



Make jobs the priority

Anna Pha

Last week brought some relief to SPC Ardmona's (SPCA) workforce with a commitment by the company to remain in operation for five years. But even this one bright spot in a week of bad news could see some workers lose their jobs. Unemployment has risen with full-time jobs, in particular, taking another hit. Public and private sector sackings continue to mount, with many more in the pipeline. Economists warn of worse to come and the prospect of recession rears its ugly head.

Meanwhile, the Abbott government cannot move fast enough with its cuts and sackings. It seems determined to drive the economy into recession. At the same time, it is blaming the victims of its cuts and other policies and preparing punitive cuts to the entitlements of the unemployed, in particular young people.

The Victorian government agreed to a \$22 million "co-investment" towards a \$100 million refit at SPCA's cannery in Shepparton on condition that it retains a minimum of 500 staff. If it closes within five years, it will have to repay the money. This is welcome news for Shepparton and the farmers and others dependent on the cannery.

But the underlying problems have not been addressed. Not only did the federal government steadfastly refuse any assistance, it has done nothing to stop the flood of cheap fruit and other foods being dumped on one of the most open and deregulated markets in the industrialised world. The situation looks set to worsen under free trade agreements, in particular the Trans Pacific Partnership if it is signed.

Decline in full-time jobs

The official unemployment figure rose again in January to a whopping 728,600. That is 728,600 workers could not even find one hour's paid work in the previous couple of weeks. The real picture of unemployed and under-employed is closer to double that figure. Hundreds of thousands of workers are in casual employment, living from day to day without any certainty of what lies ahead. Many can only

Far from attempting to address the departure of Toyota from Australia, the government blamed Toyota's workforce and the AMWU for the impending closure.



find part-time work or short-term contracts. They do not appear in the official unemployment figures.

The media casually announce the unemployment rate has risen slightly to 6.0 percent, suggesting it might be bad news for the government.

Yet job insecurity continues to rise, and employers are on the offensive reducing wages and looking to a very supportive government to assist them.

Every one of those 728,600 people is a human being with a life to lead and needs that must be met. But the government is only interested in private sector profits, not whether lives are ruined or children go without. The prospects of finding work or affording retraining are growing dimmer, especially with TAFE closures, rising fees and inadequate income support.

Toyota

Toyota is a classic example of the government's policy failures. Far from attempting to address the departure of Toyota from

Australia in 2017 (or maybe even earlier), the government blamed Toyota's workforce and the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union for the impending closure. AMWU members had earlier knocked back an attempt by the company to cut pay and entitlements which would have cut the cost of making a car by \$147 – hardly enough to make the product more competitive!

Toyota's response was incredible for an employer. The company, in effect, accused the government of lying. "Toyota Australia has never blamed the union for its decision to close its manufacturing operations by the end of 2017, neither publicly or in private discussion with any stakeholders," the company said in a statement.

Toyota identified a number of contributing factors including the relatively high dollar that makes exports unviable and the low economies of scale in Australia – a country with a relatively small population. These factors, together "with one of the most open and fragmented automotive markets in the world and increased competitiveness due to current

and future free trade agreements, [mean that] it is not viable to continue building cars in Australia."

In other words, it is blaming government policies, not workers or unions.

The Australian economy is one of the most deregulated of all the industrialised nations and it is costing us heavily. Its tariffs on imports are amongst the lowest in the world.

The government doesn't care one iota if the whole car industry folds or that thousands of workers will be sent to the scrap heap or that Australia will see the destruction of an important skill base. It has no vision, no plans for a manufacturing base in the future.

The Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement poses an enormous threat to Australian industry, not just manufacturing. Foreign corporations will have more rights under the TPPA than Australian ones and will be able to sue the Australian government for any decisions or legislation that might hurt potential or actual profit-making activities. It will not have any means to protect any industry.

Continued on page 2

3  "Blame the victim" policy backfires

5  Fears over "one-punch" laws

10  Culture & Life Exorcising the public

Stop Press
Manus Island
See page 3

Guardian

Issue 1627

February 19, 2014

Vatican claims anti-Catholic conspiracy

Hopes of the faithful that Francis would be a reforming Pope have received a heavy blow. The Vatican responded angrily to a UN report on child sexual abuse by priests, claiming that it is "prejudiced" against the Catholic Church and that it peddles attacks made by anti-Catholic advocacy groups. But while the Catholic Church features heavily in revelations of cover-up and protection of serial offenders, it is far from the only organisation to which children are entrusted to be accused of failing miserably to protect them from sexual predators. The Catholic Church's claim of a witch hunt doesn't stack up.

Australia is getting disturbing insights into the extent of the horrors via the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It was revealed two weeks ago that boys at the Bexley Boys Home in Sydney were routinely beaten, sexually abused and rented out to paedophiles for weekends during the 1960s and '70s. The Salvation Army, which ran the home, isn't denying any claims but insists that guidelines and procedures have been put in place to prevent any such practices occurring again. Like the Catholic Church, it has expressed its sorrow for the abuse and sympathy for the victims.

The Royal Commission was called following a report on the ABC's *Lateline* TV program on November 8, 2012. Detective chief inspector Peter Fox essentially put his life and job on the line in an interview with Tony Jones. "I can testify from my own experience the Church covers up, silences victims, hinders police investigations, alerts offenders, destroys evidence and moves priests to protect the good name of the Church," Fox said in a letter to the NSW Premier. The public outcry forced the federal government's hand despite strong opposition from the Church. The terms of reference are suitably broad though time will tell how the question of compensation will be handled.

The institutions in question will doubtless try to place the criminal behaviour and subsequent cover-up squarely in the past; the "bad old days" before modern regulation and oversight. But this isn't ancient history. Last month, the Vatican revealed that close to 400 priests left the priesthood in 2011 and 2012 due to accusations of child sexual abuse.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has rightly called the Catholic Church on its recalcitrance in these matters. No Catholic Bishop has ever been sanctioned for protecting offending priests. The Committee has urged the Church to implement its recommendations and to report back by 2017. It was 14 years late in making its submission for the latest report.

The committee has responded to suggestions that it is prejudiced and has ignored measures taken in recent years by Church authorities. "The Committee on the Rights of the Child is not in the business of saying 'Well said'. We are in the business of saying 'Well done'. We want to see concrete measures," Benyam Mezmur, a committee member and Ethiopian academic on children's legal rights, told the media.

A question for societies blighted by the sorts of institutional practices now coming to light is the increasing role religious-affiliated charity groups play in delivering social services. A major part of the neo-liberal agenda is for governments to step out of their duty to meet the health, education and social security needs of their citizens. Private operators, including many religious-affiliated organisations, will be expected to take charge of the much smaller safety net left behind.

A revealing reaction to the recent UN report on the Vatican's inaction over child sex abuse came from Austen Invereigh, coordinator of Canadian church advocacy group Catholic Voices. "It takes no account of the particularities of the Holy See, treating it as if it were the HQ of a multinational corporation," he said. When it comes to the provision of social services, the Catholic Church is indeed a multinational – a very wealthy one that can expect to expand its reach as governments like the Abbott government in Australia press on with their privatising agenda. The public is right to ask how fit these organisations are to carry out these functions.

