against the attacks coming on the multicultural Australian working class. Multiculturalism must be promoted in new and creative ways.

*Bob Briton is the General Secretary of the CPA. ✱



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Guardian

Issue 1712

November 25, 2015

Who set terrorism loose?

While thousands upon thousands of innocent people die in big power wars, tens of millions displaced, the usual suspects profit from the death and chaos. A drumbeat for military escalation and internal repression becomes louder and louder. Terrorist attacks lead to big gains for defence stocks as investors bet on a jump in weapons spending. The Islamic State provided wonderful business opportunities for armaments companies. In almost two years Northrop Grumman's share price has surged 160 percent, Lockheed Martin shares have climbed 150 percent.

And now those trying to channel the narrative about terrorist attacks are refuting claims that the groups emerged after and because of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This is part of the message in the increasingly rabid "debate" in the mass media: take the official line of the war mongering status quo or keep your head down and your mouth shut.

It certainly does go back beyond 2003. In 1922 Britain excised a part of Iraq to set up an absolutist Sheikdom to protect Britain's oil interests. That caliphate is called Kuwait. Thus, at the end of the 1980s Iraq moved to reclaim its territory. Again to protect big oil interests, the first of the Bush dynasty presidents, oil man George Sr, used it as a pretext to bomb Iraq's infrastructure to rubble. They could not claim to be defending democracy in Kuwait; there isn't even the pretence of it there.

This was a precursor to the second Bush dynasty president, son George W, to invade and occupy Iraq in 2003 with the "coalition of the willing" in violation of international law and based on a lie about claims of weapons of mass destruction.

There are more than a million Iraqis dead as a result. So, shine a light on the Opera House for them. No? For two reasons: some lives are valued over others, depending on where you are born, your skin colour and your religious beliefs and that it might prompt memory of those who were behind that crime.

Where ever John Howard is, he is not where he should be: in prison.

Now the coalition of the willing has cut a swathe of death and destruction through parts of the Middle East, but has hit a road block in Syria.

The atrocities of Paris were unspeakable and sickening. But what is not being said in the wake of the incident – what has been ignored by the mass media – is predictably telling and ominous.

As in the wake of 9/11, the people of the world are being provoked, agitated and mobilised; the fear, horror, rage and shock channelled and shaped into wave of collective vengeance and hatred.

The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attacks. But what is the Islamic State?

The fact that remains wilfully unacknowledged is that Islamic State is the guided military-intelligence and political apparatus of the West, created, trained, financed, advised and protected by the West and NATO – including France.

The Islamic State and Islamic extremism, including Al-Qaeda, functions on behalf of NATO and Western strategic interests.

Anglo-American war policy is what has set terrorism loose. It continues to sow, foment and expand terrorism in an unimaginable scale, with no end in sight. The trail of blood leads back to the policy, and its policy makers.

This apocalyptic crisis is not a war "on" terror, but a war "of" terror, committed by terrorists, guided by terrorists, and psychopathic war criminals that operate beyond the reach of law.

PRESS FUND

In Paris last week an opera performance opened with *The Marseilles* and the audience sprang to its feet, belting out the words. Shades of *Casablanca*! Some national anthems call for the overthrow of tyranny, others are rabidly chauvinistic, and the British anthem praises the monarchy, a parasitic remnant of its feudal past. The Australian anthem praises the land's beauty and productivity, but it also invites others to share in our good fortune. How inconsistent that invitation is with our treatment of those who've sought asylum here, but have instead been imprisoned on Nauru and Manus Island! Press Fund contributions will help us campaign for their release, so please send us something for the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

S Cooper \$20, Noel Hazard \$20, D Humphries \$30, Mark Mannion \$5, RR \$5, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$95 Progressive total \$5,955

CPA statement on domestic and family violence

Wednesday November 25, 2015 is National White Ribbon Day in Australia. The Communist Party of Australia fully supports the objectives of White Ribbon to prevent men's violence against women and shares the organisation's concern at the growing problem in Australia and internationally. The Party's weekly newspaper, the *Guardian*, has given details of neglect of the issue and lack of a sense of urgency on the part of Australian governments in the face of a mounting toll of deaths of women at the hands of abusive partners or ex-partners. The Coalition has de-funded services to women escaping domestic violence, forcing the services to close. Programs to change men's violent behaviour have been cut. Australian governments are long on lip-service but short on action.

The CPA holds that violence against women has historical, social and economic roots. "Historically, under capitalism, women have been treated as chattels belonging to men. Fathers gave their daughters away in marriage as property. Discrimination marginalising women

is embedded in the system. Married women were not expected to enter the paid workforce and if they did, they were not paid a living wage. A 'good' marriage was promoted as a vehicle to economic security," as the front page article of the *Guardian* of September 30 pointed out. Australians still live with this toxic, sexist legacy because we still live in a class-exploitative capitalist system.

Male members of the CPA's Central Committee have taken the White Ribbon Oath. Over 174,000 Australians have taken it so far. It says "I will stand up, speak out and act to prevent men's violence against women." That certainly must be done. Beyond that we demand governments adequately fund services to women escaping domestic violence and programs aimed at addressing the current critical situation. We demand a guarantee of leave to all workers needing to find new, secure circumstances as a result of such violence. Through their commitment to achieving a socialist society, members of the CPA have also pledged to eliminate the root cause of the scourge of domestic and family violence and call on others to join them. ☘



NATO adopts facebook strategy, will use national flags to fight ISIS

In what facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has described as a social media coup, NATO has announced it will abandon its bombing campaign in Syria and contain the spread of terrorism using the French and other national flags.

Noting the absence of terrorist attacks since the French flag profile pic went viral on the popular social media platform, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said US president Barack Obama called him in the wake of the Paris attacks to suggest a complete change in strategy.

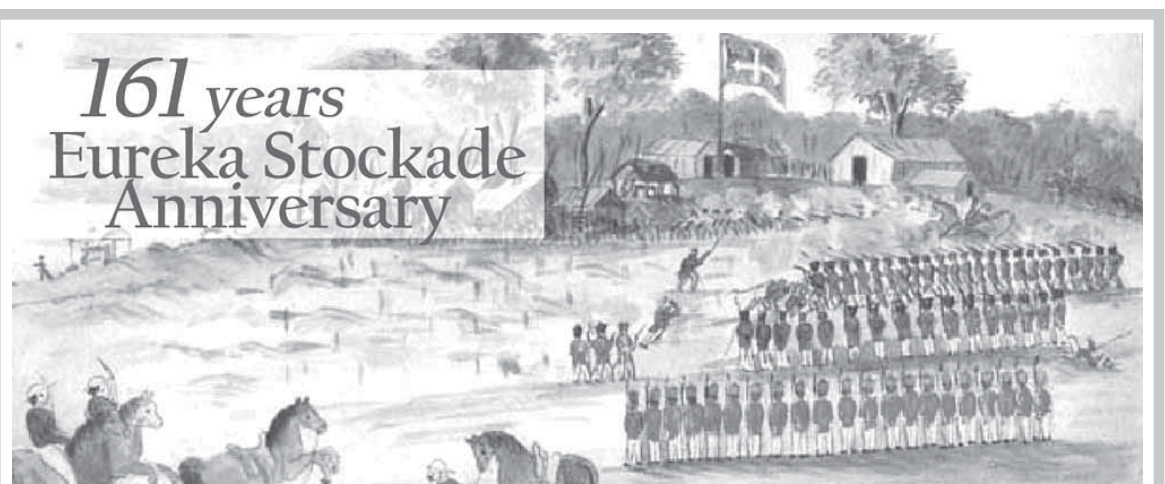
"Mr Obama, having conferred with his key defence advisors, called me as soon as it became apparent using flags was the best way to stop the spread of terror," he said.

"President Obama told me the US Air Force has replaced all its missiles with military-grade fabric that would be dropped over IS strongholds in Syria, severely restricting the movements and visibility of the rogue death cult.

"He emphasised the new strategy would only work using the flags of NATO aligned countries, which with custom made zips would also double as body bags."

A spokesperson for military hardware specialist Lockheed Martin told *Common Tern* they weren't expecting to diversify so soon but recognised the immense influence facebook profiles can have on world peace.

"We now know that bombs just aren't that effective. If we can produce as many flags as we've seen on facebook, or even half that amount, we'll destroy the enemy both militarily and psychologically," he said. *The Common Tern* flies over the heads of some but beware not to take him too seriously. ☘



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Medicare attack

Eliminating the safety net

Anna Pha

Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Health Minister Sussan Ley may present a softer, more consultative image but when it comes to the agenda for destroying Medicare they are just as ruthless as their predecessors. The *Health Insurance Amendment (Safety Net) Bill* sets out to introduce caps on rebates under the Extended Medicare Safety Net. These “efficiencies”, as the Minister calls them, are in the form of caps on payments under the safety net. They will deny many needy patients access to the life-saving treatment and tests they require.

The Minister says the changes will save \$266.7 million over five years. The “savings” are cuts to Medicare refunds under the safety net. They are savings for the government, not patients. Patients could be thousands of dollars more out of pocket than at present. They apply where services covered by the Medicare Benefits Schedule are not bulk-billed.

At present there is a Medicare Safety Net system which provides for higher rates of refunds when accumulated out-of-pocket expenses (gap between fees charged and Medicare rebate) reach specified thresholds. These include GP and specialist consultations, x-rays, blood tests and treatment of patients with chronic conditions and cancer.

The present threshold for Commonwealth Concession Cardholders such as pensioners, seniors and people eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part A (FTB(A)) is \$638.40 per calendar year. For all other singles and families it is \$2,000.

Once the threshold is reached, Medicare pays up to 80 percent of out-of-pocket expenses – that is, up to 80 percent of the gap between the medical practitioner’s fee and the Medicare rebate.

The bill sets new, lower thresholds:

- \$400 for concession card holders
- \$700 for people eligible for FTB(A) or confirmed as singles
- \$1,000 for all other families and singles

This sounds great but as with anything the Coalition government

does, the most disadvantaged end up paying more.

Sting in the tail

The government wants to impose two caps that will hit hardest those with chronic, complex conditions, mental illness or requiring expensive services.

The first cap limits the amount of out-of-pocket costs for individual items that can be counted towards the threshold. The aim is to make it much harder and to take longer to reach the threshold.

