



Unsustainable policies



Anna Pha

The nation's welfare system is too large and "unsustainable" according to Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews, attempting to soften public reaction to the austerity measures in the forthcoming May budget. Urgent changes must be made to the disability pension and the general unemployment benefit, as well as Medicare, Andrews warned. This is the same man who had the carriage of the anti-union WorkChoices legislation in the Howard government and is now launching an offensive against the most vulnerable in the community.

Andrews is one in a chorus of ministers, employer bodies and media commentators singing the same line about so-called "unsustainable" spending.

Health Minister Peter Dutton claims spending on Medicare has grown at a rapid rate over the past decade and is becoming "unmanageable". Dutton pointed to an ageing population, warning of the additional costs of an increase in dementia, diabetes and other conditions. "It's hard to understand where we

are going to find money to pay for these services'," Dutton said.

Dutton acknowledged that single mothers (not parents) who were forced onto Newstart are struggling, but "the problem we've got now is a huge government debt."

The unemployed are also "unsustainable". We are told the numbers on Newstart payments have ballooned and are putting pressure on the budget. This is not true.

The number of people receiving unemployment payments (Newstart for people aged 22 years and over and Youth Allowance for people aged 16- 21) was lower in 2012 than in 2002 (633,000 compared with 645,000). There was a jump in the number between December 2012 and February 2013, mostly attributable to parents being transferred from parenting to payment to the dole.

The government has raised the work-for-the-dole scheme, in which the unemployed work for nothing under threat of losing their payment.

The sick, people with disability, single parents and the unemployed are all in line for cuts. Chief executive of the national council of

St Vincent de Paul society, John Falzon said, "It's always been therapeutic for welfare bashers to put in the boot to people who are excluded and blame them for their exclusion from the workforce."

The age pension, the government has reassured us, will not be cut in this budget. But that does not mean there will not be other measures to cut spending on pensions.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (20-02-2013) headline, "Unsustainable pensioners", said it all. Michael Pascoe's article had an all too familiar ring – questioning the right of pensioners to pass on their family home to future generations. They should be mortgaging it to fund their retirement.

Never mind how hard they have worked, how much they have been exploited or what taxes they have paid during their working lives, the age pension is becoming "unsustainable" because of an ageing population, or so we are supposed to believe.

The banks made billions out of workers' mortgage repayments during their working lives and now they want to come back for a second round!

"Unsustainable" is the new buzz word being used to try to justify the closure of and withdrawal of funding from important community services and programs that provide vital services to Indigenous Australians (see story page 4 and #1623 of the *Guardian*), people with mental illness, the homeless, single parents, etc.

The abolition of the "unsustainable" school kids bonus has stalled in the Senate, legislation to axe the payment of \$410 for eligible primary school children and \$820 for secondary school children is before the Senate, waiting for the Coalition's majority in July. The amounts involved are relatively small in relation to the federal budget, but to families on low incomes attempting to find hundreds of dollars for books, stationery and uniforms it is yet another blow they cannot afford.

It is interesting to reflect on what the government sees as unsustainable. There is a striking pattern to these budget items. Every single one of them affects the most vulnerable, those on low incomes, those in need and their families – ordinary working people doing it tough.

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A dangerous posture

The former Labor government's *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper set out a strategy for Australian businesses to exploit Asia's rapid economic development and growing prosperity, in particular in China and India. At the same time it set about strengthening the US and Australia's military and political ties, in particular supporting the US's military's major realignment, the so-called "pivot" to Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

"Asia's growth offers Australia tremendous potential to significantly increase our exports by utilising our competitive advantages as a nation – as long as we position ourselves so that we are ready to seize these opportunities and unleash Australia's real economic potential," the Liberal Party's pre-election policy stated. "For example, estimates suggest that Asian demand could almost double our net energy exports over the next 20 years. And that comes on top of projections that the volume of our minerals exports could increase by 40 percent to 60 percent in the period to 2025," the policy continued. Regardless of any differences with Labor their economic focus looked to also be clearly set on Asia.

Yet just days after the election, the process of pulling down the Asian Century began, both figuratively and literally. The website was removed and nothing was put in its place.

In an interview with the *AFR Weekend* last weekend, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop stated that, "in respect of who is our 'best friend' in economic terms, it is undeniably the US. While China is of course our largest merchandise trading partner, I would just make that point, as I am here in Washington."

Bishop suggests that our economic future lies with the US. She does some simple arithmetic, adding the value of longstanding accumulated investments to the value of current trade and comparing US and China's totals. The US comes out on top with a total of \$1 trillion. Two-way annual trade with China is currently \$130 billion compared with the US's \$60 billion. She plays down the relative economic decline of the US and rise of Asian economies.

Abbott is quite clear that he sees the US alliance as "the bedrock of Australian security". His government is prepared to give the US everything it asks for, even if it is at the expense of Australia's sovereignty or regional interests. At its first AUSMIN meeting of foreign and defence ministers with the US last November, Julie Bishop and David Johnston, signed a Statement of Principles providing "a common vision for advancing the US force posture initiatives in northern Australia".

These initiatives are based on US global domination and in particular, preparing for war with China the main target, along with North Korea. The Principles were forthright, tying Australia into the US's war preparations, supporting the militarisation of Japan contrary to that country's Constitution. China would be quite justified in seeing them as offensive and a threat to its security.

The Principles went further in asserting the US's intentions in our region than in more recent ASUMIN communiqués. "The United States and Australia have a vital stake in, and share a common commitment to, the security and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and are working together closely as the United States rebalances to the region.

"The United States and Australia affirm they will continue to enhance trust and confidence through dialogue with China on strategic security issues and will encourage China to play a responsible and constructive role in support of regional stability and prosperity, including through adherence to international law. They are dedicated to working with China to secure progress on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Labor recognised the complexities and contradictions of a capitalist economy whose economic interests lie in Asia, in particular with the People's Republic of China, but whose foreign and military policies are scripted by the USA in the interests of the US imperialism.

It sought to boost economic relations with China at the same time as strengthening its involvement in the US's attempts to contain China and assert its hegemony in the region. The Coalition's stance, especially its dressing down of China when it set up Air Defence Identification Zone in the East China Sea to guard against potential air threats, also suggests the Coalition are taking a more openly bellicose stand, a dangerous posture that reflects Australia's subservient role to the US in the region.

PRESS FUND

At the G20 meeting last week Prime Minister Tony Abbott achieved the status of a one-man national embarrassment when he commented that the war in Syria was just a matter of "baddie versus baddie", and that the solution to the conflict simply lay in one side or the other laying down their arms. But speaking of embarrassment, the Press Fund is already short of contributions, even though this is only the second edition for the year. The Fund plays the key financial role in production of the *Guardian*, and we really need your help to boost the level of support. So please send us a contribution if you possibly can for the next edition. Let's have an embarrassment of riches! Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

R Girvan \$16, Mark Mannion \$5, Amador Navidi \$28, "Round Figure" \$11.

This week's total: \$60 Progressive total: \$100

Keeping your cool in workplace heat

The hot weather hitting southern Australia has caused the Australian Manufacturing Workers' union (AMWU) to remind members that employers have an obligation to provide a safe workplace with sufficient protections from the heat.

The union's Victorian branch issued a *Heat Bulletin* which emphasises the need for workplaces to have access to cool drinks, proper ventilation to moderate high temperatures, an air-conditioned first-aid room and planned breaks as the mercury rises into the high 30s and above.

AMWU Victorian branch Health and Safety Officer Frank Fairley said the chances of accidents happening increased rapidly as the temperature rose, with risk of wavering concentration and discomfort wearing safety equipment.

Victorian OH&S law does not specify temperatures, but does

require that workers must not be exposed to hazards and that atmospheric quality must be maintained.

"Heat policy should have already been negotiated in Health Agreements but even at workplaces without these there are basic guidelines to ensure no one suffers from dehydration or life-threatening heat stroke," he said.

Mr Fairley said a risk assessment should have been done in each area where members work, with the temperature taken in the hottest place.

Rest breaks should be taken every hour in a cooled area, preferably air conditioned, where cool drinks are available.

Victorian branch guidelines are for a 10-minute hourly break in temperatures 30-32C degrees, a 15-minute hourly break from 32-35C degrees, 30 minutes of every hour 35-38C degrees. When the temperature goes above 38

degrees work should cease until the temperature falls or employees should go home on full pay.

"These are guidelines and in some cases employees may demand the right to cease work before temperatures hit 38C degrees or the old 100 Fahrenheit," Mr Fairly said.

"Employers could also look to moderate heat by installing extra insulation around heat sources, closing down some machines or doing the harder physical work in the cooler part of the day.

"It is up to OH&S delegates to keep a close eye on conditions as the temperatures climb towards 40 degrees and if any member feels concerned over the heat they should immediately see their delegate."

The AMWU strongly recommends that any workplace without a Health Agreement work with their organiser to make it a priority. ✪

Unsustainable policies

Continued from page 1

The rich, the insurance companies, the banks, the mining corporations, and other profit-gouging outfits will not lose one cent if these and other planned cuts go ahead. Their homes will be safe, they will still be able to afford \$30,000 a year for each child's fees in an exclusive private school as well as private health insurance and their overseas holidays. In fact, their incomes stand to increase significantly.

The billions of dollars saved by these austerity measures will lay the basis for future tax cuts for companies and the wealthy and advance the neo-liberal agenda of privatisation and deregulation.

Really unsustainable

But that is not to say there are not a number of unsustainable budget items which could and should be cut. The following are a few examples:

The bloated military budget fast approaching \$30 billion a year with automatic indexation – a very minimum cut of 10 percent could be used to fund an increase in unemployment benefits of \$50 a week, restore single parent payments, and still leave around \$1.5 billion towards reducing the budget deficit. It would not harm our security.

The \$6 billion uncapped private health insurance rebate – it is nothing more than a subsidy to otherwise financially unsustainable private hospitals (and insurance companies) which is bleeding the public health system. It could be used to adequately staff and equip public hospitals, increase Medicare rebates to doctors, and provide full coverage for dental services under Medicare.

The billions of dollars in diesel fuel rebates paid to mining companies is environmentally unsustainable and financially irresponsible. This money could be diverted to research and development of environmentally responsible renewable energy sources, creating jobs as well as making a positive contribution towards addressing climate change.

The \$9 billion being paid by the

federal government to non-government schools (only \$4.4 billion to government schools) – phasing out this subsidy would provide much needed funds for the public school system and inservice training and support for teachers. The remainder of the \$9 billion could fund free preschool for all children and afterschool and holiday programs for children.

Negative gearing is costing the government \$5 billion per annum, while subsidising property investors and pushing up the cost of housing. If phased out, this money could be redirected to building public housing and debt reduction.

Ongoing cuts to company taxation – commenced by Labor in the 1980s. These cuts have cost hundreds of billions, around \$35 billion alone last year. No government can go on cutting income and maintain spending. Company tax should be increased, not cut as planned by the Abbott government. All industries should be subjected to a genuine super profits tax – banking, insurance and mining in particular.

Self-assessment of company tax by the largest corporations – Abbott's latest announcement will result in even less income - is unsustainable.

Cutting 900 jobs from the Australian Taxation Office – this is just as financially irresponsible. The ATO needs more staff to chase up the tax cheats, especially the largest corporations.

Offshore processing and incarceration of asylum seekers – it is not only illegal and inhumane but is costing billions of dollars every year. Asylum seekers should be placed in the community and allowed to work while their refugee status is assessed. The money saved could be used to provide English language classes and assistance with accommodation, finding work, education, etc.

Spending billions of dollars on roads – transport emissions are now 18 percent above their 2000 levels, and 41 percent above 1990 levels. The money should be spent on sustainable transport such as rail freight and buses and trains for passengers

resulting in lower environmental, social and economic costs.