PRESS FUND

Federal Treasurer Joe Hockey says the solution to six per cent unemployment is to sell billions of dollars worth of state and federal government assets, in order to fund new infrastructure and generate employment. But when government assets are sold the money just goes back to consolidated revenue. Rather than being used for infrastructure it could just as easily end up being used to fund implementation of the cruel asylum seeker policies. We intend to campaign against all the government's reactionary activities, including its sale of public assets. However, we really need your Press Fund contributions, so please send us something for the next issue if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

M H in memory of Peter Symon \$400

Guardian tin Melbourne Branch CPA \$50, Mike Donaldson \$20, Eric Durston \$10, Mark Mannion \$5, G T Boote \$40, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$540 Progressive total: \$1,240.

Stop Abbott, save Medicare

Around 500 people braved the rain to join the "Stop Abbott, Save Medicare" rally in Sydney on Saturday February 15 outside the Sydney Town Hall. The rally was supported by health and other unions, Unions NSW, the Doctors' Reform Society (DRS), and other groups affected by the Coalition's cuts. Speakers from the unions, DRS, Labor and Indigenous groups spoke out strongly against the Abbott government's cuts and in defence of bulk-billing and the dangers of the introduction of a co-payment for GP visits. The long-term agenda is an Americanisation of

the health system, with two tiers depending on income and a takeover of Medicare by the private health insurance funds. The rally was reminded of the horrors of pre-Medicare days when people could not pay medical bills while, today, a sick child can be taken to the GP and the parent bulk-billed. There were also calls for the government to stop over-paying pharmaceutical companies under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, to reduce costs, and for dental services to be fully incorporated under Medicare. ✪



(Photo: Anna Pha)

Make jobs the priority

Continued from page 1

More jobs in the firing line

Job losses continue to mount in the public and private sector. Around 60,000 full-time jobs were lost in the past four months with a small rise in part-time work.

The Forge Group in Western Australia has retrenched 1,300 workers. WesTrac has begun sacking 440 people in WA. Telstra is looking to outsource another 1,000 jobs to the Philippines and India, after slashing its local workforce by 2,000 last year.

The Australian Taxation Office is set to close its Valuation Office with the loss of 200 public service jobs on top of the previously announced cut of 900 jobs in the ATO this year.

State governments are still sacking thousands of employees or not filling jobs as public servants leave. In NSW the toll stands at 15,000; in Queensland it is headed for 14,000.

The media make a big show out of the likes of Toyota, Ford, Holden or SPCA when jobs are being shed. But there is a deafening silence

around public sector sackings which are just as destructive to the people affected and the economy.

Government job cutting not only inflicts pain and hardship on those losing their jobs. It affects the many thousands whose future employment prospects are wiped, especially younger workers. It also has an impact on those who rely on the services that are cut or reduced.

Beyond that it has a contractionary effect on the economy as incomes are reduced and demand for goods and services shrinks. As sales decline, more workers are laid off or their hours reduced. And so the downward cycle continues.

Work is a basic human right

No capitalist country has ever achieved full employment. The boom-bust economic cycle sees swings in unemployment rates but never genuine full employment. Unemployment is endemic to capitalism and a tool to pit workers against each other to drive down wages and working conditions – the cost of labour.

Downturns are inevitable in the capitalist system – the boom-bust cycle cannot be eliminated as the mining sector is well aware. But government policies can impact on the depth and length of recessions and assist its victims with appropriate actions.

Unions are fighting in their own areas to save jobs and services – nurses in hospitals, teachers in schools and TAFE, public servants in the public service, etc. What is required is a national campaign to save at risk industries, the public sector, jobs and services; to defend and improve living standards; and to restore trade union and other democratic rights to be able to fight the Abbott government/ employer agenda.

If corporations cannot run enterprises such as the car plants currently listed for closure, they should be nationalised and converted to produce the public transport vehicles or renewable energy equipment we urgently need.

The so-called "free" markets have got us into the current mess and have no solution for people, only for bigger and bigger profits. Australia needs a government of a new type that is prepared to stand up to the big corporations and act in the interests of people. This requires radical changes in policy based on government regulation, expansion of the public sector, reversal of privatisations, an increase in social security payments, job creation programs and, above all, planning. ✪

Correction

In last week's *Guardian*, "Gov't property and services: Big business wants the lot!" it was stated that Australia Post made a loss. The loss reported related to the delivery of letters. Australia Post made a pre-tax profit of \$402.8 million and post-tax profit of \$311.9. Our apologies.

"Blame the victim" policy backfires

Peter Mac

The Abbott government's practice of blaming workers for the crash of Australia's auto manufacturing and fruit canning industries backfired last week.

The head of Toyota Australia denied that he had told Treasurer Joe Hockey the Toyota workers and their unions were responsible for the decision to cease manufacturing cars in Australia, and blamed the high Australian dollar for the decision.

The manager of food canning company SPC Ardmona also denied the government's claims that the company's impending closure was prompted by its employees' sick leave claims and their "excessive" wages and conditions, which, the government said, included 104 weeks accumulated redundancy pay, "cashing in" unused sick leave on retirement, and nine weeks annual leave.

The local Liberal MP, Sharon Stone, also very courageously accused the government of lying when it blamed the company's workers for the crisis.

In fact, the total claims for sick leave, long service leave and other entitlements last year amounted to less than 0.1 percent of the company's cost of goods. Employees lost the entitlement to cash in unused sick leave two years ago, and they get four weeks annual leave, not nine. The maximum redundancy pay is 52 weeks, not 104 – and at the rate of two weeks pay for every six months employment, they have to work for the company for 26 years to get it!

The company management pointed out that the primary cause of its financial problems was the dumping of canned food from other countries. When faced with this problem New Zealand recently took steps to limit the practice, but Australia has not followed its example.

The wrong way to go

With regard to auto manufacturing, a major factor that weakens Australia's competitive position is the low tariff on imported cars. In 1984 it was 60 per cent, but under Australia's trade agreements, the tariff is less than five per cent for trade with the

US, New Zealand, Chile, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

However, Brazil's current auto tariff is 35 per cent, China's 25 per cent, and India's between 60 and 100 per cent. In contrast, our present tariff for trade with those countries is just five percent, and the Treasurer is now considering removing the tariff altogether!

The government appears to see the crisis in the food canning and auto industries merely in terms of the opportunity it offers the government to force Australian workers to accept reduced pay and work entitlements. That's the basis of the government's recent submission to the Fair Work Commission's current review of Australia's 125 industrial awards.

In fact, the crucial issues involved in these industries include the impact of their collapse on the workers and industry suppliers, and on Australia's primary and secondary industries as a whole.