There is a mathematical formula. The cap is equal to 150% (one and a half times) of the standard MBS fee minus the Medicare refund. See box opposite for example. At present *all out-of-pocket costs* for out-of-hospital medical services count towards the threshold.

As many non-bulk-billing doctors and specialists charge well over the Medicare schedule fee, the value of the reduction in the threshold will soon pale into insignificance for higher demand patients.

Safety net cap

But there is a second cap, a limit on the amount patients are refunded when they reach the safety net. The present 80 percent of out-of-pocket costs is capped. The same mathematical formula is applied. The cap limits the refund to a maximum of 150% of the Schedule Fee less the standard MBS rebate. This would apply to *all* Medicare items once the safety net is reached.

The consequences would be catastrophic. For cancer treatments out-of-pocket costs could amount to \$10,000 or more. It is punitive, hitting hardest those requiring frequent services or consultations, such as a patient suffering deep depression or diabetes, or a heart condition and with mental health conditions who may require frequent consultations.

The government has to squeeze every dollar it can out of those who can least avoid it. The thresholds will be increased annually while the rebates are frozen in the coming years. The MBS is under review with the likelihood that the government will remove many items and reduce scheduled fees in other cases.



Photo: Anna Pha

Example

Specialist fee \$300
 Medicare scheduled fee \$183.65
 Medicare refund \$156.15

At present:

Out-of-pocket cost
 $\$300 - \$156.15 = \$145.85$
 $\$145.85$ counts towards threshold

With proposed cap:

Out-of-pocket cost remains the same
 Cap: 150% scheduled fee minus rebate
 $(150\% \text{ of } \$183.65) - \$156.15 = \$275.48 - \$156.15 = \$119.33$
 $\$119.33$ counts towards threshold

The government is arguing that the present system is unfair because it is mostly people from the wealthier suburbs who are using the safety net and not those from poorer socio-economic groups.

There is a reason for these statistics. The medical practitioners in those wealthier suburbs are less likely to bulk bill their patients.

But the changes to the safety net are part of a bigger picture which includes means testing access to Medicare and requiring those who do not qualify to take out private health insurance to cover Medicare items. (See *Guardian*, “Medicare

privatisation at full tilt”, 11-11-2015, #1710)

The legislation is not just about hitting the wealthy. Further down the track of Medicare privatisation and deregulation, it will have a serious impact on many workers and families who are presently bulk-billed.

The government had planned to bring in the caps from January 1, 2016, but has not succeeded in getting the legislation through the Senate. There is still time to protest against the Bill. Labor opposed it and it has been referred to a Senate Committee for review.

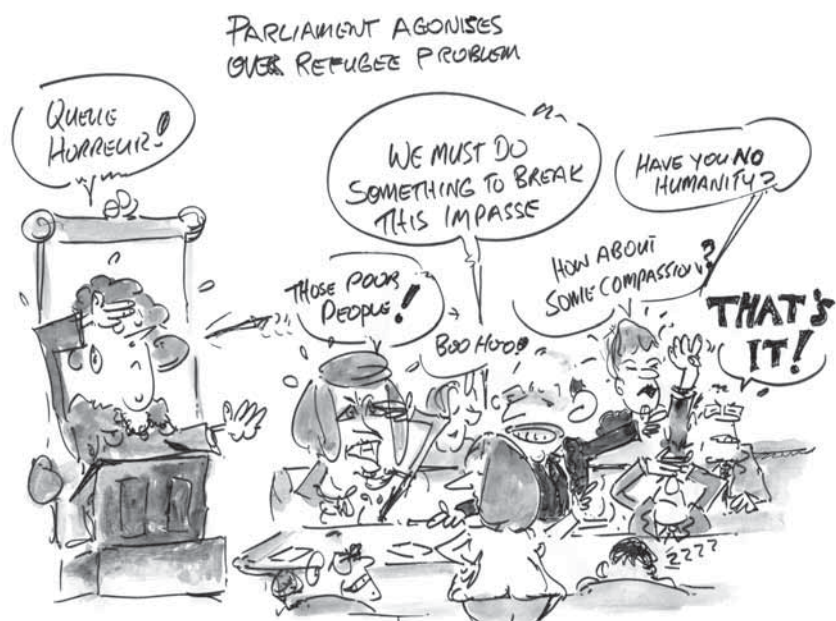
The government is attacking

Medicare from all directions. It must be thrown out of office in the next elections. It is vital that the essential principles of Medicare which have been eroded be restored in full.

These are centred around universal access, bulk billing, properly funded and resourced public hospitals with quality services. The \$6 billion per annum that is presently subsidising the private hospital system should be phased out and the funds redirected to the public sector.

Health care is a basic human right and in a country such as Australia it is affordable. It is a question of political will. ☺

Pete's Corner



Sydney

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History inspires

Working Voices Choir mark 100 years since Joe Hill's execution in 1915

Richard Titelius

The annual Harold Peden Memorial Lecture 2015 delivered by Unions WA secretary Meredith Hammat paid tribute to Harold Peden a senior trade union activist, state president of the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union, senior vice president of the Trades and Labour Council, state president of the Communist Party of Australia and a long-time activist in the peace movement, retiring in July 1985. Peden was a man who took the cause of labour and labour history to his heart. A political activist and proud unionist throughout his working life, Peden was awarded the Order of Australia in 1990 for his services to the trade union movement and Western Australian workers. Each year since his untimely death in 1993 due to boating accident, the Labour History Society celebrates Harold's life with a community lecture emphasising his work and passion.

This year the 100th anniversary of Joe Hill coincided with the lecture. The WA Working Voices choir, led

by the legendary musical and singing talents of Bernard Carney, performed a memorable tribute to Joe Hill ("I dreamed I saw..."). Hill, the Swedish-American labour activist, song writer and member of the Industrial Workers of the World ("The Wobblies") was executed aged 36 by firing squad on November 19, 1915 on a murder charge universally considered to be a frame up.

In addition to singing a rousing version of Joe Hill, the choir sang a song penned by Joe Hill himself (with the melody based on an earlier song called the, "Ballad of Casey Jones") about an incident in 1911 in California involving a scab engine driver, Casey Jones, who wanted to do the bosses dirty work and break the resolve of 40,000 workers who went on strike over their treatment by Southern Pacific Railroad.

Meredith Hammat delivered her lecture, which was a call to organise, saying that "Workers have a moral duty to protect the wages and working conditions which workers have fought so hard to protect which we enjoy today". It is going to take a more militant sustained struggle to protect wages and conditions and

above all to organise the organised and grow in numbers. Hand in hand with organising, Meredith flagged the marginal seats campaign needed to remove the current anti-worker government.

Though it is a sobering statistic which Hammat quoted from the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics figures which showed national union density at a new low of 15 percent, we should not walk away from our collective resolve to protect our wages and conditions and ultimately a fair and dignified life and society for all.

Workers are being slowly pushed towards the wages, conditions and strong arm tactics of employers utilised in the time of Joe Hill and our response must be similar: workers must realise which class they belong to, be militant and organise as a collective in a union of fellow workers.

Unions and workers, concluded Hammat, had a responsibility to leave something better for the workers who are left behind. ✪



Joe Hill.

International maritime workers take action

The ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation) fair practices committee (FPC), along with its cabotage taskforce condemned a decision to scrap the MV *Portland* – an Australian-flagged and crewed ship dedicated to Australian coastal routes – and outsource the work to a flag of convenience vessel.

The ITF cabotage taskforce was launched last month to support cabotage protection laws that help maintain the nations' skills, shipping and security, and to challenge the threat of liberalisation posed by international trade talks. The FPC represents the world's most powerful docker and seafarer unions around the world.

The meeting stated that: "The decision by Alcoa to jettison this ship, these workers and 50 years of marine history is indefensible, and we strongly urge the company, even at this late stage, to abandon its plans. Until now this vessel and crew have been helping to defend vital national maritime skills and shipping. Its loss is not just a blow to the crew, their families and the local community, but also to Australia itself and the wider principle that countries have a role to play in protecting their vital trade resources.

"Protecting maritime cabotage is a legitimate domestic policy – not

protectionism. Forty-seven countries have some form of cabotage law, and this is because it is good for their economies. With a thriving maritime industry, people are working in good quality jobs and they are consuming goods and boosting the economy.

"Failing to protect cabotage undermines sovereignty and has national security implications. It also has serious economic implications for maritime regions and communities.

"Failing to protect cabotage will mean lost maritime skills and resources – and will remove the supply of qualified personnel from critical shore-based industries. Businesses whose livelihoods depend on local industry can be ruined, while job losses reduce government income from taxes."

Chair of the ITF's seafarer section and FPC co-chair Dave Heindel is also the secretary treasurer of the Seafarers International Union (SIU) of the United States of America. He stated: "Alcoa's decision is a failure of responsibility by a US-owned company who should know better. What they are doing would be a legal and moral violation of our cabotage and shipping laws in the USA. They need to urgently review their decision." ✪

CPA SA State Conference

The 25th South Australian State Conference of the CPA was held recently in Adelaide. The Conference heard reports and elected the incoming State Committee. State Secretary Bob Briton reported on a challenging period for SA Branches since the last Conference and a troubling political scene at the international, national and state level.

"The international situation described at the 12th National Congress of the Party remains as it was in 2013 – highly charged with potential for war in several spheres. US imperialism is desperately pursuing its unchanged strategy for global domination despite economic stagnation at home and in the economies of its traditional allies, including Australia," Bob said.

"We are being drawn closer into the war fighting plans of the US with higher 'defence' spending, more US military bases and facilities being made available to the US and its allies. There are closer military ties with Japan, including the probable purchase of submarines. Wars Australia has participated in, or otherwise encouraged, have caused large numbers of refugees to seek asylum in the country, only to be met by the most appalling mistreatment.

"Racist groups are on the march again, fanning the flames of division on behalf of the capitalist system, which fears unity among the oppressed. The tensions leading to terrorism have been exploited to increase surveillance of the Australian population and put police state structures in place.

"De-industrialisation has hit SA hard. GMH's exit from manufacturing in 2017 will be devastating for

a state already suffering the worst unemployment in the country. The trade unions have not been able to mount effective resistance to this process or insist on the creation of new industries. I believe the state government has used the uncertainty about the economic future of the country to put nuclear options in front of the people that otherwise would not have been entertained. The Royal Commission into the nuclear energy cycle is clearly designed to deliver a waste dump, at least, for SA."