Any government recklessly handing out billions of dollars in corporate welfare to the military industrial complex, private hospitals, the mining industry, etc, at the same time as slashing taxation revenue, will not have enough funds to provide basic public and social services. They cannot be provided from thin air.

It is the corporate welfare that is unsustainable.

As pointed out above, there is a pattern to what the government calls "unsustainable". The unsustainable policies of the government are ideologically based. They work in the interests of the rich and big business and hurt the working class, in particular, the most vulnerable.

The struggle to defeat the government's economic policies and win support for pro-people policies is part of the class struggle. Central to these policies is who pays taxes, how much they pay and how they are spent. The government with its neo-liberal, austerity measures, is serving the interests of the capitalist class.

Gareth Hutchens (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 21-01-2013, "Richest 85 boast same wealth as half the world") notes that "In the US, the wealthiest one percent of the population grabbed 95 percent of the post-financial crisis growth between 2009 and 2012, while the bottom 90 percent became poorer." There is nothing fair, democratic, or sustainable about these outcomes.

A similar process is occurring in Australia and the gap will only widen if the government is allowed to go ahead with its planned cuts.

The task now for left and progressive forces is to turn the slogan "One term Abbott" into a reality. This requires the building of a broad movement, united around defeating neo-liberalism and replacing it with a new type of government committed to pro-people policies.

For more on the government's social agenda and the forces behind it, see page 4. ✪

Undermining democratic rights

Peter Mac

The Abbott government is positioning itself to cut back democratic rights while claiming they are protecting basic freedoms, particularly freedom of speech.

The first step in this attack is likely to be the attempted repeal of Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, which prohibits offending or insulting people on the basis of their race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

The government has trivialised the significance of Section 18C, arguing that speech should not be limited because someone might be offended or insulted.

However, as a result of the government's stated intention to dump this section Attorney General George Brandis and other cabinet ministers have received protest delegations from the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and other organisations representing people from Chinese, Greek, Cypriot, and Arabic backgrounds.

In describing their position Fairfax journalist Jacqueline Maley pointed out:

"Making offensive statements about someone is categorically different to offending someone over (for example) their religion, they say. Skin colour is not a matter of belief or choice. If you insult or offend a black person for being black, you are attacking their dignity as a human, not their choices or beliefs (which in a free society are up for genuine discussion, even if that discussion is offensive)."

But the government has strong support in other quarters.

The elimination of 18C would be welcomed by the nation's "shock jock" radio broadcasters, who consider that it removes their God-given right to freedom of speech, i.e. their presumed right to say whatever they like about whoever they want, regardless of the social division or damage to individuals or groups this may cause.

Reproductive rights at risk

Another area that could be in the government's gun sights is the right of women to terminate unwanted pregnancies: the right of women to have control over their own bodies. This right has been attacked by South Australian Senator Cory Bernadi, who once equated gay marriage with the eventual legalisation of bestiality.

In his recently-published book, Bernadi condemned termination as a "death industry". He declared that some women use it as a means of contraception, and called for a reduction in the rate of abortions.

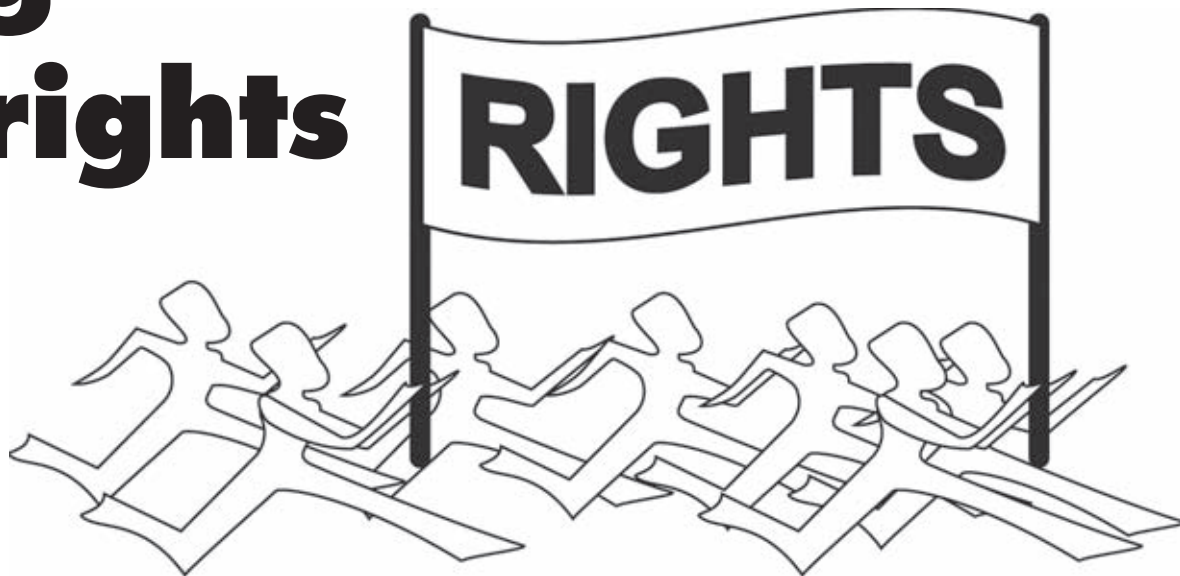
He praised families in which the children are raised by both biological parents, and associated the increased rate of child delinquency with single parent families, families with step parents and "blended" families.

In reply, Abbott merely commented that Bernadi is entitled to say whatever he likes. Abbott is a fundamentalist Catholic, who also opposes abortion. As the Howard government's Minister for Health he attempted to prevent the placing of a new "morning after" contraceptive pill on the national Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

It seems unthinkable that the government would consider interfering with legislation that enshrines women's reproductive rights. Yet there are already indications that this may happen in Victoria, where the Coalition government is desperate to gain the support of MP Jeff Shaw, who holds the balance of power and is a bitter opponent of abortion.

And in July the Abbott government may also find itself beholden to newly-arrived Senators who were elected last year, some of whose views may correspond to those of Shaw.

The government is also likely to reintroduce new industrial laws similar to the Howard government's "Work Choices" legislation. The Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss has already stated that Toyota employees should "choose" to give



up their entitlements in order to ensure the profitability of the company.

That would certainly appeal to newly-elected MP Clive Palmer and the Senators who have formed an alliance with him.

Whose interests are served?

The government's intends to eliminate Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act partly because the extreme right-wing shock jock radio broadcasts command vast audiences and therefore draw lucrative advertising contracts as part of the major corporations' marketing campaigns. It's all about profits, not freedom.

Some people advocate the right to free speech over all other considerations because they see it as an invaluable element of human civilisation. However, all rights are accompanied by responsibility, and this is already implicit in civil laws against slander and defamation.

These laws generally relate to individuals. However, the right-wing broadcasters who seek the total repeal of Section 18C of the Act, and their supporters in parliament, appear quite willing to accept the slander and defamation of entire groups within the Australian community that would inevitably result from such a move.

The government has given a clear indication of its intentions by its recent appointment of Tim Wilson

to the Human Rights Commission. Attorney-General Brandis has argued that Wilson's opposition to the Queensland government's anti-bikie legislation demonstrates he is a "free spirit". But in fact he's exactly the sort of person the government wants in the Commission.

As former head of policy for the ultra-conservative Institute of Public Affairs, Wilson called for the Commission's abolition. After his appointment he declared with supreme arrogance: "The Commission has not sufficiently focused on human rights, particularly the right to free speech. By accepting this role I have taken on the challenge to help the Commission refocus its work."

And what would this "refocus" involve?

According to barrister and journalist Richard Ackland: "(Wilson) decries restrictions on cigarette advertising and the plain packaging legislation (a free speech issue for the tobacco industry), attempted regulations on poker machines, taxes on alcohol, moves to control the intake of fatty and sugary foods, and (the) banning (of) tanning beds. All of this is, in Wilson's view, paternalistic nonsense, along with global warming and the tax on carbon."

For its part, the government has indicated how much it wants to "help" the Commission by deciding that Wilson's \$320,000 Commissioner's salary will have to come out of the organisation's program budget.

To date the salaries of commissioners have been separately funded.

The loss of funds to pay for Wilson's presence will probably mean that two programs, one of which concerns education for the elderly and the other opposition to bullying, will have to be cut.

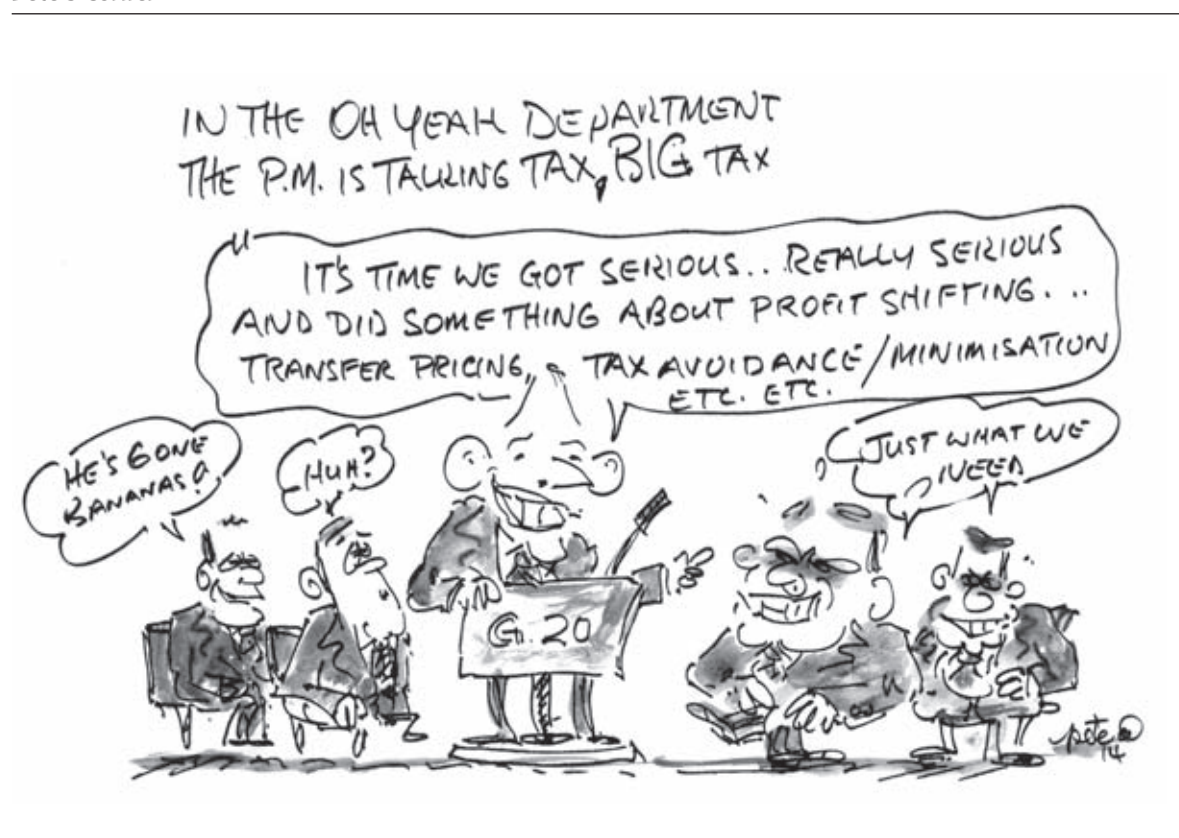
Moreover, the precedent set by this funding arrangement may mean that in future all the Commissioners' salaries will have to come from the program budget. There would be little money left for the Commission to actually do its work.