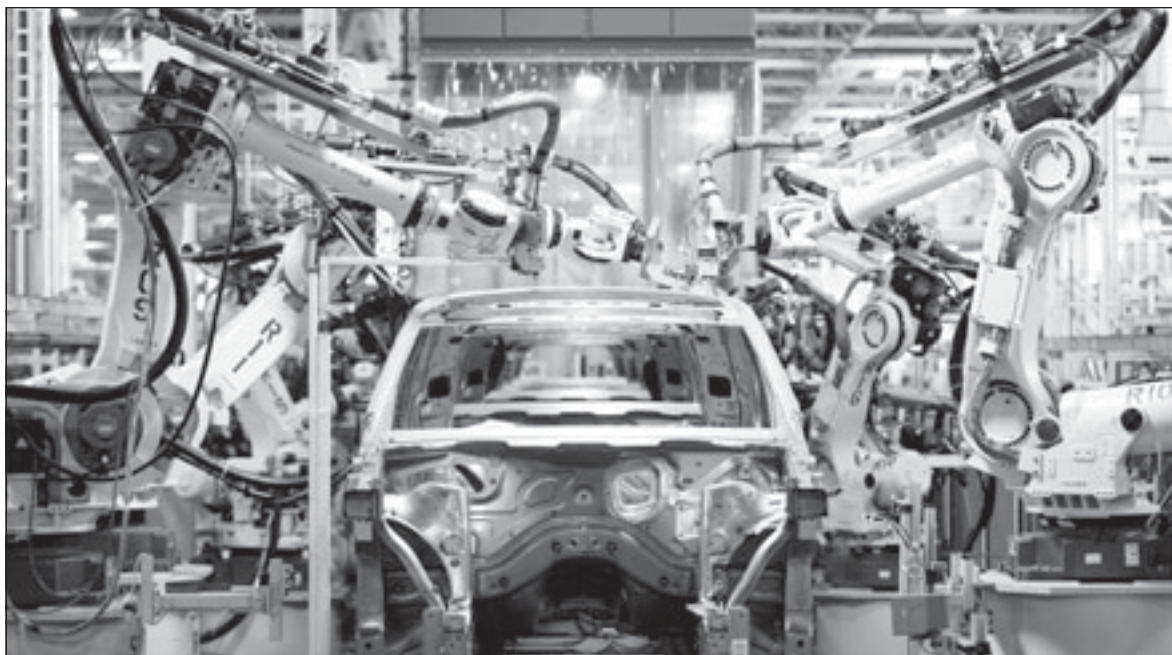
The collective expertise and individual skills represented by those industries and in associated companies will be lost to the nation if their factories shut down, and thousands of people will suffer bitter economic hardship.

The SPC Ardmona crisis has already claimed its first victim. Last week, faced with economic ruin a distressed orchardist pulled up all the fruit trees he would have harvested, then committed suicide.

The world is entering a period in which the population is rising but food production could suffer because of the impact of climate change, pollution and loss of arable soil and fresh water supplies. Yet the government is quite willing to see the last major fruit canning facility in Australia cease operation.

The development of secondary industry is of primary national importance. Tony Abbott is right in saying that the focus of secondary industry should be on high technology products. However, he and his government don't seem to think this applies to the auto industry.

In fact, that industry is on the point of tremendous change, because of the global reduction in oil supplies and the necessity for a reduction in



The government appears to see the crisis in the food canning and auto industries merely in terms of the opportunity it offers the government to force Australian workers to accept reduced pay and work entitlements.

the rate of carbon emissions. Those factors constitute tremendous problems. However, they also hold the potential to not only save the Australian auto industry, but to radically improve its trading position.

The right way to go

The government should take steps to protect the auto and canning industries from the competitive trade advantages offered by other nations, by limiting the amount of canned and fresh food products that can be imported, re-imposing quarantine restrictions on imported food, and imposing tariffs on imported cars equivalent to the import tariffs imposed in the country of origin.

It should also offer to bail out SPC Ardmona and the auto companies, but only under the condition that the government becomes a major shareholder, with any benefits going to the Australian taxpayer, and with

the industries undertaking to utilise high technology and produce low or zero carbon emissions in the course of production.

The government should also stipulate that the auto industry must produce a given minimum proportion of electric vehicles each year, as the Californian state government did in 1992.

That would assist the nation to exceed its carbon emission targets. However, it would also place Australia in the forefront of quality vehicle production, because electric vehicles enjoy significant advantages over petrol-driven vehicles, including much lower maintenance requirements, lower running costs and "green" credentials.

The booming US electric vehicle company Tessler intends to install solar-powered recharging stations on major highways and to recharge cars carrying its logo free of charge.

That has tremendous implications for Australia, because our population is largely urban, most of our car journeys are less than 100 kilometres (well within the range of electric vehicles), and we receive far more sunshine than many other developed nations.

The government has a wonderful opportunity to save the fruit canning and auto production industries and to help the nation ride the crest of a new wave of technological change. But it won't, because Abbott and company have no national vision, they're only interested in blaming the victims of capitalism for its failings and squeezing the maximum profit out of the national workforce.

The responsibility for dealing with the current industrial crisis will only be taken up by individuals and organisations that actually believe in revolutionary change. ✪

Pete's Corner



Manus Island

As the *Guardian* went to press reports were coming in of yet another protest at Manus Island during which three people have been shot, one fatally and another in a critical condition. In all 77 people have been reported injured at the Detention Centre in Papua New Guinea. Two have been airlifted to Australia for treatment.

In press conference in Darwin Immigration Minister Scott Morrison, as usual evasive and contemptuous, at one point responded to a question by saying the GS4 private security company at the camp would be releasing a statement: a private security company is now making statements on government policy.

The government now has more blood on its hands. The illegal policy of remote and offshore indefinite and brutal detention of people seeking asylum, with its violation of international law, must become the focus of active protest as part of a growing opposition to the Abbott government's reactionary agenda more broadly.

Commission should investigate slush funds linked to LNP

The CFMEU has expressed grave concern that the narrow terms of the Royal Commission appear to exclude slush funds in the construction industry that are linked to the Liberal National Party (LNP).

National CFMEU Construction Secretary, Dave Noonan said if Tony Abbott was serious about shining a torch on slush funds, there is no reason why property developer Walton Construction and Steve Nolan Construction should be exempt from being investigated by the Royal Commission. "Both Walton Construction and Steve Nolan Construction are in need of some very bright light shone on them."

It has been reported that a property trust linked to the LNP, received \$430,000 in rent from Walton Construction last year. At the same time, the company collapsed, owing workers \$2.9 million in wages and entitlements.

Steve Nolan Construction, which Australian Electoral Commission records reveal donated \$150,000 to the LNP in New South Wales, and \$50,000 to the LNP nationally, in late 2012 and early 2013, has gone into administration, owing more than \$30 million to workers and small business owners.

"Australian Electoral Commission records reveal that the Property Trust, and its trustee Altum P/L is a Liberal National Party fundraising

organisation. Its Board includes LNP state party treasurer and Senator-elect Barry O'Sullivan.

"It is clearly recorded that they received more than \$1.4 million from Walton Construction," Noonan said.

Walton Construction went into liquidation last year with debts to the tune of \$50 million. Queensland government Housing Minister, Tim Mander made a commitment to publicly examine Walton Director, Craig Walton, and to investigate the \$50 million collapse after a meeting with some very angry and distressed small business owners late last year.

This includes lost wages to workers and sub-contractors for work completed – a situation which the CFMEU deals with on a regular basis, according to Noonan.

"We currently have 200 workers in New South Wales who are owed millions of dollars in lost wages by Steve Nolan Construction. The workers are on the street at two different sites in Sydney protesting against the developer in an attempt to get some of the money they're owed.

"The terms of reference of the Royal Commission exclude companies in this situation, who have ripped off hundreds of workers and small businesses, from being investigated.

"We call on Mr Abbott to explain why property developers who have donated to LNP slush funds will be excluded from the Royal Commission." ✪



Protest against Santos CSG in the Pilliga

Last week 120 farmers and community members from across the NSW North West spent a morning protesting Santos coal seam gas operations in the Pilliga, travelling to the site from Bellata, Coonamble, Spring Plain, Wee Waa, Coonabarabran, Gilgandra, Gunnedah, Mullaley, Tambar Springs, Narrabri, Edgeroi and more.

The group participated in protests at the site of a coal seam gas waste water pipeline laying operation, and a blockade of the access road to a coal seam gas drill rig, disrupting Santos' activities for hours.

Two police visited the site of the protests but no arrests were made.