While the report was self-critical about the Party's performance in SA, Bob pointed to a number of achievements.

"The Party in SA has engaged in some very visible campaigning around the question of uranium exports through Port Adelaide. It has been good, united front work with other progressive forces in the city. It has been the best campaigning we have done since our election campaigns in Lee and Port

Adelaide. Our presence on the Internet has grown in professionalism and reach thanks to comrades Craig and Nick.

"One of Craig's recent memes on Facebook has reached over 32,000 people and been shared over 400 times. This is impressive. Nick's creative use of Twitter secured me an interview on the John Saffran and Father Bob show on ABC's national Triple J radio station. We have a lot of potential in this sphere to attract people to our Party," Bob said.

At the end of the Conference, Max Cordwell presented a clock given to him by the late Premier of Tasmania and state Secretary of the BLF, Jim Bacon, to Jimmy O'Connor for his service to the struggle of workers in SA. This refers to Jimmy's principled stand in his work as an organiser in the CFMEU, in the course of which he was hounded by the Fair Work Commission and fined by the Federal Court in August. ✪

Newcastle

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Did BHP Billiton know their dams would collapse?

Peter Mac

A report prepared two years ago by four Brazilian university academics warned that design flaws could lead to a catastrophic collapse of iron ore tailings dams owned partly by BHP-Billiton in Brazil.

And on Friday November 6 one dam suffered a massive breach and another collapsed, sending a 50 million cubic metre toxic flood up to 18 metres high and hundreds of metres wide down a mountain, inundating the town of Bento Rodrigues before flowing 500 kilometres along the river Rio Doce to the Atlantic Ocean.

One scientist has estimated it will take 50 years for the river to recover, but no one knows whether this will ever be possible. At least nine people have died and 21 are missing, and the toll will undoubtedly rise because people living along the river depend on it for water, which is now undrinkable.

The tailings contain sand and iron ore, and possibly other toxic matter. A representative of Samarco, the project-specific corporate giant in which BHP Billiton and Brazilian corporation Vale share partnership, admit they don't know the chemical composition of the tailings, and samples are being analysed.

Samarco has admitted that the structures supporting a third dam was not built to Brazilian engineering standards, and the area below that dam has now been evacuated.

"Arm's length" operation

The dams were built and the mine operated "at arm's length" by a separate company which failed to install emergency warning sirens. Brazilian officials are now considering laying criminal charges against the company.

Samarco has been fined \$91.9 million, and has agreed to make a preliminary payment of \$367.6 million for clean-up and compensation.

A Brazilian court has frozen \$109 million of Samarco's funds.

A Brazilian Congress subcommittee is currently drafting amendments to mining legislation, which will increase the level of insurance that mining companies will have to take out.

Consultants hired by the committee's chief have advised that the final bill for Samarco clean-up and compensation will be between \$2.5 billion and \$3.6 billion. However, Samarco is only insured for \$1.4 billion. Moreover, as a company representative interviewed by the *Australian Financial Review* noted, "Samarco has non-recourse external debt..."

After the insurance is paid, the remaining bill for compensation and remediation, combined with Samarco's external debt, means the conglomerate company could go broke.

As the owners, BHP-Billiton and Vale would presumably have to pick up the bill. However, Samarco's representative pointed out that the company's external debt "... is not guaranteed by BHP[Billiton] or Vale." In other words, whether Samarco goes broke or not, the two companies could walk away without having to repay the debt that Samarco already had prior to collapse of the dams.

They would still have to pay compensation, but as BP's Gulf of Mexico disaster showed, major corporations can do so without going under. BHP-Billiton shares fell after the disaster, reducing the company's worth to its value ten years ago. But that certainly doesn't mean the company is about to crash.

Community shirtfronts corporation

Samarco has provided emergency accommodation and water supplies for 650 residents affected by the collapse, and has promised to set up a \$US100 million emergency assistance fund, but public rage is still mounting.

Members of the Krenak tribe

who live downstream have blocked the Rio Doce freight rail line, forcing Vale to suspend ore shipments. Protesters demonstrated outside Vale's headquarters in Rio de Janeiro and the company's regional office in Vitoria, and residents of the river town of Periquito held street demonstrations and stopped traffic on a federal highway.

BHP Billiton is hastily reviewing its involvement in two other "arm's length" mining projects in South America. At one stage it asked Xstrata, its partner in one of the projects, to take over management of that mine while BHP managed the other, but Xstrata refused.

BHP Billiton and Vale will probably argue that penalties they incur for the Samarco disaster should be lenient, in order to save the project. Shareholders are now exerting pressure on the two companies to take over direct responsibility for mining operations from the current operator, but that would necessitate the sale or restructure of Samarco, and possibly a declaration of bankruptcy.

However, it's most unlikely that BHP Billiton itself will go broke. The company reduces its tax and royalty payments by selling its products at rock-bottom prices to BHP Billiton AG, a Swiss subsidiary operating out of Singapore, which then sells the product to the end buyer at the top market price.

BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto both operate subsidiaries in Singapore, reaping a \$2.6 billion profit last year and paying only 2.5 percent local tax, according to the *Australian Financial Review*.

Nevertheless, things are changing. The Queensland government requires royalty payments as a percentage of the first sale of minerals, and it has taken BHP-Billiton to court over claims for unpaid royalties. Claims against the company for unpaid tax and royalties arising from its Singapore operations now amount to \$810 million.

Superannuation companies with major investments in BHP-Billiton want the company's executive salaries to be conditional on achieving environmental objectives. The Brazilian disaster and the recent fall in global coal and iron ore prices are said to have reduced the value of Australian workers' superannuation retirement savings by \$6 billion.

So far, BHP Billiton has refused to take responsibility for the safety of its operations, delegating that job to someone else while it reaped in the profits and minimised any tax paid in Australia.

It is fighting the tax and royalty claims, and might adopt stalling tactics over the Brazilian disaster by lodging endless legal appeals, as Exxon did after the Exxon-Valdez disaster.

The company has refused to reveal whether it knew about the contents of the report predicting a collapse. However, it's impossible to believe it didn't, given that the report was available to the public. And in any case, it was their job to find out, rather than adopt a policy of "see no evil, hear no evil".

Before its merger with Billiton, BHP used to describe itself as "the big Australian". But the Brazilian disaster has revealed it as just another super-ruthless, super-greedy multinational. ✪



The town of Bento Rodrigues hit by the toxic flood from the collapse of the dam.



"It's not what you know, it's who you know", a sentiment that seems to be a meal ticket for ex-politicians and sometimes their parties as well. For instance, former NSW deputy premier and trade minister Andrew Stoner has started a new career as a part-time advisor to Yuhu Group Australia – a Chinese property firm. Yuhu manages and owns commercial real estate including the Eastwood shopping centre and office towers in North Sydney. The Australian electoral commission has records showing Yuhu Group (Australia) declared donations of \$670,000 to the Liberal and Labor parties during 2013-2014, mostly before the 2013 federal election. A former state secretary of the NSW ALP Mr Roozendaal now works as Yuhu Australia vice-president. It's not that these people cannot be employed by some company or other. The problem arises when there is a conflict between their positions and their influence on the government's decisions.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has launched a Federal Court challenge to the Environment Minister Greg Hunt's re-approval of the Carmichael coal mine. The Adani coal project in Queensland will be the largest coal mine in Australia, if approved. It will cover more than 45,000 hectares and produce as much carbon annually as does the whole of New Zealand. Australia has obligations to protect the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef. Extracting coal and polluting the environment is not the way forward and governments should be held responsible for their actions. The coal industry causes great harm to the environment and many countries are working hard to find environment-friendly and inexpensive energy sources. Money would be better invested in research, creating jobs and training people for the future, rather than the past.

November 27-29 will see millions of people march for a safe and environmentally-friendly world we all want to live in. People's Climate March Australia will see thousands across the country marching as world leaders meet in Paris. For the Sydney march gather at 12.30 on Sunday, November 29 at the Domain. For the nearest march details for your locality go to www.peoplesclimate.org.au



Hutchison port workers win return

New enterprise agreement a testament to character of Hutchison and a victory for common sense over anti-worker ideology

A few minutes before midnight on Thursday August 6 this year multinational port operator Hutchison Port Holdings, the biggest stevedoring company in the world, sent a text and accompanying email to 97 wharves in Brisbane and Port Botany (Sydney) telling them they were sacked.

On Monday November 16, 102 days after this act of bastardry, an enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) between Hutchison and the Maritime Union of Australia was endorsed 149 votes-1. The agreement gets everyone back in the gate with no forced redundancy.

The agreement gave every worker the right to go back through the gate, or to take an extremely generous voluntary redundancy package that allowed workers to come back as casuals and return as full-time employees as work volumes increased.

The agreement is an amazing outcome in an industry sector where both government and industry invariably see unions as an unnecessary hindrance to their business and unionised workers as something companies should be rid of. This victory in this context is a testament to the character and resilience of the maritime workers and their union.

MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin pointed out at the conclusion of the new agreement that what had begun as a “shabby, mean spirited and heartbreaking attack on an innocent workforce by Hutchison” had slowly turned into the “building of respect and proper involvement of those workers.”

Workers are “essential to the productivity and good health of any successful enterprise” he said, “and have a social and legal right to be treated with respect and decency regardless of commercial cycles.”

Mr Crumlin said he hoped the big maritime multinationals in the industry in Australia had got “a strong signal” that “they are diminished and devalued by the workplace policies of subterfuge and industrial and legal harassment of their workers as a preferred course of action.”

MUA assistant national secretary Warren Smith called the agreement “a step forward for workers” and “a victory of common sense over anti-worker ideology.” He declared it a “major victory for the MUA and all Hutchison workers” who had fought hard to win from their employer a new enterprise agreement that retained the key components of the former agreement and cemented in “the best safety clauses in the industry – in fact any industry.”

“This achievement is testament to the character of all Hutchison workers” who, he said, “remained united, determined to beat an injustice which was not acceptable in a modern workplace or society.”

Mr Smith pointed to the determination of the whole of the workforce and their supporters

in Australia and internationally in getting “common sense” to prevail.

“This has been a long hard go. We have been forced into a battle with the world’s biggest stevedore and we have won the battle by returning to a mutually agreed outcome.”