Labor and the Greens have indicated that they will oppose any amendment to Section 18C. The government will be in a better position to pass the amending legislation in July, when the Coalition candidates who were elected last year are entitled to take their places in the Senate.

That also depends on the position taken by the representatives of the Senate "wildcards", i.e. the Palmer United Party, the Australian Motoring Enthusiasts Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, and the Australian Sports Party.

However, when the chips are down, their voting patterns are likely to be conservative. Defeating the government's agenda will still depend on the strength of community objections, as expressed in large-scale demonstrations that are part of well-organised and passionately-supported campaigns. Over to you and me. ✪

Pete's Corner



WATER
NOT GOLD

AUSTRALIA

Stop mining abuses in El Salvador, the Philippines and beyond

RALLY at OceanaGold Offices
Friday 31 January at 12 noon
250 Collins Street, Melbourne

Australian Company, OceanaGold is suing the El Salvador Government through PacificRim for \$315 million. The same Australian company is causing environmental damage and Human Rights abuses in the Philippines

Welfare "reform"

Divide and conquer tactics

Bob Briton

The unemployed and people with disabilities will be the main target of the latest batch of "reforms" to be rolled out, beginning with the Federal Budget in May. The Abbott government has announced an audit to be headed by the former CEO of Mission Australia, Patrick McLure. Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews has been trying to reassure the bulk of the one in five Australians who now receive some form of income support from the government.

"This is essentially a limited review ... It's about the normal things, DSP [Disability Support Pension], Newstart, that sort of thing basically," he told *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The capitalist system has failed to meet the basic needs of millions of Australians – starting with a job – but the Libs are determined to keep blaming and punishing the victims.

The federal government hopes aged pensioners and Family Tax Benefit recipients will breathe a sigh of relief and hardly spare a thought for the 650,000 people on unemployment benefits and the 827,000 DSP recipients. It would be a mistake to adopt a "she'll be right" attitude, however. The government will eventually be taking an axe to those other sectors of social security, too.

The "divide and conquer" approach is also evident in a proposition to subject only new applicants to a raft of new and very draconian regulations. Newstart recipients will no longer be able to decline a job offer if travel to the workplace takes longer than 90 minutes. Advocacy and support groups have pointed out the consequences of this for single parents of children of eight years and

older who were dumped onto the dole queues last year.

Work for the dole will be expanded. The unemployed may have to work for nothing in aged care facilities as well as cleaning streets and parks. Opposition spokeswoman Jenny Macklin has blasted the mooted changes. "Kevin Andrews should be telling people how he'll improve services for families and vulnerable people, not floating yet another thought bubble on how to make savage cuts," she said.

But these aren't thought bubbles. They're part of a long-term plan for governments to step out of their responsibilities to the disadvantaged and essentially hand them over to charities. Labor governments have been singing from the same neo-liberal hymn book for a long time, too. And these changes don't save public money. Handing over the social security system to profit-making and nominally not-for-profit outfits is expensive. "Nothing is set in concrete yet, but I'm not doing this to chase savings," Mr Andrews said.

Some measures do fall into the category of traditional budgetary pruning. Merging the Department of Human Services and Social Services and the sacking of more public servants is on the cards. The Abbott government is reigning in its verbal support to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, citing a cost blowout during trials of the scheme.

The big reform being sought from the audit is a single, flat, miserable welfare payment that may, or may not, be supplemented by a number of "top-up" payments according to the circumstances of the applicant. "Monolithic", "homogeneous" welfare payments are one of government's new enemies. Applicants will have to demonstrate their need for the various "top-ups", who knows,

maybe while standing in a queue in a fully privatised Australia Post shop. These reforms are not about simplicity, either.

Patrick McLure will be a valuable ally in this current crusade. He was a seminarian training to be a Franciscan priest before his career in social welfare. "My family had known the Franciscans for many years and I was attracted to St Francis because of his simplicity, preaching of the Gospel and his working with the most disadvantaged," he told *The Catholic Weekly*. He is the author of a memoir entitled *Seize the Day: From Priest to CEO* that was launched by former Liberal PM, John Howard. In 2006-08, McLure was CEO of Macquarie Capital Funds' Capital Retirement Villages Group from 2006-8 which raised \$850 million of institutional funds for investment in retirement villages in Australia and New Zealand.

Under McLure's leadership, Mission Australia became a major provider of employment and training services in the federal government's privatised Jobs Network. In 2005, it acquired a one third stake in Working Links, a company that provides employment and training services to the UK equivalent of the Jobs Network. Mr McLure was deputy chair of the 2006-07 Welfare to Work Consultative Forum that led to the recent changes to single parent payments.

The Abbott government's plans are pretty plain despite its sham musing and hiding behind "audits" and "reviews". It is seeking to blame the victims of a failed, corrupt system and to divide the community while it is being robbed of its social security system. This must be met with a united response from workers and the other exploited people of Australia. ✪



The capitalist system has failed to meet the basic needs of millions of Australians – starting with a job – but the Libs are determined to keep blaming and punishing the victims.

Workers not to blame

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) wants to make it clear that workers are not to blame for the repeated blowouts in the cost of Chevron's Gorgon LNG project.

The Gorgon gas project is a natural gas project in Western Australia, involving the development of the Greater Gorgon gas fields, subsea gas-gathering infrastructure, and a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant on Barrow Island. The project also includes a domestic gas component. It is currently under construction and once completed, will become Australia's fourth LNG export development.

The company estimated in 2009 the project would cost \$US37 billion; that was revised to \$US52 billion a year ago. The company has now revealed the cost has risen again, to \$US54 billion.

When the project was first proposed in 2003, the estimated cost was \$13 billion. In explaining the repeated cost blowouts, the company has often sought to focus the blame on high labour costs.

But MUA state secretary Christy Cain said research undertaken by

BIS Shrapnel proved workers were not to blame.

"The research found that labour costs made up less than one percent of the total cost of the Gorgon project," he said.

"It also found that the biggest opportunities for cost savings could be found in the improvement of management practices.

"For example, a KJV report showed that it takes 132 days to load and unload a barge on the non-unionised Barrow Island wharf, but it takes 95 days to load and unload the same barge at the fully-unionised wharf at the Australian Marine Complex.

"Instead of blaming workers for the cost blowouts on Gorgon, Chevron management should be taking a good look at themselves and their management practices.

"And instead of always questioning the wages of the hard working men and women, who spend months away from home building the project, public debate should focus on the salaries and perks of Chevron's St George's Terrace management." ✪

Congress calls meetings in wake of cuts

The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples has called a series of public meetings sparked by government cuts to Indigenous organisations and a threat to its own funding. The meetings come after federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion met late last year with National Congress co-chairs Kirstie Parker and Les Malezer to inform them it was unlikely their organisation would receive any funding in the next Budget.

"I advised that the decision about future funding would be made as part of the Budget process, after the Commission of Audit reports," Senator Scullion said. "However, I did stress that it was highly unlikely that funding would be approved as the government moves funding to frontline services to focus on delivering real outcomes for First Australians."

Ms Parker and Mr Malezer promised that Congress would "continue as a strong, fearless national representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" and said they had met with

their fellow directors to assess the government's announcement that "it will, in all likelihood, renege on a \$15 million funding commitment in the 2013 Budget."

"Our founders protected Congress from the whims of government by ensuring we were established as an independent company owned and operated by our peoples – not as a construct of the government," they said in a statement.

"Participate"

"Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions. We will continue to fight for the issues that are important to us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples."

Senator Scullion said Congress had about \$8.3 million in its coffers. "I encouraged Congress to

use these resources to prepare and plan for the future," he said. "There remains a role for Congress, but it is important that it build membership from its current level of approximately 7,500 and look to other sources of financial support in the future."

Mr Malezer and Ms Parker said they would hold urgent meetings with members.

"The new government has shown that they do not support real decision-making for our families and communities through a national representative body chosen by our peoples, for our peoples," they said. "The board remains focussed on the purposes of Congress, including securing economic, political, social, cultural and environmental futures for our peoples.

"Critical to this will be building a sustainable financial base for the long term. Congress will also continue to grow its extensive membership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples."

Koori Mail ✪

Film review by Ed Rampell

Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit

Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of Ruskies? The Shadow Recruit knows!

Reactionary espionage novelist Tom Clancy may have died last year, but his heroic CIA agent, Jack Ryan, lives on, as does the right-wing pro-CIA Military-Industrial-Intelligence-Entertainment Complex's agitprop. To be sure, *Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit*, Paramount's reboot of the Clancy-derived, highly lucrative Ryan film franchise, is a slickly made, entertaining piece of movie-making full of the usual suspects found in spy movies: motorcycle and car chases galore, assassins, gunfire, dastardly villains hell bent on world domination, a little romance and all those other endless spy movie clichés. *Shadow Recruit* is also a sophisticated cinematic piece of propaganda masquerading under the guise of mass entertainment.

In this latest instalment of the Ryan franchise (jump cut: definition of a Hollywood franchise – beating a dead horse into the ground until viewers wise up and quit buying tickets to see these sequels and remakes) Jumping Jack Smash is tepidly played by 33-year-old Chris Pine, who previously played Captain Kirk in another profitable motion picture franchise, *Star Trek*. In the 2014 chapter of the spy series Jack is an Afghan War veteran – never mind that Alec Baldwin played Ryan in 1990s *The Hunt for Red October* and Harrison Ford started portraying Ryan in 1992s *Patriot Games*, when Pine was a mere wisp of a lad presumably pining after superstardom in empty-headed action flicks.

The actor may be new but the premise is tired and old, reviving Cold War tensions between Washington and Moscow, as America's enemy is the same in *Shadow Recruit* as it was almost a quarter century ago in *The Hunt for Red October*.

In a bit of clever central casting, real-life Soviet defector/ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov plays a Kremlin killer in a cameo. Kenneth Branagh (who also directed) portrays dastardly oligarch Viktor Cherevin, a stereotypical Ruskie out to stage terrorist attacks on the good ol' USA and to topple our economy. It doesn't matter that the Ruskies have traded communism in for corporatist ideology – they're STILL the bad guys in this hackneyed plot extolling the virtues of the CIA, as latter day *Cold Warriors* battle it out from Moscow to Manhattan.

Speaking of which, the extremely gifted Keira Knightley squanders her talents playing Cathy Muller, Jack's nurse-cum-live-in-lover-cum-dam-

sel-in-distress. She was far superior in the 2011 Freud-versus-Jung film *A Dangerous Method*, but I suppose there's a method to her career madness. The cast includes Kevin Costner as the CIA covert ops agent Thomas Harper. (By the way, the characters' globetrotting from Manhattan to Moscow and beyond via commercial airliners in what seems to be mere hours – putting the Concorde to shame – is inherently incredible, as is the fact that these jet-setters never get jet lag.)

In between munching popcorn, audiences should be aware of *Shadow Recruit*'s real shadowy message: The CIA are heroic good guys who are also technical whiz kids – their supposed high-tech prowess is intended to impress and intimidate opponents – saving the world from the baddies. *Shadow Recruit* is the latest recruit in what I called the intelligence community's "Operation Image Control" in my May 2013 cover story for *CounterPunch Magazine* called "Hollywood's Year of Living Clandestinely." Jack Ryan has enlisted to fight to make the world safe for US imperialism, along with: the [American] ABC mini-series *The Assets*, about real-life CIA double agent/traitor Aldrich Ames; the just launched Intelligence TV series about a bionic agent; plus *Marvel's Agents of SHIELD* and Blacklist series that premiered on network TV in the fall. On the big screen the FBI prominently features in *American Hustle*, about the 1970s Abscam scandal.