Tambar Springs farmer David Quince was on site and said, "It was tremendous to see the huge numbers

of farmers in the Pilliga today, turning up to demonstrate the strong and widespread local opposition to Santos coal seam gas fields spreading across the North West.

"The Santos workers abandoned the site of the coal seam gas water pipeline laying operations when they knew there were 120 locals on their way to protest. Santos should abandon their plans for the Narrabri Gas Project and any other projects all together."

Spring Plain farmer Kim Revell joined the swelling numbers, concerned about encroachment of gas-fields onto farmland and damage to the groundwater aquifers that support communities across the north west of the state.

Ms Revell said, "The water under the Pilliga, recharged in this forest, supports the entire region,

and that's why people have come from across the region and risk arrest to stop Santos from drilling into the Pilliga again.

"I'm representing my fellow Spring Plains farmers, my neighbours and family here today, who have clearly said we do not want the encroachment of coal seam gas fields onto farmlands or across our water supplies.

Edgeroi farmer Geoff O'Neill participated in his first protest in the Pilliga. "My main concern is the possible damage that coal seam gas poses to the underground water supply. If our groundwater is polluted we are in deep trouble."

The growing numbers of local community members protesting in the Pilliga comes after seven people were arrested in the Pilliga for blocking Santos' drill rig. ✪

Telstra slashes more local jobs as profits surge

Unions have slammed a Telstra plan to send another 1,000 Australian jobs, including hundreds from Sensis, overseas at the same time it announced a massive \$1.7 billion half yearly profit.

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) national president Michael Tull said: "Today's profit results confirm that Telstra workers are delivering great outcomes for the company and for its customers. However, rather than reward staff for their efforts, Telstra executives are slashing another 1,000 Australian jobs and sending work offshore.

"There is growing alarm about job losses in many sectors of the economy right now. Australians are increasingly uneasy that extremely well paid Telstra executives are being rewarded for putting thousands of mums and dads on the dole and then sending their jobs overseas.

"They are also uneasy that the federal government is doing nothing to stop this happening. Telstra has made over \$3 billion profit every year for the last five years. It remains Australia's leading telecommunications company with over 15 million mobile customers.

"This is a strong business but it needs to look after the

workforce on whom its profits are built and the Australian community whose strong support has allowed it to prosper," Mr Tull said.

According to the union, Telstra announced over 2,000 job cuts last year and based on analysis of Telstra's business plan, anticipates job cuts in 2014 to be even higher.

Tull said that the scale of job losses and offshoring in Telstra is an issue for the whole community. Around a third of Telstra work is done overseas by outsourced providers and this figure is climbing every day.

He said Telstra executives need to be accountable for the thousands of Aussies they are putting out of work.

"We need new obligations on employers like Telstra, to build the skills and increase the employment security of Australian telecommunications workers.

"And finally the government needs a plan that encourages companies like Telstra to maintain its Australian workforce. With billions of public money going to Telstra through the NBN and other government contracts, Australians expect Telstra and the government to stand up for Aussie jobs." ✪

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Fears over "one-punch" laws

Rudi Maxwell

Legal organisations in NSW are concerned that the much-publicised new "one-punch" laws will mean more Aboriginal people go to jail. The O'Farrell government recently introduced the first suite of new legislation that is supposed to deal with "coward-punch" incidents, but also includes huge increases in on-the-spot fines for offensive language, failure to comply with "move-on" directions by police and offensive behaviour.

The legislation was supported by the Labor opposition but opposed by the Greens, in the wake of a few highly-publicised violent incidents in Kings Cross and George Street in central Sydney. The government is also planning to introduce mandatory minimum sentences for assaulting police and assault occasioning bodily harm.

NSW ACT Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) chief legal officer John McKenzie told the *Koori Mail* newspaper that based on the numbers of Aboriginal clients it represents, the new laws would mean 1,000 more Aboriginal people in jail each year in NSW.

"These mandatory minimum sentences really concern us, because they put a lot of Aboriginal people in jeopardy," he said. "Anyone with any understanding of the history of assault police and Aboriginal people can just imagine what's going to happen here."

"People can be charged with assaulting police without any physical contact; for example, someone pretty drunk who takes a swing at an officer that's wildly misdirected and doesn't even go close to connecting."

"With a minimum two years in jail this has got the potential to lock up huge cohorts of Aboriginal people, and really increase frictions on the street between police and community members."

A spokesperson for NSW Indigenous Affairs Minister Victor Dominello said the government had committed to conducting a review of the amendments to the NSW Crimes Act within three years. "At that time we will be in better position to assess their impact," he said.

"Through OCHRE, the NSW government plan for Aboriginal affairs, we are improving opportunities for Aboriginal young people through initiatives which help them to build pride in their identity and culture, support Aboriginal students to stay in school and get fulfilling and sustainable jobs."

"OCHRE aims to support strong Aboriginal communities, deter criminal behaviour and keep Aboriginal young people out of juvenile detention."

The fine for failure to comply with a "move-on" direction by police has increased from \$200 to \$1,100, and for offensive language from \$150 to \$500.

In NSW, failure to pay a fine attracts penalty fees and the State Debt Recovery Office can cancel driver's licences and car registration after a three-month period.

"In remote and regional areas there are not always good relations between police and Aboriginal communities and, unfortunately, these fines are handed out fairly often to Aboriginal people, which will indirectly lead to a greater number of Aboriginal people in prison," Mr McKenzie said. "Say you get an \$1,100 fine, which you can't pay because of poverty, within 12 months that becomes \$2,000, and you have your licence suspended for non-payment."

"In regional areas where there is no viable public transport to get to a doctor, hospital, a job, or a Centrelink interview, unfortunately the reality leads many Aboriginal people to continue driving and sooner or later they get picked up and sent to jail for driving while disqualified."

"We estimate at the moment approximately 30 percent of the adult prison population is there for driving offences."

The spokesperson for Mr Dominello said that while the penalties had increased, Work and Development Orders (WDO), which allow people to clear fines through unpaid work, educational courses or treatment, would continue.

"People experiencing homelessness, financial hardship, and/or serious addictions to drugs and alcohol can apply for a WDO with the



support of an approved organisation or health practitioner," he said.

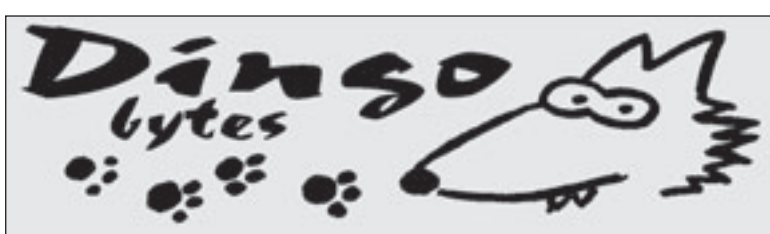
"These are made by the State Debt Recovery Office, and Legal Aid NSW works with eligible Aboriginal people to ensure they are aware of the benefits of WDOs."

Mr McKenzie said Aboriginal people in NSW already made up 25 percent of the prison population. "But that doesn't make one big headline like eight years for one punch," he said. "I understand the public outrage about people dying. The reality is tragic, but it is very rare."

"But to make laws on the basis that 'this cleans the streets up', because of issues in Kings Cross and George Street, does not give a proper basis for laws in this state, and Aboriginal people in the bush will wear the detrimental effects."

The NSW Bar Association, Law Society and former Director of Public Prosecutions Nicholas Cowdery have all condemned mandatory sentencing as non-effective as a deterrent and is a recipe for injustice.