The MUA achieved a fantastic agreement, at all times negotiated with the rank and file, which retains the capacity to fight on the job. The agreement actually improves working conditions and despite some detractors, mainly the ultra left, the workers all realise this agreement is a fantastic step forward.

MUA Queensland branch secretary, Bob Carnegie, paid tribute to “the rank and file, the leadership involved and thousands of supporters who stood by us during this most difficult of times” saying that in a perfect world the preferred outcome would have been no redundancies, but “times have been very grim at the Hutchison terminal in Brisbane” which is currently running at a “tiny” throughput.

Mr Carnegie said “what we have achieved is an outcome which I believe we can look anyone in the eye and say ‘We did our best’”, knowing that all rank and file delegates and officials “left no stone unturned in our battle to get the best possible outcome in a very difficult situation”.

The MUA had also put up “very strong fences around the use of casuals and how they must be sourced”, while ensuring Hutchison could not use the new enterprise agreement to undercut its competitors.

A long hard struggle in a difficult situation

Outside the Port Botany terminal on the Monday August 3, assistant national secretary Warren Smith had declared that “Hutchison ought to know the MUA is not naïve to its tactics and we are gearing up to fight for the long-haul ... This is a plot to remove union delegates and activists and bring in a disposable, casual, pliable workforce...” He pointed out that Hutchison was using textbook union busting tactics.

When three days later Hutchison emailed the 97 port workers to tell them they were sacked, it told them to not even bother showing up at work to collect their belongings – Hutchison would post anything left behind out to them, along with a cheque for a final week’s pay.

This, not surprisingly, had the opposite effect on the wharves who dug in.

Despite being confronted with security guards that Hutchison had installed overnight to block workers from entering - dismissed workers showed up at the gates at both Brisbane and Botany ports in strength. The remaining workers joined their comrades, refusing to return to



Showing support for the picket at Port Botany, Sydney.

work until the 97 sacked workers were reinstated and the company agreed to meaningful negotiations with the MUA that included putting the facts on the table to determine the true nature and scope of the employer’s situation.

Company arrogance

However, Hutchison immediately obtained an interim order from the Fair Work Commission directing Hutchison employees to cease all forms of industrial action. The company then announced, in all its arrogance, that it expected the MUA to “facilitate the orderly return to work and the continuation of work at terminals in Sydney and Brisbane.”

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) ruled that the employed port workers picketing outside their work places with their sacked workmates constituted a secondary boycott under the Act; the union also was not in a formal bargaining period, so not authorised to take action.

In granting its interim order against the workers the Fair Work Commission, acting in accordance with the FW Act was forced by law to ignore the fact that it was the employer

who violated the existing agreement to start with, by sacking workers without discussion or negotiation.

It also ignored Hutchison’s collusion with the other port operators, to whom Hutchison had off-loaded job contracts so its plans could proceed, with the possibility of breaking the union, something which the employers all saw as a benefit.

Class leadership

The workers were not having a bar of the orders from the FWC and the orders were subsequently ignored for near on a week with pickets ensuing in both Brisbane and Sydney. This in itself is a brave and outstanding piece of class leadership seldom seen in today’s IR environment.

The MUA took Hutchison to the Federal Court on the grounds that the company’s action had breached its enterprise agreement with its workers by failing to consult adequately with respect to redundancies and by ignoring the dispute resolution clause. The MUA sought an injunction, plus penalties and damages.



Union banners at Port Botany, Sydney.

Turn to work

n workers



The Federal Court granted an interlocutory injunction against the sackings the following Thursday (August 14) and set a full hearing of the Court for the end of August. It protected the dismissed workers' jobs on the grounds that the company did not consult about employment terminations as the enterprise agreement required. This was never something that could be relied on into the future but it kept bread and butter on the tables of the sacked workers.

While the workers who still had their jobs returned to work after the federal Court injunction, the pickets at the Brisbane and Sydney ports remained in place, pending the full hearing. This was a tactical position by the MUA which in the end was part of the key to its success in finalising the dispute in a manner favourable to the workers.

Under the mandate of the FWC, Hutchison management agreed to hold formal talks in the FWC after it had been temporarily defeated in the Federal Court.

Meanwhile MUA supporters blitzed Employment Minister Eric Abetz with text

messages "sacking" him for characterising Hutchison's email and text sackings as an "appropriate methodology" for shedding employees.

The MUA also used the launch of a national brand campaign by Vodaphone towards the end of August by publicising the Hutchison workers' sackings at its launch events in three capital cities. Hutchison is half owner of the telecom company.

Just prior to the full Federal Court hearing set for August 31 the MUA and Hutchison agreed to a six-week negotiation process to be overseen by the Fair Work Commission under FWC Deputy President Anna Booth. These hearing dates were extended and talks continued in and out of the FWC with the MUA negotiating committee which at all times included rank and file members.

The core condition of this negotiating process was that the sacked workers would remain on the payroll for the duration.

A multi-prong strategy

However, as central to the MUA strategy of getting Hutchison to the negotiating table and winning was the maintenance of pressure on the company "in the field" as well as "at the table".

MUA assistant national secretary Warren Smith summed this up well, referring to the pickets, or community assemblies that were kept for the duration of the dispute outside the gates of Hutchison's ports in both Sydney and Brisbane.

As the union moved into negotiations with Hutchison in the Fair Work Commission he pointed out that the company would never have negotiated if the assemblies had not been initiated and declared that:

"The sacked 97 workers, despite being 'reinstated' by Federal Court injunction, remain in limbo for the time being. They are receiving wages but are yet to get through the gate and still require moral support in this trying time. Therefore I am asking all members and supporters to continue their attendance at the two assemblies.

"The support from members, other unions and the community has been amazing up until this point and it's important that we show our solidarity and that the MUA won't be going anywhere until we secure an acceptable result."

The success of the community pickets managed to attract widespread community support and often had a festive atmosphere, with concerts and barbecues a regular feature. Most importantly, the MUA was able to attract support because of its own long history of support for community struggles, as well as support for other port workers and unions within Australia and internationally.

The union also drew on its international

connections in its struggle with the world's largest port operator.

The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), to which the MUA is affiliated and the International Dockworkers Council (IDC) provided huge international support. The capacity of workers' organisations to target international trading vessels in 10 countries across its entire international voyage is testament to the effectiveness of maritime unions globally.

Rank and file MUA delegates from Hutchison also attended the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Liverpool dockers strike where they were able to meet face to face with international docker unions covering Hutchison employees, many of whom were actively supporting the MUA struggle.

The realisation by Hutchison management that their actions in Australia had galvanised the workers in their operations globally could only have had a very salutary effect on how they would come to regard the workers they had dismissed so off-handedly in August. This added to the fact that it was clear that the MUA would not go away. MUA Here to Stay has proved to be a highly political slogan considering the number of bosses and governments who really want the MUA to Go Away.

Unions and the ultra-left

The MUA's victory in overturning Hutchison's sackings is an existential win for maritime workers – it has reaffirmed that the employer must recognise the union as the workers' representative organisation, must negotiate with the union on matters affecting the company's employees and must stick to agreements it has made. If it doesn't it now knows it has a highly politicised and militant workforce largely of their own creation.

Unions can be regarded as communities of workers who join together to protect and advance their rights and interests at work and in opposition to the relentless attacks by capital. Capital fears the collective power of workers and does everything to undermine it.

Hutchison tried to use targeted sackings to see how far it could go in sidelining or busting the union while ripping into the workers.

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

Despite these facts and the reality of this dispute the MUA has come under attack by ultra-leftists peddling their own barrows.

Ultra-left parties and sects on the fringes of the labour movement have the habit of informing workers that their union is betraying them because it has entered into deals. This and other misinformed notions of union sell-outs have

been published by a number of Trotskyist outfits during this dispute. The results arising from the blue and the fact that the MUA rank and file delegates were key negotiators and always a major part of the decision making process ensured those forces are now treated with derision on the waterfront particularly amongst the Hutchison workers and wharfies in general. Workers have seen the lies and distortions from the SEP and Solidarity, all of whose naysaying amounted to nothing. Workers have seen the MUA, with considerable CPA and experienced class leaders, ensure that they were fully involved and take actions fundamental to a significant and historic win on the waterfront. Those workers now see clearly that the sage-like wisdom of the Trotskyist forces would have led them into oblivion and destroyed the union. The line of the ultra-left would have certainly seen the dispute crash into a huge defeat.

What the Trotskyist critics are ultimately saying is unions are not revolutionary parties, something for which they blame the union not themselves. The critics are also almost always screaming from the sidelines. They don't represent workers just have a misguided theoretical understanding about the importance of workers. They don't understand unions or workers it would seem. The simple notion of voluntary membership in an organisation of workers is an anathema to these people. None of the leaders of these organisations critical of the union lead workers, except down the garden path. They have never delivered outcomes for workers nor have any of their kindred organisations ever led workers in any revolutionary situation.

These organisations also refuse to recognise their errors. Their position during the dispute was clearly wrong but we are not holding our breath for retractions of articles where the union (and CPA) was proven right and the Trotskyist anti-union mantra, as expected, was wrong in practice.

The CPA recognises it is only at the political level – backed by industrial strength – that policies and programs can be implemented that address the extended priorities of working people. We however see no contradiction between our Party and militant unions, in struggle, fighting to defend their position.

While the Hutchison workers will continue to see CPA members in the direct course of their ongoing employment, we do not expect to see the hangers-on who are only about participation at workers' struggles based upon what they can get out of it themselves. The CPA sees unions as the primary form of class organisation in Australia and recognises the need for painstaking, long and patient work in this area – we refuse to flit in and out like these critics based on nothing other than their own self-interest. It didn't take the workers long to see that fact. ✖



Vinnie Molina, CPA President visits the picket at Port Botany, Sydney.



Wharfies gather at Port Botany, Sydney.

Stopping ISIS: Follow the money

Peter Van Buren

Wars are expensive. The recruitment and sustainment of fighters in the field, the ongoing purchases of weapons and munitions, as well as the myriad other costs of struggle, add up.

So why isn't the United States going after Islamic State's funding sources as a way of lessening or eliminating their strength at making war? Follow the money back, cut it off, and you strike a blow much more devastating than an air strike. But that has not happened. Why?

Donations

Many have long held that Sunni terror groups, ISIS now and Al-Qaeda before them, are funded via Gulf States, such as Saudi Arabia, who are also long-time American allies. Direct links are difficult to prove, particularly if the United States chooses not to prove them. The issue is exacerbated by suggestions that the money comes from "donors", not directly from national treasuries, and may be routed through legitimate charitable organisations or front companies.