Make no mistake about it: With the possible exception of *American Hustle*, which is critical of the FBI, these big and small screen productions appear to be intended to project positive images of the CIA, NSA, etc, as part of the Military-Industrial-Intelligence-Entertainment Complex's never ending campaign to win hearts, minds and viewers. This propaganda barrage aims to hoodwink taxpayers and, in particular, is a counter-offensive aimed against the revelations of the super-surveillance state by whistle-blowers.

In particular, *The Assets* may be intended as an attack on Edward Snowden, who is rather stupidly (or perhaps, I should say, quite cleverly) likened to Ames by feckless pundits/dopes/dupes, although Ames traded CIA secrets for rubles, while Snowden does not appear to have cashed in on his revelations about the Orwellian NSA hyper-surveillance state that he is, rather patriotically and at great risk to himself, warning us all about.

Snowden, of course, is ensconced



Chris Pine as Jumping Jack Smash.

in icy exile in Mother Russia – and isn't it hilarious how the imperialists and their media lackeys use this against Snowden, while conveniently forgetting that Washington revoked his passport and even forced Bolivian President Evo Morales' jet down in an effort to prevent Snowden from possibly leaving Russia.

The Central Intelligence Agency definitely does have an entertainment liaison officer and actively seeks to influence movie and TV productions for propagandistic purposes. I asked Paramount if the CIA was involved in any way with *Shadow Recruit* but, as to be expected when dealing with the shadowy world of cloak and dagger, got no response. While they want to know everything about you, they don't want you to know anything about them and how they operate behind the scenes.

But consider what former CIA officer Bob Baer (George Clooney played Baer in 2005's *Syriana*, which was based on Baer's exploits) said in my *CounterPunch* exposé about an earlier Jack Ryan iteration: "I'm pretty sure Ben Affleck was able to get meetings with those in the CIA ... He was in [2002's] *The Sum of All Fears*, a heavily assisted text by the CIA. They were involved in everything from set design to script review to meeting with the actors, director, writers ... to shape their image of that Agency. [Tom Clancy's] Jack Ryan series has always been more positive in terms of its depiction of the CIA than other film franchises, but ... *Sum of All Fears* of all Jack Ryan films is the most positive in its depiction." Affleck, of course, went on to star in and direct 2012's pro-CIA *Argo*, which – for the first time in Academy Award history – had its Best Picture Oscar winner announced by a sitting First Lady, Michelle Obama, live at the White House, surrounded by military personnel.

The fact that Kenneth Branagh, once regarded as the heir to Laurence Olivier's throne as the interpreter of the Bard's classics, has now stooped so low to make craven pro-CIA propaganda is truly, well, a Shakespearean tragedy.

People's World ✪



Weekend hunters will be declaring open season next month. They are allowed back into about 200 state forests in NSW after minor changes to safety measures. It is only the beginning – 358 state forests had been re-declared for hunting. Amateur hunters are still regarded as a potential deadly threat to other users of national parks. Greens MP David Shoebridge expressed a popular view when he said that "the government's own consultant acknowledges there's a genuine risk of people being shot, with unsupervised hunting in state forests but, regardless, the minister has reopened the parks".

The Abbott government is busy deregulating everything it possibly can. The Business Council of Australia (BCA) is happy to help with their wish list. The BCA wants shipping laws changed so that regulations introduced by Labor are scrapped. Labor had introduced a licensing system which included a requirement that crews on foreign ships be paid local wages when they are carrying cargo between Australian ports. "Economic deregulation of the coastal shipping sector should be implemented to increase competitiveness and reduce costs, with positive flow-on impacts for productivity, investment and jobs in Tasmania and other regional economies across Australia," the BCA said. While companies and the BCA object to the Fair Work Act when it comes to wages and conditions of workers, they demand no changes to the subsidies received under the Tasmania Freight Equalisation Scheme.

There are more than 300 Australian Disability Enterprises (sheltered workshops as they used to be called). They employ about 20,000 disabled people in such work as packaging, cleaning and manufacturing. It was found in 2012 that workers in sheltered workshops had been underpaid for several years – in breach of the Disability Discrimination Act. A legal firm lodged a class action in December to recover the underpayments. The Abbott government has announced that it will make a one-off payment in July to the underpaid employees. The amount was not specified but those employees who agreed to the payment would waive rights to sue for a potentially large larger amount. Legal firm Maurice Blackburn filed the Federal Court action to stop 10,000 employees signing away their legal rights to sue the government for back pay. Some of the employees involved in the case are paid less than \$1 an hour. Under laws for the workshops, many disabled workers are legally paid about \$1 or \$2 an hour. Australia's minimum wage is supposed to be \$16.37 an hour. The application to the Federal Court also demanded that all communication between the government and disabled workers be supervised by the court.

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Decades-long reign of terror on

Larry Derfner

Kamal Shaban, a farmer in the West Bank village of Sinjil, is watching workmen repair a local family's house that had recently been firebombed by settlers in the middle of the night, forcing the parents and five children asleep inside to flee to the rooftop. As for himself, Shaban tells me that during the autumn olive harvests, settlers have stoned the labourers in his fields, turned over a tractor, stolen sacks of olives and once broke a worker's arm with a big rock – all under the eye of Israeli soldiers required by the Supreme Court to protect the farmers.

He asks: "Why do the United States, the European Union and the United Nations call Hamas terrorists and Hezbollah terrorists, but they don't call these people terrorists?"

The phenomenon of settler violence against Palestinians, which is as old and as vibrant as the settlements themselves, tells you everything you need to know about how serious Israel is about ending its rule over a foreign people. It also tells you everything you need to know about how serious the world is about forcing Israel to end it.

Settler violence, lately characterised mainly by masked young men roaming the West Bank and attacking Palestinian farmers with stones, clubs or rifles and burning their olive groves, their fields, and occasionally their schools, mosques and homes, is a unique feature of the occupation. Unlike every other aspect of it – the conquest of another people's homeland by military force and land theft, the brutality, the house demolitions and expulsions, the whole system of officially sanctioned subjugation – settler violence is something nobody outside the radical fringe in Israel will defend. This, alone, they'll denounce.

And yet it goes on. The world doesn't penalise or even threaten to penalise Israel for it.

If a decades-long reign of terror on unarmed Palestinians by Jewish gangs backed by an army of occupation is tolerable, not only to Israel but to the United Nations, European Union, United States and the rest of the world, then everything Israel does to the Palestinians is tolerable. Then the occupation as a whole is tolerable.

An attack each day

Settlers attack Palestinians in the West Bank on an average of once a day, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Last year there were 399 assaults – 93 in which Palestinians were injured, another 306 in which their property was damaged or destroyed. The frequency of these attacks has stayed fairly stable over the last four years, but it is quadruple the rate in 2006, when OCHA began tracking these incidents.

As we drove in Zakaria Sadah's van up Route 60 through the northern part of the West Bank, he pointed out some of the landmarks. "In this house we're passing," he narrated, "a group of settlers went in and attacked a mother and her children, stripped their clothes off, sent them to the hospital. That house over there, about 15 settlers set it on fire; some soldiers were in on it, too. In that village over there

they burned the sports hall, uprooted olive trees three or four times ..."

Sadah, the West Bank field worker for Rabbis for Human Rights, takes us through the heartland of the "price tag" movement – near the Nablus-area settlement Yitzhar and the settler outposts Esh Kodesh, Adei Ad, Shvut Rachel, Kida and Ahiya, and, surrounded by them, two of the most frequently targeted Palestinian villages, Jalud and Sinjil.

"In the seat you're sitting in," he tells me, "the ambassador from Belgium sat, diplomats from the EU sat, the UN, the US. Next week I'm taking someone from the American consulate so he can see what the settlers are doing. I take foreign VIPs on tours about once a month, and they're all shocked at what they see."

After they get over being shocked, do they do anything with what they've learned?

"No," said Sadah. "Some of them say they're going to talk to somebody, they're going to change things. Nothing happens."

Israeli settlers who came from the direction of Yitzhar set fire to Palestinian fields in the village of Asira al-Qibliya. Several of the settlers opened fire on the Palestinians who came to defend their property, hitting Nimer Najem, 24, in his face.

Lack of political will

Connie Martinez-Varela Pedersen, director of international advocacy for Yesh Din, one of the most vital Israeli human rights organisations working in the West Bank, says she's talked to diplomats from around 20 countries about the issue of settler violence, and gives regular briefings about it to European, American and Canadian officials. They duly report on the attacks and Israel's response to them back to their foreign ministries or other relevant departments in their home countries.

"They get it," Pedersen says. "They get that there's a lack of political will to stop the violence. The sense you get from them is – here we are talking about the same issue again. In a way there's nothing to even talk about. It's a no-brainer – it's so obvious to everyone that there's something wrong."

That's the feeling I had when I called a European diplomat stationed in Israel to talk to him about the issue: the very clear sense that we both knew what the other thinks about it because there's nothing else one could possibly think, so what is there to discuss? But just to hear it from the mouth of someone representing the big wide world in this country, I called him, and he spoke on condition that he wouldn't be identified.

"European diplomats in Israel are definitely aware of the problem, we've written a joint report about it in the names of all the member states of the EU, it's been mentioned in the conclusions of the European Council. There have also been private demarches [diplomatic statements, often protests] about it from individual EU countries to Israeli authorities. We're mostly concerned with the issue of impunity for the settler attackers."

Do you think these reports and demarches affect Israel's handling of the problem?

"No, I don't think so."

I asked him why he thought that was. He laughed dryly; what could he say?

What effect, I asked, does Israel's indifference to these reports and demarches have on the European diplomatic corps in this country?



May 13, 2013, a Palestinian boy holds up a symbolic key during a march to mark the 65th anniversary of the May 15 to commemorate the expulsion or fleeing of hundreds of thousands of their brethren from their homes (Photo: Ali Hashisho)

"Well, I think it leads to a measure of frustration."

"They're burning down the house!"

The high-water mark of international recognition of the problem of settler violence, in the view of people at Yesh Din, was President Obama's remark about it in his speech at the Jerusalem Convention Centre last March. "It is not just when settler violence against Palestinians goes unpunished," the president said.

We drove into the village of Sinjil, where one of the worst settler attacks on Palestinians in recent years took place last November 14. At about two in the morning, a car carrying four young men passed an isolated house at the end of a road where Khaled Dar Khalil, his wife Rowaida and their five children, ages 16 months to eight years, were sleeping. Two men got out of the car, poured gasoline under the porch, broke the glass enclosure in front, threw Molotov cocktails through the windows, and drove away.

"My husband saw it from our bedroom window upstairs. He was yelling, 'My God, they're burning down the house!'" said Rowaida. The front door was blocked by fire, the house was filling up with smoke, so the family

ran up the stairs and out onto the roof, where they waited for the Palestinian fire department to arrive.

That was not the first time the property had been firebombed; Molotov cocktails were thrown at the yard about six months before and about two years before that, Rowaida said. "The house is pretty exposed," she said by way of explanation. Khaled said Israeli police showed up to investigate, and he's gotten telephone calls since from a detective who, he said, "seems interested."

The day after this latest arson at the home, a driver pulled up in front and called out to Rowaida, "I'm coming back to burn what's left of you," and took off, she recalls.

Workmen were at the house the day I was there; it needs heavy repairs for the collapsed ceilings and other damage. The parents and children are okay, except for three-year-old Nisreen. "She's still scared," said Khaled. "She cries at night."

Rowaida spoke to me in English with an Americanised accent. The 38-year-old woman said she lived in Springfield, Massachusetts for many years before and after her marriage, and, like her husband and children, is a US citizen.

"People from the American consulate came here after the fire," she said. "They've called

The day after this latest arson at the home, a driver pulled up in front and called out to "I'm coming back to burn what's left of you" and took off, she recalls.