Koori Mail ☘



Public health and consumer groups are furious over the decision to take down the government website on new healthy food ratings the day after it was launched. It took two years to develop and no time at all to ditch. Obesity is being treated as a real danger to people's health and a real burden on the health purse. You would expect any government to be interested in preventing obesity and other disorders caused by inappropriate or wrong diets. You would also expect Assistant Health Minister Fiona Nash to be promoting healthier habits through reliable information. Not so. The junk food industry was there in force to undermine the efforts to let consumers know which products are better for them. Both Ms Nash and her chief of staff, Alastair Furnival, personally intervened to insist health department staff pull down the health star rating site. Mr Furnival used to be a chairman of Australian Public Affairs, listed on the lobbyists' register as representing the Australian Beverages Council and Mondelez Australia, which owns Kraft, Cadbury, Oreo brands and others. His wife is sole director and secretary of the company.

Human rights activists have called the latest Immigration Department's campaign distasteful and slammed it for stressing severe health risks of off-shore detentions centres. Asylum seekers were warned off making the journey by boat -- because of the dangers of mosquito bites. A comic strip on Customs' site warns of dangers of travelling overseas, showing an Afghan man being attacked by mosquitoes in a detention centre. There were four recorded cases of malaria on Manus Island -- one asylum seeker and three employees were infected with malaria there. If you follow the government's logic, then the government should not be sending people into mosquito infested areas.

In the bad old days the bosses had supervisors with whips -- to increase the productivity of slaves, as it were. Nowadays we are more "civilised". Electronics manufacturer Hitachi has produced a high-tech ID badge that not only tracks an employee's exact location within the office, but also keeps a record of all other staff members they have spoken to, for how long and how energetically! They called the device the Business Microscope. It sends information on how much time an employee spends in his/her seat and even records how much time is spent in the toilet. Hitachi said the technology was designed to boost efficiency levels in the workplace and help employers realise and react to problems that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. It used to be called spying on workers.

Naphthine's glass jaw brings on an iron fist

Luke Hilakari

Quietly, quietly, in the weeks before Christmas last year the Naphthine government in Victoria introduced a Bill to stop our right to freely protest. The proposed amendments to the Summary Offences Act undo more than a century of consensus that the right to protest, while sometimes inconvenient for governments, is a cornerstone of participatory democracy.

The Victorian Premier's changes will mean that workers picketing in an industrial dispute or protesters making a statement, can now be "Moved On" by police.

The Victorian union movement is a peaceful movement, which has a strong professional relationship with police. By extending the "Move On" laws, Premier Denis Naphthine is trying to make

the police a political instrument, where they will be pressured to take action against issues that frustrate governments.

Right now in Victoria, paramedics are bravely standing up for the safety of the community in their EBA negotiations. Do we really want a situation where our police are forced to confront their friends and colleagues and silence their call for better services?

Draconian penalties

These new laws are supported by draconian penalties like a \$720 fine for breaching a move on order. If an activist stands their ground and refuse to move on, they can be subject to a 12-month Exclusion Order. Contravention of an Exclusion Order is punishable by a custodial sentence of up to two years.

To put that in perspective, that sentence is equivalent to breaking

out of prison and certain sex crimes. That's how threatened Denis Naphthine feels about Victorians having free speech.

These move on laws apply not just to an individual but may apply to groups, like an entire workforce, a union or a community organisation. The new powers also allow police to pre-emptively exercise their powers if there is a reasonable suspicion that a protest may obstruct or impede people. These powers are designed to silence movements before any action has occurred.

History is strewn with examples of brave activists standing up for their values, often under threat of persecution. And that threat will be made real in Victoria.

We may have expected that in 2014, in Victoria, our right to peaceful assembly and protest was safe. It is not and we must not stand for it. *Working Life* ☘

Beijing's rising star in Central America

Mahdi Darius Nazemroava

The Salvadorian corruption scandal involving Francisco Flores, who was president of El Salvador from 1999 until 2004, has opened the door for the diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China by the next government in San Salvador, which the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) failed to ascertain under the term of President Mauricio Funes. The graft involving Flores has created the appropriate political opportunity for El Salvador's FMLN to formally cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan (formally known as the Republic of China), if an FMLN president is elected in March 2014.

This diplomatic question additionally exposes the behind the scenes coordination that is taking place between Beijing and Taipei. This paints a picture of a cordial path towards Chinese unification between Taiwan and mainland China and not one of rivalry. Neither Beijing nor Taipei has put major obstacles in the other's way, recognising that ultimately there will be one China.

The Salvadorian oligarchy

Francisco Flores was president of El Salvador when the Nationalist Republican Alliance, most commonly called by its Spanish acronym ARENA, was ruling the Central American republic. He is a member of the corrupt US-aligned Salvadorian oligarchy that cheapened El Salvador by reducing it to the de facto status of a US colony by following orders from Washington, DC. Exemplifying this relationship, it was under the presidential term of Flores that El Salvador would send hundreds of troops to help the United States and the United Kingdom during their illegal occupation of Iraq.

The Salvadorian oligarchy has for all purposes operated as a comprador elite class, which means that they have ultimately served as the local representatives or managers of foreign corporations, governments, and interests. In this case the Salvadorian oligarchy has acted collectively as a comprador elite class serving the elites of the United States, which themselves are more precisely described as parasitic elites due to the fact that they have siphoned off most the local wealth and resources of the countries they have subverted to their influence. Historically, these US elites penetrated the power structures and hierarchies of Latin America once the influence of the original Spaniard parasitic elites at the top of the economic hierarchy in the Western Hemisphere was eroded. Many Latin American countries even had a US official or minister overseeing their government and daily affairs.

Under Flores and ARENA, El Salvador lost its monetary sovereignty. The colon, El Salvador's national currency, was removed by order of Flores and his ARENA government. They replaced the colon with the US dollar as the official currency of El Salvador. Thus, El Salvador joined the ranks of the various territories of the US, East Timor, Panama, and Ecuador as a place where the US dollar is official currency.

Under ARENA's rule numerous unfair private business monopolies were established by law for ARENA members and supporters. It was illegal and next to impossible to buy medication from anyone except Alfredo Cristiani, the oligarch who was the ARENA president of El Salvador prior to Armando Calderón Sol and later Funes. Cristiani not only initiated the neoliberal economic restructuring of El Salvador, but also used his private monopoly on medication to always overcharge users and to even sell expired medication with impunity. It was the same with fertiliser and other agricultural products too, which were placed under Cristiani's private monopoly. The ARENA government would allow no competition whatsoever. Moreover, Cristiani privatised the Salvadorian banking system letting his family use Cuscatlan Bank, which is now owned by Citibank, to expand their influence across Central America.

Albeit political corruption still lingers in El Salvador, the criminal basis of the previous

ARENA governments is explicitly acknowledged by the reports and files of their own police administrations. Police intelligence files testify that every president, justice minister, and police director was tied to organised crime until the FMLN took over the government in San Salvador. Moreover, Alfredo Cristiani, the sweetheart of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, is widely recognised as the father of organised crime in El Salvador.

The authors of the Salvadorian Option

Before ARENA was officially formed, these oligarchs used the Salvadorian military and police to wage a vicious war, with the outright involvement of the US government and Pentagon, against El Salvador's Indigenous people, peasants, poor, intellectuals, unions, Roman Catholic Church, and anyone demanding democracy and equal rights. The brutal repression and consequential civil war in El Salvador was part of the Salvadorian oligarchy's efforts to maintain control over Salvadorian society.