In fact, one person concerned about Saudi funding was then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who warned in a 2009 message on WikiLeaks that donors in Saudi Arabia were the "most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide."

At the G20, Russian President Vladimir Putin said out loud what has otherwise not been publicly discussed much. He announced that he has shared intelligence with the other G20 member states which reveals 40 countries from which ISIS finances the majority of its terrorist activities. The list reportedly included a number of G20 countries.

Putin's list of funders has not been made public. The G20, however, include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South



Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the European Union.

Oil

One source of income for ISIS is and has robustly been oil sales. In the early days of the air campaign, American officials made a point to say that the Islamic State's oil drilling assets were high on the target list. Yet few sites have actually been targeted. A Pentagon spokesperson explained that the coalition has actually been trying to spare some of ISIS's largest oil producing facilities, "recognising that they remain the property of the Syrian people", and to limit collateral damage to civilians nearby.

The US only this week began a slightly more aggressive approach toward the oil, albeit bombing tanker trucks, not the infrastructure behind them. The trucks were destroyed at

the Abu Kamal oil collection point, near the Iraqi border.

Conservative estimates are that Islamic State takes in one to two million dollars a day from oil sales; some see the number as high as four million a day. As recently as February, however, the Pentagon claimed oil was no longer ISIS's main way to raise money, having been bypassed by those "donations" from unspecified sources, and smuggling.

Turkey

One of the issues with selling oil, by anyone, including ISIS, is bringing the stuff to market. Oil must be taken from the ground using heavy equipment, possibly refined, stored, loaded into trucks or pipelines, moved somewhere and then sold into the worldwide market. Large amounts of money must be exchanged, and one to four million

dollars a day is a lot of cash to deal with on a daily basis. It may be that some sort of electronic transactions that have somehow to date eluded the United States are involved.

Interestingly, the UK *Guardian* reported a US-led raid on the compound housing the Islamic State's chief financial officer produced evidence that Turkish officials directly dealt with ranking ISIS members, including the ISIS officer responsible for directing the terror army's oil and gas operations in Syria.

Turkey's "open door policy", in which it allowed its southern border to serve as an unofficial transit point in and out of Syria, has been said to be one of ISIS's main routes for getting their oil to market. A Turkish apologist claimed the oil is moved only via small-diameter plastic irrigation pipes, and is thus hard to monitor.

A smuggled barrel of oil is sold for about \$50 on the black market. This means "several million dollars a day worth of oil would require a very large number of very small pipes."

Others believe Turkish and Iraqi oil buyers travel into Syria with their own trucks, and purchase the ISIS oil right at the refineries, transporting it themselves out of Syria. Convoys of trucks are easy to spot from the air, and easy to destroy from the air, though up until now the US does not seem to have done so.

So as is said, ISIS's sources of funding grow curious and curiouse the more one knows. Those seeking to destroy ISIS might well wish to look into where the money comes from, and ask why, after a year and three months of war, no one has bothered to follow the money.

And cut it off.
Information Clearing House ✪

Win the war? No, put an end to it

Jean-Paul Piérot

France's capital has been struck at its heart by the war that devastates the Near and Middle East and turns Syria into a theatre of confrontation with far-reaching regional and international reverberations. "An act of war," our president declared on Friday night. And in real fact the power of these quasi-simultaneous aggressions in several places in and around Paris, the determination to kill as many people as possible, blindly, indiscriminately, and the attackers' recourse – for the first time in France – to suicide missions – all these confer upon this terrorist coup the characteristics of a military operation in an asymmetrical conflict.

But considered separately, it does not call for a "war against terrorism", a vague notion that fails to designate both the adversary and the

causes of the conflict, and may lead to all kinds of competitive bidding. In a special edition, the weekly *l'Express* raised a martial question "How shall we win the war?" A similar incitement to the escalation of military intervention is also – and unsurprisingly – manifest in Nicolas Sarkozy's declaration. The real question, to which French diplomacy has so far given no convincing answer, is not how to win the war but how to put an end to it.

Following September 11, 2001, and taking advantage of the deep shock caused by the attacks, George W Bush succeeded in bringing world opinion round to the invasion of Afghanistan in the name of war on terrorism. And again in 2003 to the war on Iraq, except that this time France spoke against it at the UN Security Council. The region has since never found a way out of chaos.

The current situation is indeed

the end-result of Bush's adventurism. The lesson seems to have been of little use to French leaders, who can think of nothing better than more air strikes. "We are at war," Prime Minister Manuel Valls grimly repeated on the TV channel TF1, "and more terrorist attacks are to be expected." In other words the prime minister promoted powerlessness.

The massacres in Paris have made it impossible for the French diplomacy to hold to their former line. Supposing that in August 2013, the French proposal to bomb Bashar el Assad's army – following a suspicion that chemical substances had been used – had not jointly been vetoed by the US and Great Britain, Damascus would no doubt be now under Jihadist control. It is easy to imagine what the consequences would be.

The reason for the confusing French position on this point seems to be a concession to Saudi Arabia,

a country deeply involved in the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites. And Saudi Arabia shows up another ambiguity on the French side: how can France ever take a convincing stand against ISIL while claiming to be the main ally, and provider of fighter planes, to the Gulf monarchies whose ideological leanings to ISIL are a matter of public knowledge? Besides, in its relations with Riyadh, Paris proves overly discreet about the human rights issue (women's rights included).

The chaos through which the Middle-East is labouring, and which causes the exodus of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing ISIL's barbarous rule is the result of 15 years of Western interventionism. If France did not follow Bush into Iraq, the debit side in Sarkozy's record is the destruction of Libya.

It is high time we broke away with power politics and stopped sidelining the UN. These attacks,

like those that killed 129 in Paris, are for the greater part linked to a historical process that increased with the interventions in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and in Libya – all of which only added fuel to the fire, as Dominique de Villepin, former French foreign minister, contends. He denounces the climate of competitive bidding and thunderous calls for war. "What can a 'total war' mean? An all-out fight to destroy a terrorist organisation is sure to spread the contamination even further." So Villepin warns us against falling into the trap set by those who fomented the attacks.

The main lesson to be drawn from the present tragic events is certainly not to allow ourselves to be enlisted in new adventures, but to upgrade the UN's role in the process of restoration and reconstruction.
Translated by Isabelle Métal
l'Humanite ✪

Russia warns Turkey and Qatar

Lyuba Lulko

In 1999, Putin promised to find and destroy terrorists even in their toilets. All of those Chechen warlords – from Basayev to Umarov – were indeed destroyed. Russia's recent missile attacks from strategic bombers and a submarine came as a warning sign for the countries that support terrorists.

UN Charter

In the fight against terrorism, Russia will act in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. The article regulates the right to self-defence for a state, Putin stated. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stressed at a meeting with his Lebanese counterpart that Russia would be implementing the article by all means – military, diplomatic and financial ones.

Article 51 of the UN Charter says that the Charter “in no way impairs the inherent right for individual or collective self-defence in case of an armed attack on a UN member, until the UN Security Council takes measures to maintain international peace and security.”

Originally, the document spoke about a direct invasion of a foreign army. After the 9/11 attacks, the US appealed to the UN Security Council for the use of force against the Taliban movement, which, as US officials believed, masterminded the attacks in New York. The UN Security Council

decided that the right to self-defence could be used against non-organised armed groups or those that did not act on behalf of any particular state.

After the terrorist attack in the skies over the Sinai Peninsula, Russia can use Article 51 to either bring perpetrators to justice, or take other measures against them (destroy them).

One of the terrorists, whom Putin promised to destroy, was Chechen militant Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, who organised the invasion of Dagestan in 1999. Yandarbiyev was killed on February 13, 2004 as a result of a special operation of the Chief Intelligence Directorate in Doha, the capital of Qatar. Russia had unsuccessfully requested his delivery from the Qatari authorities for three years.

All traces lead to Qatar

Qatar is one of the organisers of the terrorist act over the Sinai.

“In Qatar and Saudi Arabia, there are those who organise and sponsor terrorist attacks – they are headquartered there. There are well-known people there, who control terrorist activities in Syria and Iraq.

“In my opinion, these people should be very much afraid of Russia, like plague. It is up for the country's administration to decide how to intimidate those people. Bombing is not necessary at all – there are completely different

methods of influence,” CEO of the Institute for the Middle East, Yevgeny Satanovsky said.

According to Satanovsky, “Russia stepped on the warpath, grabbed a large tomahawk, arrows and went to work. Everything else does not matter.” Russia was not coordinating its actions with international organisations to take Berlin in 1945, the expert added.

Russia must go ahead of NATO

The *Rostov-on-Don* submarine launched “Kalibr” cruise missiles on the Islamic State from the eastern Mediterranean. The missiles flew on a ballistic trajectory over Turkey. Strategic bombers Tu-160, Tu-95 MS and Tu-22 took part in the operation as well.

If you can not prevent a fight, you should fight first, Putin said once. If Russia does not do it, NATO will take the lead in bringing the war to Russia's borders. According to *Foreign Policy*, NATO has been working on that (“NATO's Turn to Attack”).

In Brussels, EU officials discuss the military operation in Syria on the basis of Article 51 of the UN Charter. The EU has its own experience: the deployment of contingents in Afghanistan and Iraq, the adoption of the US Patriot Act that gave US special services an opportunity to violate any law in case of a terrorist threat. The EU imposed sanctions on



The *Rostov-on-Don* submarine launched “Kalibr” cruise missiles on the Islamic State from the eastern Mediterranean.

the countries that support terrorism and toppled legitimate presidents.

Strangely enough, Saudi Arabia, one of the organisers of September 11 terrorist attack in New York, was left unpunished. Yet, it is the precedent and the scale of action that matters.

Russia can no longer ignore the fact that the conflicts in Syria and Iraq affect its most important interests. Russia can not let terrorists kill Russian citizens. Developing the special operation inside and outside

Syria, Russia must emphasise that it is building an “open coalition.”

It is worthy of note that the centre to coordinate air operations led by the US and the US-led coalition – al-Udeid air base – is located in Qatar. Is it time to raise the issue at the United Nations to organise an international tribunal for the governments of Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia for their involvement in terrorism?