Unarmed Palestinians



Nakba. Palestinians will mark "Nakba" (Catastrophe) on the war that led to the founding of Israel in 1948.

me a couple of times since to see how we're doing."

All American citizens, the family of seven, including five children, were the victims of a murder attempt because they are Palestinian, their house was firebombed in the middle of the night by Israel's lords of the land. It was the third time the family had been targeted with Molotov cocktails by these people in two years – and not a word of protest was heard from the United States.

I wanted to ask the US embassy in Tel Aviv about it, but my request for an interview was denied. It seems that one 11-word sentence in Obama's speech didn't have such a huge impact on Israeli or American policy toward the problem of "settler violence against Palestinians going unpunished."

Turning a blind eye

It's understood that Israel could stop the violence if it wanted to, but for obvious domestic political reasons it doesn't want to: Israel has no intention of taking harsh, extended measures against any part of the settler movement. Thus, the general view is that Israel chooses to turn a blind eye to these Jewish terrorists.

"Israel is a country that zapped Sheikh Yassin from the skies; that seemed to know about every terror bombing a day before it

happened. Israel can get shit done. They really can stop this," said the Israel-Palestine bureau chief of a major foreign news organisation.

"The clearest proof that there is no serious intent to stop the violence is the olive harvest. There's always a spike in violence during the harvest, which comes in October, and the army accompanies the farmers to the olive groves, so it knows exactly where the violence is taking place. It's a perfect opportunity to catch the settler attackers, but they don't," said Reut Mor, spokesperson for Yesh Din.

Masked settlers, who came from the direction of Yitzhar, beat Palestinian olive farmers near the West Bank village of Burin last October 20. A recent Yesh Din study found that 97.4 percent of Israel Police investigations into the destruction of Palestinian-owned olive and fruit trees are closed due to what the NGO's lawyers termed "circumstances testifying to investigative failure."

In the old hillside village of Jalud, which faces the hilltop outposts Esh Kodesh, Ahiya and Shvut Rachel a few hundred metres away, farmer Ibrahim Haj Mohammed says he's lost hundreds of trees to settler attacks over the years. "I've complained to the police more than 10 times – once I got a telephone call back from them," he says.

On October 9 a couple of dozen settlers converged on Jalud. One group threw rocks at pupils in the village elementary school while a second group threw rocks at villagers' cars and a third group set fire to olive groves, including Mohammed's.

"I made a complaint that day to the police," he says, "and two or three days later I went to the Sha'ar Binyamin station to see what was happening. I spoke to a policeman and he said, 'Your case is being handled by a detective who is on holiday today, and if he needs you, we will talk to you.' Nobody's contacted me since."

Army's role

Yet the problem goes beyond Israeli authorities turning a blind eye; when soldiers get to the scene of a settler attack on Palestinians, as often as not they stand by obediently – as seen in a B'Tselem video of a January 6 settler attack on the village of Urif – and take action only after the Palestinians start throwing rocks back, which is when the troops turn their tear gas and rubber-coated (but potentially lethal) bullets on the Palestinians.

"The village of Burin, which is between Yitzhar and a row of Har Bracha outposts, sometimes gets attacked by settlers three times a week. They always have the army with them, and when the young Palestinians in the village start throwing stones back, the army attacks the village. It works every time. The settlers know that if they start, the army will finish up, and much more brutally than they can manage. And they know nothing will happen to them – even if they're arrested, the case will be closed, they'll never get indicted," said Reut Mor.

"There's no way three settlers would attack an entire village with stones if they didn't know they had armed soldiers behind them," adds Mor.

"A couple of years ago a teenager was killed in Qusra – like it always happens, the settlers from Esh Kodesh came down to destroy their crops, then the villagers threw stones at them, then Israeli soldiers came, and the Palestinians see them as one with the settlers, so they started throwing stones at the soldiers, too, and the soldiers opened fire," said B'Tselem spokesperson Sarit Michaeli.

(Many readers are by now no doubt wondering: what about Palestinian violence against settlers, not to mention against other Israelis? My answer is that there is no comparing the violence of people living under colonial rule with that of the colonists.)

"Price tag"

The popular term for settler violence in recent years is "price tag" – "tag mechir" in Hebrew – which settlers often spray paint on a Palestinian mosque, house or car they've torched. The idea is that the attack is the "price tag" the settlers are putting on the most recent action by the army or government that they consider harmful to their cause, or on the most recent Palestinian attack against Israelis. (On

occasion, such graffiti has accompanied settler arson against left-wing Israeli activists, churches and army property.)

The term emerged after the 2005 disengagement from Gaza and evacuation of the West Bank outpost Amona in early 2006, signalling yet another escalation in settler militancy. It has been a hugely successful propaganda tool for the settlers for two reasons: One, it conveys the message that these attacks are reprisals, even self-defence. Two, as Yesh Din's Mor says, "It shifts all the attention to the attacks accompanied by 'price tag' graffiti, and gives the impression that this is all the settler violence there is, when in fact it's a very small portion. 'Price tag' was a brilliant exercise in branding by the settlers."

If there is a single image that illustrates how settler persecution of Palestinians is an accepted fact of life, it is the chain-link and cloth netting hung over stretches of the souk in Hebron to catch at least some of the rocks, bricks, bottles, soiled diapers, eggs, urine, bleach and other ammunition tossed over from the adjacent Avraham Avinu and Beit Hadassah buildings, where most of Hebron's settlers live. Above the souk are two Israeli army lookout posts with a clear view of what goes on below.

"We yell up to the soldiers to stop the settlers from attacking us, but they don't pay any attention," Jamal Maraga, who runs a fabric stall in the souk, told me early this month, pointing out the scarves on display that had been stained by eggs. A boy showed me a brick that had fallen out of the sky recently. A man who'd been hit in the chest with a rock a couple of days before was giving the details to a pair of Norwegian observers from TIPH, the Temporary International Presence in Hebron. In the previous week, the souk vendors had closed up their shops to protest the army's failure to protect them from settler assaults.

"Actually using the information"

The people from TIPH say the level of settler attacks against Palestinians in Hebron has gone down in recent years. An official with a foreign agency operating in Hebron put it this way: "The Palestinians in the city, what can I say, have given up the fight. They have to survive, so they are very patient with the settlers. They know their children are exposed to the settlers' children, and there's a lot of tension. They're neighbours after all."

TIPH, whose observers have been patrolling the Jewish-Arab seam line in Hebron since 1997, stays absolutely neutral. It records every disturbance of the peace, whether by settler, soldier or Palestinian, and sends confidential reports to its six member nations (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy and Turkey) as well as to Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

I asked the head of the TIPH mission, Christine Fossen, a lawyer and local police chief in Norway, what those countries do with the documentation of settler attacks on the city's Palestinians.

"They follow our reports closely, they're working mostly in diplomatic channels," she said. "We don't know what different diplomatic missions do, but we know they are very interested in what we are writing and we expect that they are actually using that information."

Ceases to be of interest

One of the reasons settler violence doesn't create much of a ripple internationally is that outside of Israel, it rarely makes the news. "Dog bites man is not news, and settlers behaving badly is dog bites man," said the local bureau chief, who's been covering this region for many years. "And it's not new, it's been going on for decades, so it ceases to be of interest."

Presumably that's why the January 7 incident in the West Bank village of Qusra, where settlers once again attacked Palestinian farmers but this time got caught and beat up by the villagers, did make the international news – marauding settlers getting their clocks cleaned by their Palestinian targets is, as Yossi Gurvitz wrote, a case of man bites dog.

Some village leaders protected the 15 or

so settlers from possibly getting lynched by an angry crowd of locals before turning them over to the army. Some of the settlers escaped the soldiers' grasp, while the others were brought before a judge and ordered under house arrest for five days. Zakaria Sadah of Rabbis for Human Rights, who helped the village leaders protect the settlers from the crowd, said the invaders destroyed about 40 olive trees before being caught.

In Qusra they were celebrating that night. The village imam, Ziad Oudeh – who Sadah said was also one of the locals protecting the settlers from further harm – told Haaretz it was "like a wedding. People sang 'God is great' all night. For four years we've been suffering from these settlers, and people feel we've paid them back." Sadah said village leaders told him that in recent years, Qusra has been attacked by settlers 66 times.

In Israel, the pathetic spectacle of these frightened, bleeding young fanatics, and the fact that Palestinians who are ordinarily their victims saved their lives and handed them over to the army, provided another occasion for officials to decry the "price tag" phenomenon and pledge to uproot it.

Empty pledges to act

Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon said: "The unacceptable trend known as 'price tag' is in my opinion terror in every sense of the word, and we are acting and will act against the perpetrators, firmly and with zero tolerance, in order to eradicate it."

His statement echoed the one last June from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the torching of cars and spraying of anti-Arab graffiti in Abu Ghosh, an Israeli Arab village popular for its tourist restaurants. "What happened today in Abu Ghosh," said Netanyahu, "goes against Judaism's mitzvot [commandments] and against the values of our people and our state. Just this week we made decisions that allow us to act more forcefully against the people who commit these crimes and we will do so with full force."

Netanyahu's predecessor, Ehud Olmert, twice used the word "pogrom" in late 2008 to describe separate shooting attacks on Palestinians by settlers from Yitzhar and Hebron. "In the State of Israel, there will be no pogroms against non-Jews," he told his cabinet. "This is an intolerable phenomenon and it will be dealt with in the strongest way by Israel's law enforcement authorities."

Unacceptable. Terror in every sense of the word. Zero tolerance. Against our values. Pogroms. Intolerable.

The Esh Kodesh settlers' ill-fated attack in Qusra on January 7 was the first incident of settler violence cited by OCHA in its weekly report from the occupied territories for January 7-13. It was not, however, the last.

"At least five other settler attacks recorded during the remainder of the week were reportedly carried out by settlers in retaliation for the Qusra incident," OCHA wrote. "A total of six Palestinian vehicles were burned or damaged near Al Jalazun Refugee Camp (Ramallah), in Al Funduq (Qalqilya) and in Kifl Haris (Salfit). Settler raids also took place in Sinjil and Madama (Nablus), during which 'price tag' slogans, such as 'death to the Arabs', were sprayed on houses and shops."

On January 15, the day after the most recent of OCHA's weekly reports was issued, a mosque in the northern West Bank village of Deir Istiya was torched; luckily the fire didn't spread beyond the front door. Haaretz reported that the graffiti "Arabs out", "Regards from Qusra", and "Revenge for spilled blood in Qusra," was sprayed on the mosque's walls.

All in a day's work. This is nothing new in the annals of the occupation, nor in the annals of colonialism; the bold young men of history's settler movements have never been known for their decency toward the "natives." The only unique thing about Israeli settler violence is that it grows out of the Israeli occupation, which is the only outpost, excuse the pun, of colonialism still standing in the so-called democratic world. And as long as that occupation lasts, so will settler violence. Literally, it comes with the territory.

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Germany: "GroKo" politics

Victor Grossman

BERLIN: Some have suggested the German "Word of the Year" should be "whistleblower" – in the escalating English language here breezily called "Neu-Deutsch" ("New German"). Chosen instead, however, is the word "GroKo", shorthand for "Grosse Koalition," a term used constantly during three months of wrangling between Germany's two biggest parties, once seen as "irreconcilable foes," but now together in a new government. (NB: in German, gross or grosse does not mean gross, it means big or grand!)

The wrangling between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) with its sister party in Bavaria, the even more rightwing Christian Social Union (CSU), had two main goals.

In its election campaign, the SPD had tried to sound leftist so as to keep or win back the votes of union members and at least some progressive voters. But now, to become part of a GroKo government, it had to tone down such sounds and soothe the fears of big biz bosses and their adherents in the CDU and in Bavaria, while trying not to let it look like collapse or capitulation.