It was under the rule of these oligarchs that the infamous Salvador Option was spawned by US-aligned death squads that would exterminate whole villages in slow, cruel, and grotesque ways. Ice picks would be used to stab out eyes and deform faces while limbs would be systematically torn by horses or vehicles. The murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in San Salvador, who was killed while giving a mass, is one of their most well-known acts. The man behind Romero's murder, Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, would become the founder of ARENA.

The murder of Archbishop Romero, however, was merely one of the many atrocities that these oligarchs committed with Washington's full knowledge, support, and involvement. Salvadorian military leaders were trained by the infamous School of the Americas and by the Pentagon and many of the torture and murder techniques that the death squads had used were taught to them by the US military. Moreover, countless Salvadorian guerrilla fighters remember fighting US troops and hearing US orders on the radios to bomb the jungle and villages of El Salvador in English or Spanish.

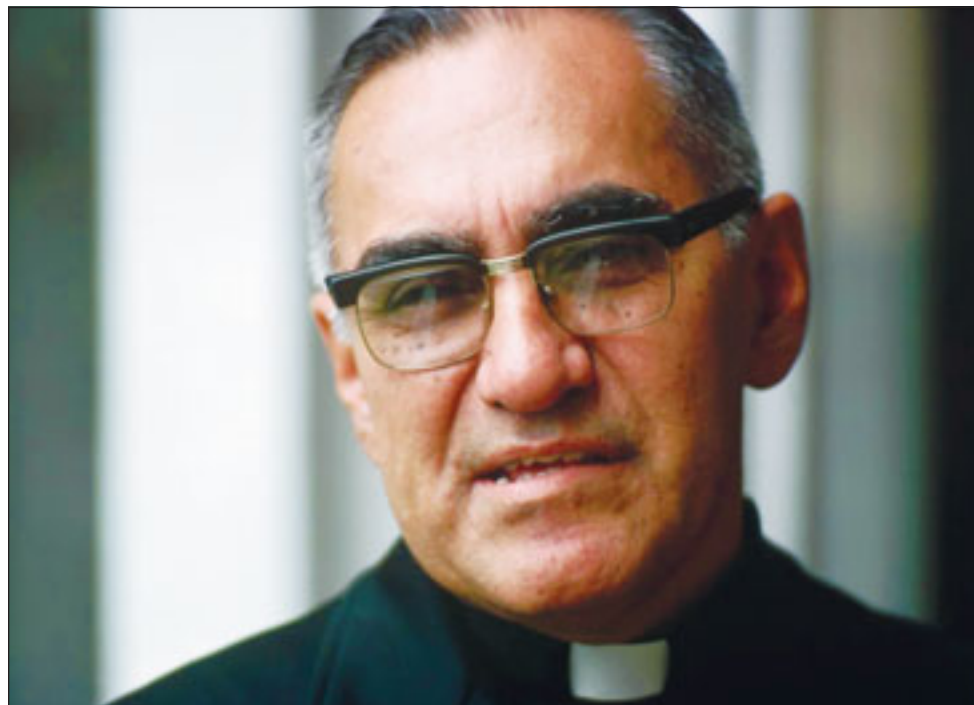
Almost all of El Salvador's Indigenous population would be exterminated by these oligarchs. Entire families would be murdered while their properties would be plundered or destroyed. Not even children and animals would be spared. Both rape and the desecration of graves would be systematic and common practices.

One of the worst massacres was committed on December 11, 1981. This massacre took place in the village of El Mozote in the Department of Morazan. Eight hundred unarmed civilians, including children, were systematically tortured, humiliated, raped, and killed by a US-trained special operations unit.

Washington would send people like James Steele and John Negroponte to Anglo-American occupied Iraq to recreate the reign of terror that the US helped author in El Salvador. The exact same patterns and tactics of murder and torture would emerge in occupied Iraq, exposing the US as the source behind the death squads in both El Salvador and Anglo-American occupied Iraq.

Taiwanese bribery?

While the National Assembly or Legislative Assembly of El Salvador was conducting an investigation on past corruption it discovered that US\$10 million had personally gone to the bank account of Francisco Flores. When Flores was questioned by the National Assembly about the large amount of money, he responded by saying that the money had come from the Taiwanese government and that he had actually taken more than US\$10 million from Taiwan. It was after this that Flores tried to flee El Salvador or tried to make it look like he had fled. Flores did this after he was ordered



The murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero (pictured), the head of the Roman Catholic Church in San Salvador, was merely one of the many atrocities that the oligarchs committed with Washington's full knowledge, support, and involvement.

to reappear in front of the National Assembly again on the eve of the first round the 2014 Salvadorian presidential elections.

The funds that Francisco Flores had taken were actually part of a set of secret payments being made by Taiwan annually. Taiwan has very close ties to El Salvador and Central America. Aside from the US-sponsored states of Latin America, the Taiwanese government also joined the US and Israel to support the oligarchs in El Salvador against the FMLN during the Salvadorian Civil War.

The secret payments made by Taiwan to Flores were originally established to prevent El Salvador from recognising the government in Beijing as the legitimate government of China. While the payments may have originally been anti-Beijing or a Taiwanese award for the recognition of Taiwan instead of the government in mainland China, they appear to have been sustained with less and less anti-Beijing sentiments. The continued Taiwanese payments were maintained to sustain advantageous treatment of Taiwanese business interests and to win economic concessions in El Salvador, including a monopoly over the Salvadorian geothermal sector that is completely owned by Taiwan.

It is also worth noting that the Salvadorian government and Taipei have been exchanging information over the corruption scandal. This is in part due to the fact that Chen Shui-bian was the Taiwanese president whose government sent Flores the funds. Shui-bian and his wife are now in jail due to corruption convictions in Taiwan and there is probably a parallel probe in Taipei examining the role of Shui-bian and his associates.

China's rising star

The People's Republic of China is an increasingly important player in Latin America. One important project that involves China is the creation of a mega canal connecting the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean, like a second Panama Canal. This second Panama Canal, however, will be based in Nicaragua and called the Great Canal of Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan government even signed an agreement in 2012 with a freshly formed Hong Kong-based company, called the Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Company Limited, run by a Chinese telecommunications business magnate for attracting international investments for building the canal. The project is due to start in a matter of months.

When the FMLN had Mauricio Funes elected as president, they had him immediately establish diplomatic relations with Cuba when he was inaugurated on June 1, 2009. The previous ARENA government refused to have ties with Havana and was helping the US

blockade of Cuba and to oppose Venezuela and its regional allies. The FMLN additionally established diplomatic relations with Vietnam, Cambodia, and Russia. They failed to do so, however, with the People's Republic of China due to multiple factors.

The failure to recognise Beijing was due to opposition by President Funes, who is now the outgoing president of El Salvador. Mauricio Funes, a former CNN employee and popular local broadcaster, was merely endorsed by the FMLN. Funes is not a member of the FMLN as some outside of El Salvador assume. Under the agreement that Funes had with the FMLN, the portfolios of the Salvadorian cabinet were divided between the FMLN and non-FMLN individuals (popularly called the "Friends of Funes") selected by President Funes. Under this power sharing agreement, Funes would control strategic issues, national economics, and the secretariat for political reforms while the FMLN would manage the portfolios responsible for healthcare, education, and security. It was under this framework that Funes was able to stall recognition of the People's Republic of China and to hinder the economic and political reforms that the FMLN wanted.