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Region Briefs

Japan's Defence Minister Nakatani Gen and the US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter held a meeting in Malaysia. They agreed to build an Alliance Coordination Mechanism and a Bilateral Planning Mechanism. The two mechanisms, together with Japan's new war bills, would integrate Japanese Self-Defence Forces (SDF) with the US military, thus putting the SDF under the US control completely. It would also provide a possibility for the SDF to join US-led global wars. At the meeting, Nakatani supported the US's actions in South China Sea and promised to send troops to the area for conducting joint military exercises.

Nepalese Prime Minister, Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli has asked the Indian government to lift its embargo on the country, resuming petroleum and medicine supply to Nepal, especially after an earthquake badly hit the country recently. The Indian government had put an embargo on Nepal in September, after Nepal promulgated its new constitution that officially transformed the country from a monarchy state into a federal state. The Indian government used its regional influence to interfere with Nepal's new constitution, assisting ethnic Indians who live in Nepal's south to set up an Indian state. Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister, Chandra Prakash Mainali, said that “India's reservation on our new constitution is completely irrational as the constitution is purely an internal document of Nepal”.

Vietnam's Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs recently organised a conference in Phan Thiet city to encourage women to participate in politics. Participants discussed how cultural and traditional factors had affected the rate of women's participation in policy-making. The Ministry's Deputy Minister, Nguyen Trong Dam, said that one of the country's national strategies was to increase the rate of women in people-elected agencies, and that it would help women to raise their voices. The number of female members in Vietnam's National Assembly is 24.4 percent, 3.4 percent higher than the global average rate.

The 33rd meeting of the Vietnam-Cuba Inter-governmental Committee was held in Hanoi. The two sides reviewed the implementation of the agreements reached at the 32nd meeting, and then they signed a new Memorandum of Understanding, setting up realistic goals for mid-term cooperation on the basis of mutual respect and benefit. Vietnamese Minister of Construction, Trinh Dinh Dung, said that the document provided a legal foundation for fostering effective implementation in many areas and was in line with people's demand and parties' policies. Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment, Rodrigo Malmierca Diaz, agreed with Trinh and especially thanked Vietnam for its assistance in the areas of medicine and rice production.

Shameless anti-refugee bill

Emile Schepers

WASHINGTON: The Republican Party and the right have descended to a new level of repulsive shamelessness that many thought was not possible even for them. Their spokespersons and presidential candidates have vied with each other for the most outrageous statements designed to generate fear and hatred against the largest group of victims of the Salafist terrorist group ISIS, namely the millions of refugees fleeing from the fighting and repression in Syria, Iraq and other directly affected countries.

They have gone further, trying to link the Paris terrorists to Muslims and immigrants in general. Several have called for the admission only of Christian refugees and no Muslims, a position shared with some of the most backward right wing European leaders, and sharply at variance with the US Constitution.

Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson compared the refugees to rabid dogs, while Donald Trump, to nobody's surprise, outdid all the rest by suggesting that Muslims may have to be forced to wear special identification badges, like the armbands the Nazis made the Jews wear in Europe. Thirty one governors, all but one of them Republicans, have indicated that they will not accept

the settlement of the refugees in their states.

They have no right under law to do this, but the fear arises that in those states, even if the federal government insists, as President Obama has said it would, in settling the refugees, state and local governments will not cooperate with providing them with basic services. On the other hand, a number of state governors and the Chicago City Council have announced that the refugees are welcome.

Hoping to gain electoral traction for 2016 on the basis of the fear and anger roused by the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, the Republicans shoved through a bill in the House of Representatives, the *SAFE (American Security Against Foreign Enemies) Act, HR 4038*, which could have the effect of delaying the processing of the paltry number of Syrian refugees (10,000 of the millions that exist) that the federal government has announced it will admit. Iraqi refugees are also covered, as well as people who have recently travelled to those two countries. Refugees are already screened by United Nations Relief Agencies and by the US Department of Homeland Security. The new procedure would require that all be screened by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as well, and that each refugee be signed off on by several levels of officialdom. The main problem is that this is likely to slow

down the process of offering relief to desperate people.

The legislative procedure was unusual in that Congress held no hearings as to what the bill's impact might be on actual government operations. The bill passed with 289 votes “for”, 137 “against” and 8 “not voting”. Broken down by party, 242 Republicans voted to pass the measure, and only two voted against it, with two others not voting. Forty seven Democrats voted in favour, while 135 voted “no” and six did not vote.

The matter now goes to the US Senate. Civil liberties supporters are calling for all of us to immediately contact our US senators to ask them to vote “NO” on HR 4038, for the sake of humanity, common sense and the honour of our country. The very user friendly website of the US Congress can help you find contact information for your senators, here: www.congress.gov. Given the urgency of the situation, it is best to make telephone calls, but one can also send e-mails and faxes.

President Obama has said he would veto this legislation, but it does not hurt to also contact the White House to urge him to do so also: www.whitehouse.gov/contact

There is no evidence whatsoever that any refugee admitted to the United States, whether Muslim or other, has ever committed a terrorist act.

People's World ✪

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Support brave brothers and sisters

I write to express my deep sadness and heartfelt sympathy and solidarity with the French and Lebanese peoples in the wake of the awful and indiscriminate attacks by Daesh (Islamic State) extremists that killed so many innocent people in Paris and Beirut.

My thoughts are with all the families of those who lost loved ones and those who were injured. But these are not the only innocent people suffering such ordeals. And the Daesh or IS group are not the only immoral and evil forces at work in the world carrying out horrific massacres and other abuses.

I'm also very mindful and offer my utmost support to the brave brothers and sisters, Kurds, Syrians, Iraqis, Yazidis, Palestinians,

Armenians, among others engaged in fighting these same cruel fascists of Daesh who are still massacring and repressing people (mostly Muslims, but also Christians and others) in Iraq and Syria.

And I want to take this opportunity to express my solidarity with others enduring war, terror and resisting oppression. Unlike some in the Western countries I do not forget or neglect the fact that there are other courageous peoples in Palestine and elsewhere also struggling for freedom, human rights and self-determination against vicious, fascistic regimes that have imposed brutal occupations, ethnic cleansing, appalling atrocities and tyranny on them.

I grieve for the hundreds and thousands killed in these conflicts, for the many hurt, the millions of terrorised and displaced refugees and salute those continuing to struggle, sacrifice and refusing to give up their quest for justice.

Steven Katsineris,
Vic

Stand together

I feel if penalty rates go and we as a nation of hard working families are affected then shame on them and also shame on us for not standing together on this issue.

We must stand firm and simply say no, not 100 not 1,000 but tens of thousands of us can put this unfair ideology to bed if we stand together.

Each and every one of us should let our employers know that our loyalty, hard work, reliability and vital experience is the backbone of any business regardless of how big or small the company. Most of us sacrifice our weekends whether we like it or not, that little bit extra helps the average family get by. It seems the government doesn't mind taxing us twice the more we earn the more they bloody take, you won't hear them complain there.

So what right-minded person would give up watching their son or daughter compete in sport or miss a performance or simply a family gathering when these are the heart and soul and fabric of why we exist. The answer is no one does but we do.

Here are some of the reasons why we work overtime and weekends: some are in fear of losing their jobs, some do it because they cannot afford to be below the poverty line and some do it because they are loyal to their employer.

If we can sacrifice to work long hours and weekends away from our families and friends so can the employer sacrifice to at least pay us for our commitment. If any business

cannot afford to pay their employees penalty rates then simply don't open your bloody doors and for those businesses who do operate on weekends, don't try and pay some under 16 year old who has not been trained properly and are chucked in the deep end. Pay your knowledgeable and dedicated staff for what they're worth, don't pay us peanuts: we are not trained monkeys.

Ray McFarlane

Penalty rates boost economy

How many of your readers, I wonder, have spent some portion of their life working weekends? Probably a majority. I know I did. How many I also wonder, continue to do so once they no longer need to? From personal experience, not many.

Basically, nobody works weekends because they want to. They work weekends for the extra money. If there is no extra money, fewer businesses will open as fewer workers are available.

Also, we must not forget that all these workers are somebody's customers. Money earned during weekends is spent at other times.

Does the CEO of any major business work weekends, or do they

spend their time travelling, wining and dining, letting other people do the work? But, they would be the first ones to strip wages from the very people who are making this lifestyle possible.

Martin H

Doing the heavy lifting

Forgive me for being cynical, but why does this government always look to the lower paid to do the heavy lifting? Penalty rates are important to many low paid workers, especially to part-timers such as students.

So why go after them, whilst doing nothing to rein in the multi-nationals free-loading on the taxpayer, or the wealthy superannuants getting huge tax breaks, or the miners (whoops too late for that, they've already exported all their profits).

Perhaps a more even-handed approach where we are all asked to bear some of the burden might be a less divisive approach. Goodness knows they might even consider that many may be willing to pay a bit more tax to fund decent health, education and social services to create a fairer Australia.

Michael Hopkins

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

ISIS, the Saudis and oil

Were the attacks in Paris the work of fanatical Islamist terrorists taking revenge on France for its well-known hostility and intolerance towards Muslims? Or are the religious fanatics merely tools, and what we are really dealing with is capitalism and its never-ending quest for higher profits?

At first sight this might seem a bit of a stretch, but *The Ecologist* ran a very interesting article by Oliver Tickell on November 16 that looked at the links between ISIS, OPEC and attempts to reduce our use of fossil fuels. And the *Financial Times* a few days earlier had run another interesting article entitled *ISIS Inc: how oil fuels the jihadi terrorists*. "Oil is the black gold that funds ISIS' black flag" said the paper. "It fuels its war machine, provides electricity and gives the fanatical jihadis critical leverage against their neighbours ..."

We all know that ISIS is supported by – and even receives arms from – the US and the latter's clients Turkey and Saudi Arabia (the USA's ostentatious but singularly ineffectual air strikes against "ISIS targets" in northern Syria notwithstanding). But did you know that the area controlled by ISIS in the Middle East produces about 34,000-40,000 barrels of crude oil per day? "The oil is sold at the wellhead for between \$20 and \$45 a barrel, earning the militants an average of US\$1.5 million a day ... While Al-Qaeda, the global terrorist network, depended on donations from wealthy foreign sponsors, ISIS has derived its financial strength from its status as monopoly producer of an

essential commodity consumed in vast quantities throughout the area it controls. Even without being able to export, it can thrive because it has a huge captive market in Syria and Iraq."