Its second goal turned out to be easier: Who would get which Cabinet posts and rule the country for the next four years – unless or until GroKo splits apart sometime before 2017.

The Cabinet spoils were decided in an amicable way. Although the two Merkel parties had received 41.5 percent of the vote, the SPD only 25.7 percent, they agreed on six Social Democratic ministers, Chancellor Merkel and five others from the CDU and three from its allied CSU-Bavarians. (Nine are men, six are women.) The year began with the big question: how would these erstwhile foes get along (as they managed to do in two such GroKos in past decades)?

The SPD, in its election campaign, stressed two demands. One was to raise taxes on filthily wealthy individuals and companies and huge inheritance sums (which it and the Greens had themselves lowered some years ago when they led the government – but now said should be reversed.)

But alas, during the wrangling the SPD admitted, oh so reluctantly, that it must now make sacrifices for the sake of the GroKo – and agreed to forego any and all such tax increases on the wealthy.

It remained steadfast on its other demand however, sticking valiantly to a measure long overdue in



German Chancellor Angela Merkel (right) and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen.

Germany, a minimum wage – of 8.50 euro an hour (US\$ 11.65). In the final coalition agreement the Merkel side conceded the point, and those trying to subsist on 5, 6 or 7 euros – or even less – often only with second jobs or relief aid from the government – gained new hope.

No laws have been passed as yet; it seems that the minimum will only gradually go into effect until the final date of January 1, 2017. But even before a law is passed some loud voices, especially in Bavaria, are demanding exceptions – for new employees, for working pensioners, students, seasonal workers, even for the long-time jobless. As yet, the SPD leaders are rejecting such exceptions as wedges aimed at weakening the whole measure. We must wait and see, pressuring them to stick to their guns. Of course, some cynics point out that 8.50 euro is not enough to live on decently even now and, since retirement pensions are based on earnings, it means a poverty-stricken retirement.

There was one interesting sideline. Manuela Schwesig, 39 (SPD), a relatively young lawmaker with the impressive title of Minister of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth – but new to national level politics – proposed that young parents should work only 32 hours a

week and have more time with their children. The difference in pay could be compensated by taxes. It took only a few hours for her fellow East German (they are the only two in the Cabinet) to quash such an idea, calling it only "her personal vision" for the future. Parents were already getting compensation for lost time with babies; there was no money for any such dreams!

Few changes were visible in public policies. The head of the SPD, stout, friendly Sigmar Gabriel (not quite as stout but seemingly more friendly than New Jersey's Christie), now Minister for the Economy and Electric Power, made no new promises and looked less friendly outside Germany when he visited Athens and continued the same Merkel "austerity" policy imposed by powerful, wealthy Germany on the hard-hit countries of southern Europe.

Ignored weapons scandal

He fully ignored a concurrent scandal in Athens exposing both German weapons salesmen and Greek politicians who had illegally lined their very deep pockets while pushing wildly expensive armament sales, totally unnecessary and damaging for that unhappy, debt-ridden

country but highly remunerative for a couple of German weapons-makers.

Armaments remained a key word for the GroKo New Year in the Ministry of Defence. But just imagine – a woman as Defence Minister! Ursula von der Leyen.

Almost immediately after her inauguration we were treated to skilful TV shots of her speaking in sincere, heart-warming tones to the German troops in Afghanistan. But it soon became very apparent: her policy was not a bit more attractive than that of her predecessor: a flexible, mobile volunteer army, with the most modern weapons, ready to fly at short notice to any corner of the globe "where German interests were threatened." And, like her predecessor, she wanted drones! German troops, after all, must have the very best. She also promised that military service would be made more palatable. At least in the homeland it must be easier for the families of service members to be close and comfy, especially for the sake of the children! (Some critical voices were heard murmuring about children in less comfy countries, terrified – or killed – by German troops and circling drones!).

The GroKo parties dominate the German Bundestag with its 631 seats; in opposition are the Greens with 63 and the Left with 64 seats. Since debating time on bills and resolutions is determined by the number of seats held, the government parties can talk their heads off while deputies from the two small parties must talk quickly just to get a few words in edgewise. And even if they join together they don't have the 25 percent of the seats needed to set up investigative committees or exercise other rights. They are busy contesting this arithmetical disadvantage – and the result is still open.

European Union

A key current theme is the European Union, whose parliament is up for election in late May in all 28 member countries. The left-wing parties' caucus, ranging in a wide variety from the German Left (till now its largest member) from Communist parties in France or the Czech Republic to Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland, hopes to increase in number, now

only 35 out of 736, worse even than the ratio in the Bundestag, especially with many more leftist delegates from Greece.

But in few countries is there much enthusiasm; scepticism abounds, about the European Parliament Union and the whole EU. But the German Left party hopes to win more seats all the same and to strengthen the left-wing caucus, especially because extreme right wing parties, often dangerously close to fascist positions, plan on unity among Islamophobes, anti-Semites and Romany-killers from France, Hungary, Britain, Germany and others – all itching to flex their growing muscles and get out their bulldozers.

But there is disagreement within the German Left party on this question. The proposed election program for the May vote criticises the EU as "neo-liberal, militarist and largely undemocratic". This militant language, often coupled with a call for Germany to quit NATO, has some Left party leaders worried, including Gregor Gysi, its best-known leader and top man of the party in the Bundestag.

There may be a quarrel on this issue at the February congress of the party in Hamburg, which will decide on the program and choose candidates for the May vote – on who to send to the European Parliament meeting alternately in Brussels, Belgium, and Strasbourg, France.

The wording may well be toned down. But the disagreement again reflects the chronic rift within the party between those who want to tone down some demands in hopes of joining with the SPD and the Greens and replacing the GroKo in 2017 (or earlier if it should sooner implode) and others who say that the Left should make no compromises on a basic issue: no sending German troops anywhere abroad, for this would sacrifice its basic position as the only true "party for peace" and dilute it into an only slightly more leftist version of the SPD – hence basically superfluous. It could well suffocate in such a three-way coalition!

People's World ☸



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SA hits “genocidal” plan of pharmaceutical giants

Emile Schepers

Two leaked memos, revealed to the press and public on January 10, have created a major blowup in South Africa, where the government is accusing the international pharmaceutical industry of plotting to interfere in upcoming elections so as to derail a government initiative to control the prices of vital medications.

South Africa has had a rather easygoing system of policing claims of patent coverage by pharmaceutical importers, and the proposed new “National Intellectual Property Policy”, which is to be incorporated into proposed legislation, has the purpose of tightening this up as a means of controlling costs.

One issue is what is called “evergreening”: in many cases, the lives of patents are artificially extended when pharma companies make minor or even cosmetic changes to the product, and then take out a completely new patent on it, making it impossible for cheaper generic versions of the basic medication to be produced and distributed. Among other things, the proposed South African bill will crack down on this and make it easier for government regulators to deny recognition of such new patents when the product is essentially the same as the one already patented.

South Africa is also working to create its own generic pharmaceuticals industry, whose success partly depends on being able to become independent of transnational pharma companies. Predictably, organisations working for the rights of patients as well as companies wanting to develop generics have praised the new plan.

This is a vital issue for South Africa because it pays a lot for drugs such as antiretrovirals to combat the country’s very high HIV levels, as well as others to control tuberculosis, an old scourge. Since the apartheid days, South Africa has greatly increased access to health care for its poor majority, but having to pay top prices for imported medicines is a strain on the health care system. Various organisations in South Africa have been pushing the government to be more pro-active in controlling the costs of, and increasing access to, medications.

The leaked memo, from the Innovative Pharmaceutical Industry Association of South Africa (IPASA), a trade group that includes both South African companies and pharmaceutical transnationals, including major pharma transnationals such as Abbott, Baxter, Bayer, Bristol-Myers Squibb, GE Health Care, Merck, Pfizer, Lilly and others, hints at plans for a negative public relations campaign in which it would be claimed that the passage of the law would discourage investment in South Africa by transnational pharmaceutical companies and other potential foreign investors. This in turn would supposedly exacerbate the high unemployment rate of the country, a red hot issue in national elections in May.

The plan as outlined in the leaked memos involved paying US\$450,000 to a politically wired Washington, DC company, Public Affairs Engagement (PAE) to work with IPASA to develop a public propaganda and pressure campaign to block changes in the patent regime. PAE is headed by James K Glassman, who is associated with the Heritage Foundation and with US government media operations under George W Bush. Others



in the firm have Democratic Party connections.

South African Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi reacted angrily to the news of the manoeuvring by IPASA, calling it “satanic” and potentially “genocidal” because it would severely impact access to needed medications by South Africa’s poor. The main labour federation in South Africa, COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) also denounced the plan and expressed its support for the government’s projected new policy. The intensity of the reaction to the leaked plans caused both IPASA and PAE to issue statements claiming that the agreement between them was only tentative and will not proceed.

This is not the first time that the pharmaceutical companies have crossed swords with the South African government on the issue of patents and the cost of medications. At the beginning of the 2000s, a similar fight over the substitution of generic drugs for much more expensive brand names controlled by transnational corporations took place, and the corporations came out of it bloodied.

Nor is the issue confined to South Africa. India and Brazil also have ongoing fights to develop their own generics in the face of protests by transnational corporations that

their intellectual property rights are being violated, and threatened action through the World Trade Organisation.

Sick people in the United States (and Australia) are also threatened by this kind of activity by the big transnational pharmaceutical industry. In the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership, there is a plan to greatly strengthen corporate ability to use patent law to block cheaper generic drugs. Labour and other sectors in the United States and beyond are working hard to stop this new plan.

People’s World ☘

Okinawa: Anti-base mayor’s election sends message

NAGO CITY: In Okinawa’s Nago City mayoral election which centred on the plan to construct a new US military base in the city, anti-base incumbent Inamine Susumu won with a wide margin over a pro-base candidate backed by the ruling Liberal Democratic (LDP) and Komei parties. This marks Okinawan people’s historic victory.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide during the election campaign said, “The planned construction of a new base will not be affected by the election results.” After the election, he also expressed his intention to push forward with the plan. Carrying out procedures for the base construction in defiance of Okinawan people’s will undermines the principle of democracy. The national government should take this election result seriously and give up the construction plan.

Inamine obtained 4,000 more votes than his rival. Nago mayoral

elections were held five times after the Japanese and US governments announced the plan in 1996 to relocate the US Futenma base in Ginowan City to the sea area off Nago’s Henoko district. This was the first election in which a conservative candidate clearly called for the promotion of the construction plan and challenged the opponent rival to a one-on-one fight. In this election, Inamine successfully secured his second term by increasing the number of votes from the previous election.

The Abe administration repressed the LDP prefectural federation, which called for the relocation of the Futenma base to outside Okinawa, and put pressure on Okinawa Governor Nakaima to approve the reclamation work of the Henoko district by using state subsidies as bait. During the election campaign, Prime Minister Abe and the ruling LDP pushed Okinawa to accept the construction plan using a carrot and stick

approach. LDP Secretary General Ishiba Shigeru, who says the government will decide where to build a new US base, visited Nago City to announce that the government will provide the city with 50 billion yen in special subsidies. This remark provoked fierce anger from local citizens.

Okinawans are opposing the new base construction based on their bitter experience in the Battle of Okinawa at the end of the Asia-Pacific War in WW2 when many residents were killed. Okinawa was kept under US occupation for 26 years after the end of the war and is still experiencing hardships due to the concentrated presence of US military bases. It is impossible for them to accept the plan to construct a new base in the prefecture as it will increase the sufferings of local people. The Abe administration should listen to the residents and give up the construction plan. *Akahata*, paper of Communist Party of Japan ☘

“Freedom from benefits” ridiculed

Rory MacKinnon

BRITAIN: Disability campaigners poured scorn on millionaire minister Iain Duncan Smith following his comparison of benefit cuts to ending slavery. The Tory Minister for Work and Pensions became an object of ridicule after lauding his regime of savage benefit cuts and sanctions before an audience of politicians at his right-wing think tank, the Centre for Social Justice.