By the time that the Salvadorian government did reach out to officials in Beijing, the Chinese government was cool to the idea of establishing diplomatic ties. This was most probably because of the delay, which the Chinese government could have viewed as an insult to Beijing's dignity. Although the FMLN as a political party has direct links to the People's Republic of China through the FMLN's international affairs office and has delegations invited to Beijing, the FMLN will look at ways to establishing formal diplomatic ties with Beijing when the FMLN wins the 2014 presidential elections in the second round of voting in March. In this context, a second FMLN presidential term provides the opportunity for the FMLN to rectify the mistake and recognise Beijing quickly under a new chapter when Vice-President Salvador Sanchez becomes El Salvador's next president.

The Salvadorian government and the FMLN have made it clear to Taiwan that El Salvador ultimately intends to recognise Beijing as the legitimate government of China. What is interesting to note is that there has been no opposition from Taiwan against this decision. Nor will the severing of diplomatic ties between San Salvador and Taipei end Taiwan's trade ties with El Salvador. There is even some type of silent coordination between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China in regards to this trajectory that falls into the framework of Chinese unification.

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Why are women still carrying the burden of rape?

Lydia James

Ages after women cast aside their chastity belts, locking up genitalia is back in fashion. US company AR Wear has launched “anti-rape underwear” that is advertised with the tagline: “A clothing line offering wearable protection for when things go wrong.”

Promoted using language not dissimilar to slogans advertising tampons or incontinence pads, this product is the latest in a long and embarrassing line of gimmicks including hairy stockings and female condoms with hooks geared at “protecting” women from rape.

AR Wear considers sexual assault in narrow terms. The product will not prevent some types of rape. And anti-rape underwear is something of a paradox. If an attacker has violated a person to the extent that they have removed their clothing – even if the underwear helps avoid a so-called “completed” rape – it is hardly grounds for a marketing campaign. It also presumes the use of physical force.

The underwear consists of a skeletal structure with thigh and waist straps. The material cannot be cut or torn, yanked to one side or taken off and only the wearer can undo the waist lock that has 132 different combinations, randomly assigned.

The company’s page on the crowd-funding site Indiegogo assures potential buyers that “a woman or girl who is wearing one of our garments will be sending a clear message to her would-be assailant that she is *not* consenting”.

But this message equates what a woman wears with her right to be safe. It has the troubling undertone of manipulating women into carrying the burden of rape.

“Anti-rape underwear feeds into the mythology that survivors are responsible for preventing their own victimisation,” says Anu Selvam, senior legal adviser at Rape Victim Advocates. “This further deflects accountability from those who commit sexual violence, and grossly ignores the fundamental nature of sexual violence. It is a violation that usually occurs without the use of physical force, primarily relying on the violence of psychological manipulation and abuse of power.”

Suggesting that not wearing this garment may cause confusion around consent is similar to other excuses for rape that are internalised from a young age: that wearing a short skirt, getting drunk or going to a party alone somehow makes a violation less clear and the victim more responsible. Victim blame is not only morally reprehensible, it doesn’t work. If it did, sexual violence would not be at epidemic proportions. Instead, one in three women worldwide is beaten or sexually assaulted

by an intimate partner or by a non-partner in their lifetime.

While women are disproportionately victims of sexual violence, AR Wear has come under fire for using a young, white, slim and physically mobile woman to model the product.

In the commercial, the narrator, another young and attractive white woman, asks: “Have you ever been out walking at night, wishing you could feel safer?” Yet far from a stranger lurking in a dark alleyway, most victims know their attackers. Lockable underwear would be unlikely to help in these situations. According to the Ministry of Justice in England and Wales, “90 percent of victims of the most serious sexual offences (rape) in 2011/12 knew the perpetrator”. In the US, over half of all rapes are committed at the victim’s home and one in ten at the home of a friend, neighbour or relative.

It is vital not to ignore or undermine the experiences of those who are raped by a stranger, but it must not be seen as the only narrative.

Maintaining the stereotype of a depraved and unknown rapist “stops the conversation at ‘rape is wrong’,” says the activist collaboration FORCE: Upsetting Rape Culture. “Categorising rapists as awful people [who are] separate from us puts a neat ribbon on the whole rape-discussion bundle so that we can collectively avoid the more uncomfortable topic, which is: what in our culture and what in ourselves creates this epidemic of sex as violence?”

While the makers of the anti-rape underwear (both of whom are survivors of sexual assault) no doubt have sincere intentions, the company is crowd-funded and profit-making. It has raised over US\$55,000 – and counting – through donations on Indiegogo for start-up costs. In return, supporters are offered a small discount off the US\$50-\$60 underwear once it becomes available. Should the estimated July 2014 release date be delayed or cancelled, there is no requirement stipulated by Indiegogo to give donors their money back.

The company has an ethical responsibility to its supporters particularly because of the emotional and personal investment many have made; yet both its message and product perpetuates rape culture instead of confronting it and, in targeting potential victims of sexual violence, it normalises the crime.

But there are ways we can counter the culture that seeks to maintain the status quo. Talking about rape using cultural and community platforms like One Billion Rising, empowering women, and men too, by being frank about individual boundaries and consent, and most of all, challenging the patriarchy that lies at the core of violence against women.

New Internationalist ✚



Both the company’s message and its product perpetuates rape culture instead of confronting it and, in targeting potential victims of sexual violence, it normalises the crime.

The great Monsanto food prize fiasco

Mark Engler

Some controversy erupted in my home state of Iowa in recent months over the World Food Prize. The award, which fancies itself an agricultural Nobel and comes with US\$250,000 in cash, aims to recognise those who have helped to improve the global food system.

This year the Prize went to ... prepare yourself ... Monsanto.

Technically speaking, the Prize was shared by three scientists who have been leaders in genetically engineering crops. One of them, Robert T Fraley, is Monsanto’s chief technology officer. Another was an executive at biotech giant Syngenta.

This isn’t the first sign that something is amiss with the Food Prize. With its headquarters in Des Moines, Iowa’s capital, the award has become a source of local pride. Yet, from its origins, it has been linked to a model of industrial agribusiness that has driven countless farm families off the land – in America’s Midwest and beyond.

The World Food Prize was founded in

1986 by Norman Borlaug, the Iowa-bred Nobel peace laureate who is considered the godfather of the “Green Revolution”. According to the conventional narrative, this revolution saved millions of people in the Global South from starvation through the introduction of high-yield seeds, petrochemical fertilisers, and synthetic pesticides.

Overall yields have indeed increased. Yet famine and hunger persist as small farmers have been marginalised, local food systems disrupted, and social inequalities exacerbated. In truth, crop yields aren’t the primary issue. We produce enough food to feed the world. But poverty and socio-economic disparities prevent food from getting into the hands of the hungry. The increased dependence on agribusiness corporations brought by the Green Revolution has only worsened those problems.

Between its major donors and featured speakers, the World Food Prize has cozied up with many of the biggest brands in industrial agriculture, including Cargill, ADM and Nestlé. In 2008, Monsanto itself made a US\$5-million contribution, spawning accusations that it bought its award.

The Food Prize’s leadership insists that an independent committee, isolated from the organisation’s fundraising, makes award decisions. Nevertheless, the apparent conflict of interest gave the prize an incestuous air that could be smelled even over the state’s notoriously noxious, mass-confinement hog lots – facilities which have proliferated in Iowa thanks to Big Ag’s influence over local government.

Whether or not you think genetically modified crops could some day have a role in sustainable agriculture, Monsanto’s abuses of corporate power deserve condemnation. Des Moines’ most courageous local columnist, Rekha Basu, took the Food Prize to task, criticising Monsanto’s “iron-fisted policies and aggressive lawsuits for patent infringement”.