In his article in *The Ecologist*, Oliver Tickell too observed that ISIS's aim is "to consolidate its hold of the regions it already occupies, extend its empire to new regions and countries, and establish a Caliphate whose power and income will largely derive from oil". But he also makes a vital connection between oil production and the COP21 climate conference that is about to take place – where? In Paris. Now there's a coincidence!

We do not yet know to what extent the horrendous events in Paris will be allowed to divert the world leaders that are about to gather there from resolutely dealing with the urgent need to reduce global carbon emissions before climate change becomes irreversible. There will unquestionably be a great temptation to ditch the knotty problem of climate change and instead to make a big show of tackling another man-made problem, one that captures headlines much more easily, namely "Islamist terrorism".

COP21 is vitally important to the very future of life on Earth. In Tickell's words, it is set to be "the biggest such event since COP15 in Copenhagen six years ago." But, as Tickell also notes, the last thing oil producing countries (including ISIS) want is "a global climate agreement that will, over time, limit global consumption of fossil fuels". Because that would cut into their profits something fearful.



As Karl Marx observed, when capitalists stand to make huge profit, there is no crime they will hesitate to perpetrate. And oil profits (and also losses) are certainly big money. The *Financial Times*: "The IEA estimates that OPEC states have lost half a trillion dollars [half a trillion!] a year in revenues since the oil price fell from over \$100 a barrel in 2011-2014 to current levels (around \$50 per barrel. ... The main problem is that Saudi Arabia is over-producing oil in order to suppress investment in and production of high cost oil in the US, Canada, UK and other countries – and so capture the lion's share of an oil market it thinks will keep on growing for decades to come.

"OPEC scenarios foresee oil demand increasing from 111 to 132 million barrels per day (mb/d) by 2040. However the International Energy Agency thinks that even modest carbon constraints will see demand for oil slump to around 100 mb/d by 2040 – and considerably lower with tough climate policies."

The Saudi oil sheiks may be US clients – well, there's no maybe, they are – but economically they are also imperialists in their own right. Their financial and military backing of ISIS clearly indicates that they already anticipate the "IS caliphate" becoming a client state of their own, as they strive to build an empire in the Middle East and Africa. Hence their bombing of Yemen (which no capitalist country has bothered to condemn, let alone try to stop) and their interference in Libya and Syria.

A successful climate conference that made binding decisions to limit the use of fossil fuels is what climate scientists and activists as well as progressive opinion everywhere wants, indeed demands as essential.

However, that is precisely what all the major oil exporters most assuredly do not want. Would they hesitate, do you think, to call on their tame fanatics – their religious shock troops – to perpetrate massive atrocities in the heart of Paris as a way to divert world leaders (some of whom are already on the side of the oil companies rather than the environment) away from climate change? Or as a way to frighten away many of the thousands of activists previously expected to gather in Paris in order to influence the conference?

Already, the threat of more potential terrorist attacks has given French police a potent excuse they can use to restrict public gatherings, prevent marches, etc.

The capitalist mass media too will now be able to concentrate on security issues and related "news", instead of emphasising the kind of discussions that the urgency of climate change demands.

And, of course, if the conference fails to take decisive action on climate change, those nasty fossil fuel restrictions that would cut into the oil sheiks' profits, can once again be shoved on to the back burner, so oil – and profits – can continue to flow.

A far-fetched scenario? I don't think so. Do you? ☘

Taking issue – Rob Gowland

The Berlin Wall – built to keep people out not in

A young comrade asked us the other day about the “notorious” Berlin Wall. The modern history textbooks she had been provided with at school were proving a tad unsatisfactory. And no wonder! They all adhered to the official Western line that the inhabitants of the GDR, like all the people of the USSR and Eastern Europe, were imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain, unable to escape but yearning to be free, to live like the people in the West that they supposedly envied so much.

According to this Western propaganda line, to prevent these unfortunate souls from making their escape to the West and the benefits of capitalism, the evil Reds in the GDR built a wall across Berlin, to the consternation of Berliners.

That’s it, a simple scenario that anyone can understand. Only one slight problem, apart from the Wall itself, the rest of it is nonsense.

To understand the Berlin Wall, one has to go back to 1945, and the fall of Hitler’s capital to the advancing Soviet Army. The capture of Hitler’s bunker wiped out the seat of Nazism. Shortly afterwards, the victorious Soviet leadership allowed their Anglo-US allies in the anti-fascist alliance to enter the city that the Soviet army had captured at such cost.

Like Vienna, the German capital was to be divided into four zones of occupation (Soviet, British, US and French), as were both Austria and Germany. This had been agreed at the Yalta conference of the Big Three (Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt), whose decisions in no way envisaged permanent partition. The four-power occupation of Germany and Austria was meant to be a temporary measure, intended to last only while the two countries were de-Nazified.

But the boardrooms of Wall Street and the City of London were not at all interested in de-Nazification: their goal was to push the beastly Bolsheviks back from the Elbe all the way to Moscow and beyond – hopefully into oblivion! This also accorded with the Pentagon’s plans for the post-war supremacy of US imperialism.

The four-power occupation of Germany and Austria was not allowed to operate successfully. The de-Nazification process was made

inoperable in the three Western zones of both countries. In the Soviet zone, all former Nazi judges, for example, were dismissed and replaced with anti-fascists. In the Western zones, on the other hand, former Nazi judges were retained. In fact, anti-fascists, many only recently released from Nazi concentration camps, found the de-Nazification laws being used against them, initially to disarm the anti-fascist militias that had taken over from the Nazi police and other officials and to reinstate Nazi officials, later to bar Communists and other anti-fascists from any kind of public office.

In Germany, the shift on the part of the Western powers from anti-fascism to anti-Communism was particularly pronounced, and did not balk at violent sabotage. The Berlin underground rail system was initially operated by the authorities in the Eastern (Soviet) sector, but this was sabotaged by rampant damage to the trains whenever they ran through the western parts of the city, culminating in the planting of a bomb on a train. The underground had to be restricted to the east.

Then the currency in the western zones was arbitrarily changed, effectively creating two Germanys. The border between the eastern and western zones was mined – on the Western side, not the Soviet. Even the status of Berlin as the capital of a single Germany under four-power occupation was unilaterally changed, with the Berlin airlift attempting to force the de-facto recognition of the western part of the city as an official outpost of the Western-occupied part of the country only.

Despite constantly sabotaging the operation of the four-Power occupation of the country and its capital, the US in particular invoked the four-Power occupation status when it suited their purposes, especially whenever they wanted to send military personnel into the eastern part of the country on scouting (read spying) expeditions. They self-righteously declared that it was their “right” under the terms of the Occupation!

Eventually, the Western powers intensified their drive to prevent the USSR (and German Communists) from having any say in German affairs by formally establishing the Federal Republic of Germany out of



the three Western zones and installing the pro-Nazi Konrad Adenauer as Chancellor. The concept that Germany was a country temporarily divided into four zones of occupation was decisively rendered a fiction.

The anti-fascists of the largely rural eastern zone then set about trying to make the best of the situation by founding the German Democratic Republic, which the West of course refused even to recognise.

The division of Germany was brought about by the West, as the means of securing German capitalism from Bolshevik collectivisation, and to allow Germany to be re-armed and relaunched against the Bolshevik scourge in the East. Throughout the 1950s the West (mainly the USA) poured money into Western Germany, to re-establish the great German corporations that US and British capital had maintained strong links with right through the War, and to simultaneously score propaganda points off the capital-deficient east.

In the east of Germany, education, the judiciary, the landed estates, the factories, all had been de-Nazified. Companies that had done well out of servicing the Nazi regime, like photographic outfit Zeiss, for example, were nationalised. Their bosses, in fact all their top brass, shot through to the West at the first opportunity, taking with them all the formulae for

Zeiss lenses. Engineers and technicians in the East had to rediscover them before the nationalised company could operate effectively. Such sabotage was commonplace while the former supporters of Hitler and co who lost their positions or their property looked for the chance to “escape” to the West.

Chances weren’t hard to find, for although the border between the two countries was closed, in Berlin it was wide open. Consequently, over 70 Western intelligence services had stations in West Berlin. It was a gateway to all of Eastern Europe.

For a decade, the attempts of the new GDR government to industrialise and rebuild the economy of the eastern region were systematically frustrated by massive, well-orchestrated sabotage from the West, by way of West Berlin.

If the GDR government announced plans to develop, say, ship-building or the chemical industry, specialists in those industries would soon receive letters, notes under doors, visits from “friends”, offering extremely well-paid positions in the West, complete with large flat and flash car.

Times were tough and many took these offers, as they were meant to.

They simply crossed over into West Berlin and went to the addresses they’d been given and that was that. A well-organised brain-drain was bleeding the GDR’s economy through an open wound called the border with West Berlin.

All the socialist countries of Eastern Europe were nations under siege, but none more so than the GDR. In addition to the usual propaganda weapons – Voice of America, BBC, Vatican Radio, Radio Free Europe, and innumerable others – the GDR had to contend with West German TV, which ran a deliberate policy of eschewing any criticism of life in the West and presenting instead a glossy, false picture of capitalism, more so than anything Australian TV has ever attempted. Why? Because most of the GDR was able to pick up West German TV.

The decision to close the open border between East and West Berlin was made at 4pm on August 12,

1961. It was put into effect without any announcement, at midnight the following Sunday.

The West was caught flat-footed. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of agents were stranded on the wrong side of the new border – the hastily erected “wall”. The black-marketeering in East Berlin using Western currency that had been encouraged by certain Western agencies came to a shuddering stop.

From the day the Wall was erected the economy of the GDR never looked back. It developed steadily to become the tenth leading industrialised country in the world.

In comparison, from the day the Wall came down, the economy of eastern Germany went down the drain. Its massive, extremely efficient collectivised farms, that could easily feed the whole of Germany, saw their markets handed over lock, stock and barrel to the less efficient but privately-owned farms of Western Germany. Companies or industries that had been nationalised, complete with all the innovations and investment that the GDR had put into them, were handed over to the Western companies that had owned them before nationalisation, companies that in many cases had co-operated with Hitler.

For the people of the GDR, who had been told by Western politicians that if they voted to unify with West Germany, they would retain all the benefits they already enjoyed (under Socialism) plus lots of consumer goods and the ability to travel anywhere at will, the fall of the Wall was a disaster. They lost their industries, their agriculture, their jobs, their public housing, their free health care, their union holidays, their free education, their government funded arts and culture, etc. Many have had to migrate to other European countries in search of work.