Mr Duncan Smith said his guidance on “the journey from dependence to independence” was “part of our party’s historic mission – just look at Wilberforce and Shaftesbury.”

William Wilberforce and the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury were 19th century politicians known primarily for pioneering anti-slavery legislation in England.

Disability activists planning a day of action next month against reviled welfare contractor Atos derided the speech.

Campaigner and “Where’s the Benefit?” blogger Steven Sumpter dismissed the comparison as

“deluded”. “It’s definitely getting rent and food money that traps me, not my illness at all.

“And as for that mobility allowance – that keeps me trapped in my house. That car it pays for enslaves me. I should be freed from its grip,” he said.

Leeds-based activist Ian Morrison called the speech “a complete and utter joke.”

“I’m an ordinary guy who’s worked all his life. I’ve paid into national insurance under the taxation system in this country. That’s what it’s for – to help when something goes wrong – but now I’m being blamed for claiming it because I’m a ‘burden on society’.”

Mr Morrison said many people were scared of publicly protesting for fear of retaliation, but disability benefits were “life or death.” Mr Morrison said the February 19 Day of Action had already seen a 144 pickets confirmed across Britain. “February 19 is going to be a day that this country has never seen before,” he said.

Morning Star ☘

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



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On Nelson Mandela

I was one of those who spent years protesting against the evil of Apartheid, (and boycotted the companies and countries that supported it), as well as working to aid those who suffered and struggled to be free of it and for the release of Nelson Mandela and other South African political prisoners. The death of Nelson Mandela and the praise that he and his legacy are receiving provoke very mixed feelings for me. I know I should feel satisfaction and pleasure at what change was achieved and that I played a very small part in that. And I do.

But to see hypocrites like Australian PM Tony Abbot (and others), who actively supported Apartheid,

viewed those who opposed it as terrorists and were quite happy to see people like Nelson Mandela languish in jail, now giving accolades to Mandela I find just sickening. And all those others who did nothing to help, who now also honour Nelson Mandela as a brave and righteous man, which he is, where were they when he and the thousands of other oppressed people really needed them. And where were they when there was an international campaign for Nelson Mandela's release.

Oh that's right, they didn't care about the cruel plight of black South Africans, they didn't want to get involved in politics, playing rugby with racist South Africa was just sport, and doing business with it, is well just business and not racial exploitation. But today we have so many more Mandelas rotting in prisoners in West Papua, Palestine, the USA, Iran, Turkey, Columbia, Bahrain, Egypt, Ireland and elsewhere with little notice taken by the outside world. And people like Tony Abbot only too willing to ignore these political prisoners and support many of the regimes (Indonesia and Israel, the USA, etc) that jail and oppress them. Despite our success in ridding

the world of Apartheid and freeing Mandela, I feel a great sadness and anguish that it often takes many people a long time to open their eyes and act to stop such horrible and oppressive regimes. And of course many others do nothing except express platitudes many years after the events, like we were witnessing after Nelson Mandela's death. I think of Steve Biko, and the thousands of others who were imprisoned, tortured, beaten and killed under the brutal reign of the Apartheid regime.

Steve Biko was another remarkable activist and leader of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, who was beaten to death. He founded the Black Consciousness Movement, which mobilized the urban black population. While living, his writings and activism empowered black people, and he was famous for his slogan "black is beautiful", which he described as meaning: "man, you are okay as you are, begin to look upon yourself as a human being."

And I find it galling that there were concerned and committed people in Australia and elsewhere who did a lot more than me to awaken the world to the horrors and immorality of Apartheid, and

who were ignored, verbally abused, jailed and beaten by the likes of Tony Abbott and his ilk. And today we have to hear and witness these supporters of Apartheid joining the chorus of Mandela supporters. So, while Tony Abbot is now praising the life of Nelson Mandela, he is still busily helping those who are oppressing those who are in prison for daring to resist the same injustices and inequalities Mandela fought against.

There's still so much human rights abuse in the world and too much hypocrisy and plenty of history repeating itself. RIP Nelson Mandela, for those of us who remain, we pledge to stay true to your ideals and we will continue the struggle for a better world. And we will not forget those who are fighting for the same civil and human rights and are now in jail for their political beliefs.

Freedom for Ahmad Sa'adat, Marwan Barghouti, Mordechai Vanunu (Palestine), Filep Karma (West Papua), Oscar Lopez Rivera, Leonard Peltier, Sudiata Acoli (USA) and all the other imprisoned political prisoners.

Steven Katsineris
Vic

Hired killers in Syria

There are thousands of mercenaries fighting in Syria from all over the world, including from Australia. They have been cultivated, supported and armed by anti-Syrian forces including the USA, Britain, EU countries, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey.

They were all lauded as "rebels", not hired killers. The government of Syria resisted the armed onslaught and now the countries whose citizens are fighting in Syria are worried about their coming back.

It has been reported that EU spy agencies are having quiet talks with the Syrian government about ways of preventing their citizens from ever returning back to Europe. They are not concerned about what atrocities they had committed in Syria. They know only too well what they have done there.

They just do not want those war-hardened and violent thugs back in their midst. They want them dead – and they want it done by somebody else.

Mati English
Sydney

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Why the rush to war, Tony?

Anyone who paid attention to the utterances or the actions of Tony Abbott's ultra-conservative Australian government could be forgiven for thinking the country was in imminent danger of being attacked by foreign foes. True, much of the present government's policies were begun under Labor, continued and extended under John Howard's ugly conservative government, then after Howard's ouster continued yet again by Labor. However, all that shows is how far the Australian Labor Party has travelled to the Right in the last half century or so.

Moves that pointed towards war thinking in the cabinet rooms of the Australian government under Labor included the stationing of US Marines in Darwin, turning Exmouth Gulf in Western Australia into a US naval base and refuelling centre for its Indian Ocean fleet, following Howard's policy of sending Australian troops or police to "trouble spots" in the Pacific region to maintain pro-US regimes there, joint training exercises with the US in how to invade China and how to "interdict" Chinese and North Korean shipping.

While Labor was in government we also saw a general increase in militarism and belligerence, the active encouragement of the same kind of mindset on the part of young Australians that the US government encourages on the part of young Americans: wrap yourself in the flag and declare that you stand for "your country right or wrong". (Which, as a wise man

one said, is like declaring that you stand for "your mother, drunk or sober".)

"Pilgrimages" to Gallipoli are now all the rage. Australia's sorry role in that debacle is now portrayed in popular myth as some sort of victory, just as *our part* in the USA's criminal and disastrous war of attempted conquest against the Vietnamese people is portrayed as a "victory" because we won a battle (but lost the war along with the Yanks).

Australia's Lilliputian army trains hard at waging a mobile war against a land-based foe across Northern Australia. What country could possibly invade Australia (without first having to conquer umpteen other countries in the region)? Only Indonesia. And Tony Abbott's Liberal Party government has made it explicitly clear that they view the prospect of war with our populous neighbour with equanimity.

In fact, they go out of their way to provoke the Indonesians. Having abrogated all our treaty obligations with regard to refugees, the government has declared the Indonesian fishermen that the refugees hire to sail them openly to Australia to be "people smugglers" and have stated categorically that "we are at war with people smugglers".

To make that point crystal clear, our Navy has been making provocative sallies into Indonesian territorial waters to intercept or turn back these same "people smugglers". The real people smugglers of course are the business people (who in every other way are favoured by Mr Abbott) in Indonesia, Malaysia

or elsewhere who in return for large sums of money wrung from desperate refugees arrange passage on dilapidated, overcrowded fishing boats to Australia.

The previous Labor government was hostile on refugees, but the Abbott government is vehemently so: refugees sailing into our waters are "breaching our sovereign borders". The right of Australia to refuse entry to poor people – especially poor people of colour – was put on record by the previous Liberal Party PM, John Howard. Abbott is merely following his former leader's policy.

Meanwhile, he is going out of his way to antagonise the Indonesian government. Why? Australia is a developed capitalist country with its own imperialist stake. Australian imperialism has long coveted the resources of some of Indonesia's territories as well as portions of the Pacific islands.

But Australian imperialism, for all its ambition, is still very much the junior partner in this business venture, still the "deputy sheriff" to the USA's big boss. Would Australia go out of its way to antagonise an oil-rich, strategically placed US ally like Indonesia without the prior approval of the boss? I don't think so, do you?

Which raises the question why would the USA want to antagonise Indonesia. Well, of course, they don't. But the USA does have a long-standing policy of trying to break up large or diverse countries that don't always see eye-to-eye with it into a grouping of smaller countries.

Yugoslavia defied the US, so German imperialism and US imperialism working for their separate ends combined to destroy the country, fostering separatism amongst its various ethnic minorities and ending up with a near-impotent collection of independent statelets with no economic or political clout whatsoever.

Now Iraq is going the same way, with separate little states being prepared for Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis.

Indonesia would be a prime target for breaking up in this manner. Its resources would still be harvestable, no matter how many small countries it was turned into, but it would be unable to mount much resistance if each of its main provinces had hived off into "independence".

There are already separatist movements in part of the country – have been for decades in some regions. The US, while doubtless privately in favour of breaking up Indonesia (a mainstay of the non-aligned movement for so many years) into its component parts, would have to tread carefully at least for a time. Might not the best idea be to let Australian imperialism, ever the faithful lapdog, provoke trouble with Indonesia which the US – no doubt backed up by the UN General Secretary – would then step in to help fix, in the process supporting key separatist forces which it was itself financing and arming.

Standard operating procedures, really, for the USA these days. Wouldn't you say? ★





Sunday February 2 –
Saturday February 8

Last week we had the feature-length *Mystery Road*, a crime thriller set against a background of apparent police corruption, racism and family tragedy. This week we have the feature-length *The Broken Shore* (ABC1 Sunday February 2 at 8.30pm), described as “a crime thriller set against a background of police corruption, racism and family tragedy”. I sense a trend developing.

Actually, it is based on Peter Temple’s internationally acclaimed novel of the same name, which won the prestigious Gold Dagger award of the UK Crime Writers Association in 2007. *Mystery Road* was set in outback NSW. *The Broken Shore* has been filmed against a rugged Victorian coastline that perfectly complements the story’s intermingling of old and new mysteries and brooding atmosphere of menace.

As in almost all thrillers set in small towns, the community’s respectable mask is just that, a mask behind which is the shocking face of intrigue and secrets. The central character, Detective Joe Cashin, broken in both body and spirit as a result of a botched homicide raid in Melbourne, has returned to the coastal village of Port Monro where he grew up. He is played by Don Hany, while Marni Johnston plays junior police officer Kendall Rodgers and Tony Briggs plays Joe’s detective partner Paul Dove.

The plot includes a 45-year-old secret about the death of Cashin’s father, a 30-year-old romance, a brutal bashing and robbery and the convenient deaths of three Aboriginal youths accused of the crime. But as Joe and Paul dig deeper, they uncover a gardener who knows which cupboard all the family skeletons are in, a racist local cop (Anthony Hayes), and an itinerant worker (Dan Wyllie) with a secret history.

Adapted by Andrew Knight, the program is directed by Rowan Woods.

Progeria is the dreadful but thankfully extremely rare aging disease that causes children to age prematurely and die of old age by the time they are about 11. Hayley Okines, now aged 13, has been followed by TV cameras since she was four and is one of the most recognisable faces of Progeria in the world.

This latest observational documentary, *The 96-Year-Old School Girl* (ABC2 Sunday February 2 at 8.30pm) shows Hayley at a significant period of her life as she begins secondary school – a landmark that her parents never thought they would see. Hayley, a tiny little girl, has a group of very protective school friends and, despite the necessity of constant trips to the USA to try out new drug therapies, she remains optimistic and buoyant.

The ABC’s popular music quiz show, *Spicks and Specks* (ABC1 Wednesdays from February 5 at 8.30pm) had barely concluded its final season when the ABC revived it with an entirely new cast. And what do you know? It looks exactly the same. Except for the host, musical comedian Josh Earl who has an unfortunate tendency to project his voice as though he were performing a live gig without a microphone. A more gentle vocal approach would be a lot easier to take, as far as I am concerned. Otherwise, the new series is a carbon copy of its previous incarnation.



Detective Joe Cashin played by Don Hany, *The Broken Shore* (ABC1 Sunday February 2 at 8.30pm).

Astonishing knowledge of music trivia mixed with good-natured banter was the secret of the show’s success and the new series seems to have retained this essential element.

Every newsstand (and doctor’s waiting room) is full of garishly-coloured tabloid magazines shouting the latest bits of gossip about celebrity sex scandals, bizarre criminal cases and minor Royalty doing anything at all. These weekly magazines, which can be read at a sitting by anyone, are recognised even by their regular readers as having nothing in them. But they help to pass the time. And that seems to be all that matters.

In fact, they are a deliberate diversion, offered to young and old alike with promises of juicy disclosures, to seduce them away from looking for reading matter about what’s wrong with the hospital system and why? Or why the Liberal Party wants to cut all forms of welfare and government services. Far

better to have them concentrating on whether the latest photo of Princess whatsername shows a baby bump or not. Far better.

Now we have tabloid documentaries, such as *The Girl Who Became Three Boys* (ABC2 Wednesday February 5 at 8.30pm), a tell-all account of how two young and sexually inexperienced teenage girls were first seduced over the internet and then in person by three boys – all of whom were in fact being impersonated by the one person: a girl, a couple of years older than her victims.

A psychiatrist would probably have a field day analysing the implications of the case, but the program is satisfied with the bizarre and the prurient, as the equivalent magazine would be. What comes out clearly nevertheless is the ease with which the internet can be used to “form relationships” with people who have not yet learned to be distrustful.

I was dissatisfied with the three-part series *Kids On Speed*

(ABC1 Thursdays from February 6 at 8.30pm). It deals with the disputed disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) which some scientific opinion believes does not even exist. Nevertheless, it is very popularly diagnosed in “problem” children these days. I am now 73 and I am moved to ask was this condition as prevalent when I was a child? We never heard of it, so what did parents in my day do about it?

The entertaining Australian period crime series *The Doctor Blake Mysteries* returns for its second series this week (ABC1 Fridays from February 7 at 8.30pm). The emotionally troubled Doctor Lucien Blake (Craig McLachlan), who has been away in China, has barely stepped off the train before he is confronted with a murder victim to examine. His freedom to interfere in police work is frankly unbelievable, but that is a fault common to most detective series about medical examiners. ☺

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POLITICS IN THE PUB

February 6
SRI LANKA GENOCIDE – PM ABBOTT’S COLLUSION WITH DICTATOR PRESIDENT RAJAPAKSA
Gordon Weiss, Former UN spokesperson on Sri Lanka, author of *The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka* and *The Last Days of the Tamil Tigers*;
Emily Howie, Director, Advocacy & Research, Human Rights Law Centre;

February 13
WHY THE RENEWAL OF THE ALP DEPENDS ON LABOR WINNING BACK ITS BATTLERS WITH A PROGRESSIVE AGENDA
Shaun Wilson, Dr, Sociology Macquarie Uni;
Amanda Perkins, Union activist;

February 20
THE TRANS PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT – NEITHER PARTNERSHIP NOR TRADE – A CORPORATE THREAT TO THE PUBLIC INTEREST
Don Edwards, MSF (Doctors without Borders);
Pat Randal, Research Associate, Sydney Uni and Campaigner Australian Fair Trade & Investment Network;

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A FOREIGN AGENCY INTERFERENCE – ISRAEL VERSUS THE AUSTRALIAN SUPPORTERS OF THE BDS
Jake Lynch, Director, Centre Peace & Conflict Studies, Sydney Uni;
Cathy Peters, Committee for Justice & Peace in Palestine, former Marrickville Councillor;

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Fallujah: more war crimes surface

Felicity Aubuthnot

“The United States Marine Corps ... its hallowed rituals, and its unbending code of honor ...”

(Thomas E Ricks; *Making the Corps*, 1997.)

As the US unleashed Grim Reaper continues to cull Iraqis in ever rising numbers, this month of the 23rd anniversary of the 1991 US led onslaught on Iraq and just weeks away from the 11th woeful wake for the 2003 illegal invasion, yet another atrocity in a litany of those under the illegal US-UK occupation has come to light.

Fallujah, now under attack from US installed tyrant Nuri al Maliki's sectarian militia armed with US supplied weapons, with the US also: “... looking to provide additional shipments of Hellfire missiles to Iraq ... as well as ten Scan Eagle drones and 48 Raven drones” (UK *Guardian*) now, another previously unreported US war crime of the myriad heaped on the city in 2004, also returns to haunt them.

The Americans invaded, chillingly: “house to house, room to room”, raining death and destruction on the proud, ancient “City of Mosques.”

One correspondent wrote: “There has been nothing like the attack on Fallujah since the Nazi invasion and occupation of much of the European continent – the shelling and bombing of Warsaw in September 1939, the terror bombing of Rotterdam in May 1940.”

Further: “... the ‘battle for Fallujah’ was entirely one-sided. US military and technical superiority over the Iraqi resistance (was) as great, if not greater, than the American army's advantage over their Indian opponents in the 1870s and 1880s.”

Seventy percent of houses and shops were reported destroyed, with those still standing damaged. Iraqi doctor, Ali Fadhil, described a city: “... completely devastated, destruction everywhere. It looked like a city of ghosts. Falluja used to be a modern city; now there was nothing. We spent the day going through the rubble that had been the centre of the city; I didn't see a single building that was functioning.” (“City of Ghosts”, *Guardian*, January 11, 2005.)

Nicholas J Davies, author of “Blood on our Hands – the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq”, has written: “The Fallujah Compensation Committee reported in March 2005 that the assault destroyed 36,000 homes, 9,000 shops, 65 mosques, 60 schools, both train stations, one of the two bridges, two power stations, three water treatment plants and the city's entire sanitation and telephone systems.”

“We'll unleash the dogs of hell”

A US Marine Sergeant had told Channel 4 News: “We'll unleash the dogs of hell, we'll unleash 'em ... They don't even know what's coming – hell is coming! If there are civilians in there, they're in the wrong place at the wrong time.” (November 8, 2004) Welcome to liberation, freedom and democracy, US style.

The horrors of 1991, 2003 and the subsequent years will haunt Iraq for decades to come, possibly, as the Mongol invasion, to which it has been compared, for all time, as the US-UK multiple atrocities ring on down the years, with further unearthing of the lies, blood, massacres and bestialities.



Those responsible for the litany of crimes against humanity appear currently on US television and give interviews in publications, talking of their trauma and sacrifice in Fallujah's near destruction and their wholesale butchery, as the city suffers yet further. “Most veterans are deeply disappointed that the struggles and the sacrifices they made ... have seemingly been for naught”, Peter Manor, a retired US officer who served in Iraq as a brigade Commander and on the staff of General David Petraeus, is quoted as saying.

“The images of Al-Qaeda militants surging back into cities that were secured at an enormous sacrifice has chilled Americans who fought in Iraq”, is a typical comment. Try burying you husband, wife, children in the garden or yard, pinned down by US fire, unable to even transport them to a remaining Mosque, then cemetery, to weep them farewell – or watching them eaten by stray dogs, and under US fire, unable to rescue their remains.

In context, that unnamed US Marine again: “It wasn't a war, it was a massacre.”

As late as September 2010, American soldiers were still murdering the inhabitants of Fallujah, including an 85 year old man and seven souls described as “youngsters.”

That same month a report was presented to the 15th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva entitled: “Testimonies of Crimes Against Humanity in Fallujah – Towards a Fair International Criminal Trial.”

The document: “... pleads and implores”, the United Nations in: “... respect for the memory (of the) victims, to investigate the crimes and violations”, in the document, and all that: “has been inflicted upon Iraq, placing the country at the top of the world's daily list for deaths, displaced persons, both internally and externally, the ensuing savage corruption, child molestation, rape, rampant kidnapping, contrary to the noble goals and (founding aspirations) of your Organisation.”

The subsequent silence has been – predictably – deafening.

The latest crimes in Fallujah emerged this month, when forty one photographs surfaced showing a US Marine pouring what appears to be gasoline over Iraqi bodies and setting them alight, others are of burned, blackened human remains, of bodies on fire and a Marine crouching next to a skull, pointing his gun at it, for a souvenir photograph.

US Central Command has said the photographs, obtained by *TMZ*, had not been previously brought to their attention. Another day, another plethora of war crimes, it would seem.

Colonel Steve Warren, Director of Press Operations for the Dept. of Defence, tells *TMZ* “... the pictures appear to show US soldiers in violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice ... which makes it a crime to mishandle remains.”

Perhaps the Marines are unaware of that. In July 2011, in Afghanistan Marines urinated on dead alleged fighters and posed for photographs with the corpses.

No prosecutions

There is no statute of limitations on such and other crimes, thus those responsible can still be prosecuted and jailed, but in the litany of horrors across Iraq, few have answered for their actions.

Article 16, second paragraph, of the 1949 Geneva Convention IV states: “As far as military considerations allow, each Party to the conflict shall facilitate the steps taken ... to protect (the killed) against ... ill-treatment.”

Article 34(1) of the 1977 Additional Protocol I provides: “The remains of persons who have died for reasons related to occupation or in detention resulting from occupation or hostilities ... shall be respected”.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) specifies: “With reference to the war crime of outrages upon personal dignity, the 2000 ICC Elements of Crimes specifies that Article 8(2) (b)(xxi) and (c)(ii) of the 1998 ICC Statute also applies to dead persons.”

(Finalised draft text of the Elements of

Crimes, adopted by the 23rd Meeting of the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court, New York, June 30, 2000, Report of the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court, UN Doc. PCNICC/2000/INF/3/Add.2, Addendum, 6 July 2000, as adopted by the Assembly of States Parties, First Session, 3–10 September 2002, Official Records of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, UN Doc. ICC-ASP/1/3, 25 September 2002, and ICC-ASP/1/3/Corr.1, 31 October 2002, p. 29.)

The sheer horror of lawlessness committed during the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq seems to have been lost on the majority of those responsible for such crimes against humanity.

In the context of some of the above, take former gunnery Sergeant Nick Popaditch on Fallujah: “There's a lot of downtrodden people there who got a shot at a free life, at freedom”, he states: “I'm just proud of the fact that when it came time to stand and fight for those things, those concepts of freedom, liberty, human rights ... I'm glad my nation did it.” (*Guardian* January 8, 2014.)

Colonel Warren too seems to suffer from delusion or denial, spouting that well worn, mega over used phrase: “The actions that are depicted in these photos are not in any way representative of the honourable, professional service of the two and a half million service members who went to war in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last decade.”

General Antonio Taguba, who released his report on the mediaeval torture which were US war crimes at Abu Ghraib prison just six months before these further Fallujah atrocities were allegedly committed, surely pinned the attitude of America's troops and their leaders, when quoting another US General who told him: “The abused are only Iraqis.”

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