The people who glibly rejoice in the anniversary of the “fall of the wall,” in the ending of the “partitioning of Germany”, should remember who divided Germany in the first place, and should spare a thought for the working people of eastern Germany, the victims of the “fall of the wall”. ☘

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The Guardian

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Published by
Guardian Publications Australia Ltd
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

Printed by Spotpress
24-26 Lillian Fowler Pl Marrickville 2204

Responsibility for electoral comment
is taken by T Pearson,
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

Waiting for approval

Lyn Drummond

While the Netherlands is expected to take a further 7,000 refugees under the European Union's proposed quota plan, on top of the 2,000 already agreed to by the Dutch government in May, a stark question remains: what will happen to the numerous rejected asylum seekers – often waiting years and too scared to return to the countries they have fled – who are squatting in empty buildings across the country?

The Netherlands has agreed with the quota plan, unlike some Eastern European countries and Baltic states, but would like to see better facilities in safe countries in the region as there is no point in asylum seekers coming to a European country which refuse refuge, a spokeswoman for the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice explained.

A contentious remark for We Are Here, an organisation of refugees who united in Amsterdam to promote their collective struggle. Their website proclaims that they are ashamed of the way refugees are treated in the Netherlands.

We Are Here has some 225 immigrants from approximately 15 countries. Their search for asylum has failed for now but they continue to appeal through various courts including the Court of Justice of the European Union.

They regularly demonstrate in Amsterdam's tourist packed centres for what they seek – a more generous refugee policy – while running the risk of being sent back to their country of origin or to the country of arrival in Europe. They want decent shelter. There is "enough for everyone", they say.

One of the collective's coordinators Luul – not her real name – has been squatting for a year with 74 other asylum seekers in an empty Amsterdam building owned by the Dutch municipality. She believes there are thousands of asylum seekers in the Netherlands who are waiting and hoping to, eventually, receive status.

Four hundred people are living on Amsterdam's streets, she says. Most of the time it's hard to live in squats, evictions are regular. Churches and charities help, some live with friends. Although squatting is illegal in the Netherlands, in Amsterdam, squatters are not evicted until the owner of the building has filed a report and proved that he has serious plans for his property.

Luul was 16 when, in 2010, she escaped from southern Somalia after being forced from her home by the Islamic militant group, al-Shabaab which is allied to Al-Qaeda. The group recruited large numbers of children from school and abducted girls for forced marriage to fighters.

Al-Shabaab demanded that Luul's 15-year old brother become a soldier. "My father said that his son would have no part of it. Two months later my father was shot in a small mosque early in the morning," she said. Her brother had died in a bomb explosion at his school.

"They took me to a man I was supposed to marry. I spat at him, insulted him, and was put in prison. A two metre by one metre prison cubicle. I was there for three weeks with three other girls. They refused us water. On some days we had food, on others none. They whipped us daily. For a long time I thought I was going to die.

"Then another group came and there was a fight; al-Shabaab ran, left us in the cells in the middle of the night. We started running, me and the other girls. I went to an aunt who contacted

my mother, and then my father's best friend, I called him uncle. He said he would get us out of the country as soon as possible. We had to leave or face being stoned to death.

"We started our journey by car. For almost a week, passing through controlled routes in Somalia and other countries. We were stopped once but the border guards did not know that al-Shabaab was looking for us. Two of the girls with me were taken from the car, because they were not wearing burkas. It was too hot."

These two teenage girls were later publicly shot by firing squad in the centre of the town of Beledweyne, near the border with Ethiopia. Al-Shabaab accused them of being spies for the Somali government.

Luul hid on her day's journey into Kenya in a net strung between the wheels of a mule cart. She made it with false documents to Europe, bound initially for Sweden but transiting through Amsterdam where she was sent to an adult detention centre.

"I was too tired to understand anything. I was treated like a criminal, I just wanted to feel safe again. To be told, don't worry, we are going to protect you. I was not supposed to be there for three weeks, but to go to an underage facility. To be rested, become familiar with the new country."

Five years later after learning Dutch at school she continues to appeal to higher courts for refugee status. She believes the immigration system does not work in a humane way. "Asylum seekers are unprotected, there is no perspective on what they have suffered. They claim their stories are often not believed but how do they get proof?" New proof of their stories is either impossible to get or would endanger their lives. They want to study, to work.

"But we are out on the street. We didn't expect to find ourselves in this situation when we came here as refugees. In fact, we lack all basic human rights. Where do we stay? First we stayed in a tent camp, followed by many different squatted buildings. What we need is a permanent solution."

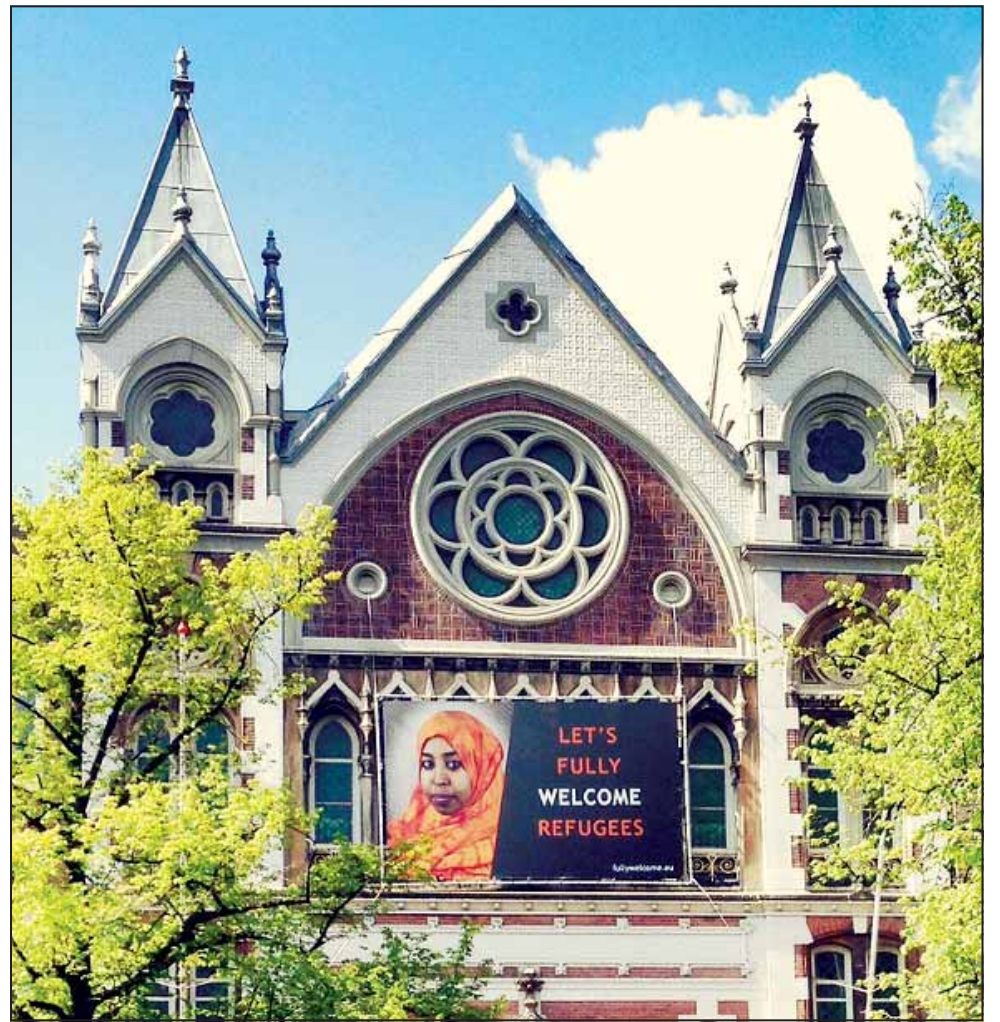
Asked why cases like Luul's are turned down, Yvonne Wiggers, spokesperson for the Dutch State Secretary of Immigration, Klaas Dijkhoff, said, "It is not possible to say something about this particular case. But it is generally the case that asylum seekers may be given asylum in the Netherlands if they need protection from persecution in their own country on account of their race, religion, nationality or beliefs, or if they risk being tortured were they to return to their country."

Ali Juma from Burundi has been waiting 11 years for refugee status. He says that he has been constantly turned down because there was not enough evidence to prove his claim of persecution. Now the Red Cross is involved and tracking down his family and friends for proof of his story.

"Red Cross have no power in first world countries. It has more impact to approach them for help in developing countries," he said. This problem was not something that had occurred to him. Why wasn't he informed this was possible rather than waiting for more than a decade? He has no answer.

We are Here also claims the Dutch government is violating the Geneva Convention by denying the basic human right for protection and safety.

An Amnesty International report from 2013 on the detention of irregular migrants and asylum seekers echoes similar recommendations that it made in its first report back in 2008.



A banner hangs off a building in Amsterdam calling to welcome all refugees.

"Asylum seekers are unprotected, there is no perspective on what they have suffered. They claim their stories are often not believed but how do they get proof?" New proof of their stories is either impossible to get or would endanger their lives. They want to study, to work.

The recommendations from Amnesty International's report include:

- establishment of a rights based, all-inclusive approach to irregular migration in which measures to "combat" irregular migration and crimes such as human trafficking and other human rights violations and abuses are balanced with increased protection for the victims;
- immigration detention should be used only if, in each individual case, it is demonstrated that it is a necessary and proportionate measure in conformity with international law;
- provide traumatised asylum-seekers and victims of human rights violations with the necessary time and means to prepare their asylum applications;
- under no circumstances should victims of human trafficking be penalised for their

illegal entry into the Netherlands or be administratively detained while awaiting their expulsion. Neither should victims of human trafficking be prosecuted for crimes committed where they have been compelled to do so.

Asked why the recommendations had not been addressed despite the first report coming out seven years ago Ruud Bosgraaf, senior press officer in Amnesty's Amsterdam office explained that it was a sensitive issue in Dutch politics between both parties in the coalition government, the Labour party and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy.

"The lawmaking process sometimes takes years and years in this country," he said.

These kinds of explanations are not what displaced people seeking a permanent, safe home want to hear.

New Internationalist ✪



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