“Even as organic farmers in the US find their crops threatened by cross-pollination from genetically modified seeds, which compromises their ability to sell them,” Basu wrote, “Monsanto sues farmers to whom that happens for using its seeds without paying.”

Such criticisms were echoed in international Millions Against Monsanto

demonstrations held in more than 400 cities last October 12, the weekend before the Food Prize ceremony. Later that week, Iowan community groups and family farm advocates were joined in protests by two Haitians, Rosnel Jean-Baptiste and Rose Edith Germain, representatives of organisations that had just won the Food Sovereignty Prize.

Created in 2009 as an alternative to the World Food Prize, the Sovereignty Prize rejects the profit-driven model of corporate agriculture. It instead honours groups that recognise issues of power, such as land reform and women’s rights, as keys to ending hunger. This year the award went to four prominent peasant organisations in Haiti. United as the Group of 4/Dessalines Brigade, these groups have worked to rebuild Haitian agriculture in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, advocate for small farmers, and save Creole seeds.

Of course, Iowan organisers don’t expect efforts like these to be celebrated by the World Food Prize any time soon. They have started planning protests in Des Moines.

New Internationalist ✚

Weathering the floods in England

Peter Frost

LONDON: At long last the army has arrived on the Somerset Levels (a coastal area in South West England) where floodwaters have been disrupting normal life since just after Christmas.

The army is using amphibious vehicles to deliver sandbags, fuel, food, and water to villages like Muchelney and Thorney that have been cut off for weeks with access only by small boat.

The army is also transporting local people to check on long-flooded and deserted remote farms, villages and isolated dwellings. Now the army vehicles will also give some reassurance to older residents who fear a medical emergency and the impossibility of getting a doctor or to hospital.

Local residents are, of course, delighted with the arrival of the troops.

But they are angry with just how long it has taken for Prime Minister David Cameron, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and Environment Minister Owen Paterson to pay any attention to the month-old floods.

Patterson finally showed himself in the Levels last week, just after the delivery of some shiny new pumps. The pumps made a good background to the TV shots.

The visit was also just after the local Tory-controlled Somerset County Council embarrassed the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government by declaring the floods a "major incident" and a state of emergency.

On his visit the minister was visibly shocked by the anger from locals against the government's lack of assistance, or indeed interest. Paterson and Cameron hurriedly promised help from the army and some dredging of the rivers Parrett and Tone, but have made no suggestions as to where the US\$6.7 million cost of such dredging might come from.

Nor have they said anything about the planned cuts to the Environment Agency announced just as the floods started. On January 3, as

some of the worst floods for 20 years hit the Somerset Levels, Paterson announced that 1,500 more jobs, many of them flood-related, would be cut at the agency.

Why have we had so much flooding?

Well, Henley on Thames Ukip councillor Davis Silvester, a defector from the Tory Party, has a simple explanation. He has said gay marriage is to blame. God sent the rain to punish us.

Just as silly are the likes of Jeremy Clarkson and others who deny climate change, or the group who are claiming it is all God's great plan and are raising funds to build a new ark. Such theories may not convince, but it's true that one obvious reason for floods is that we have had so much rain.

In much of England this January's rainfall has been the highest for a century, over twice the monthly average. Add to that new patterns of rainfall, the result of climate change, that have seen heavy storms delivering as much as 50mm of rain in an hour.

The last natural phenomena are the number of strong winds and tidal conditions that have caused coastal flooding of low-lying coastal regions and backed up rivers.

Much more important is the way we have let greed and the relentless grasping for profit change the landscape we live in. Intensive farming and land use has resulted in a dramatic decrease in floodplains near rivers. The increase of farmland drainage, paid for by government subsidies, means rain is no longer absorbed into the ground but speedily drains straight into the rivers.

The building of flood defences doesn't always help – they can sometimes simply move any flooding downstream. Another factor is the growing body of property developers who can't see a patch of green-belt or other green-field site without the desire to build a housing estate, car-park, retail shops or warehouse sheds.

They also play a key and disastrous part in the floods.



Somerset Levels (a coastal area in South West England) – in much of England this January's rainfall has been the highest for a century, over twice the monthly average.

Many of these developments have been built directly on existing floodplains, prompting demand for these areas too to be defended from inevitable flooding – a vicious circle.

All these building developments have hard surfaces which shed rain into the elaborate, and expensive network of drains that run directly into rivers and water-courses.

Loss of forests has played its part too. Hill farmers have been paid to rip out woodlands high in the mountains. Those trees once absorbed rain.

Now it gushes down the bare mountainsides leading to the flooding we have seen along the lower reaches of rivers like the Severn. The Environment Agency grades the risk of flooding in categories such as "a one in a 100 years" risk. The problem is that such floods have actually arrived three times in the last 10 years.

The village of Muchelney, for instance, was cut off by floods for many weeks at the same time last

year. Floods on Britain's east coast and in our eastern counties are often reflected in similar events in the Netherlands on the other side of the North Sea.

That was certainly the case in the terrible events of 1953.

Nor should we forget that it was Dutch engineers like Cornelius Vermuyden who in 1650 started a project to drain the English fens. Vermuyden's works for Oliver Cromwell and the Duke of Bedford involved dredging and straightening rivers, cutting new drains and building washes.

Washes were huge, low-lying areas that could be flooded deliberately to protect more vulnerable areas downstream. Four centuries on, Vermuyden's Ouse Washes still flood every winter in a controlled way and are slowly emptied into the eastern rivers that flow into the Wash.

Today in Holland at national parks like the Biesbosch near

Dortrecht the Dutch are using similar techniques.

They have stopped intensive farming on floodplains of the Rhine and created giant natural wetlands which soak up floodwater like a vast sponge or allow it to flood low-lying wild marsh without damage or threat to life or buildings.

Much of the control and maintenance of these wetlands and rivers is being done naturally using wild horses or ponies and by reintroducing beavers.

Beavers can and do dramatically change the landscape.

The beavers create and maintain ponds and wetlands that increase biodiversity, purify water and prevent large-scale flooding. More than 20 countries have already reintroduced beavers. Their dams improve water quality, produce new habitats for fish and help reduce flooding downstream.

Morning Star ✪

Flower industry exploits Colombian and Kenyan workers

Paddy McGuffin

Valentine's Day is the most lucrative date in the flower retailers' calendar yet workers in developing countries are risking their health and toiling for a pittance supplying British supermarkets. Bouquets are sold for vastly inflated prices but research by anti-poverty charity War on Want has found the mainly female workforce in Colombia and Kenya supplying those flowers continues to slave for as little as half the living wage.

Workers also suffer problems such as disabling repetitive strain injuries and miscarriages through exposure toxic to pesticides, the charity said. Supermarkets sell around 70 percent of all the flowers bought in Britain – the highest proportion in Europe.

While many British firms have adopted voluntary standards for their suppliers, these are still failing to protect the health and safety of workers or ensure basic workers' rights. War on Want believes government regulation is necessary to introduce binding legislation to hold companies to account for the impacts in their supply chains.

It argues that workers supplying multinational companies in Britain should have the right to redress in this country and the ability to seek compensation for damage to their health or loss of earnings as the result of actions of British companies and their suppliers.

The charity is calling for the establishment of a supermarket watchdog to tackle abuses by British firms and their suppliers.

War on Want spokesman Paul Collins said: "Millions of people

buying Valentine's Day roses for their loved ones will be shocked to learn that many workers supplying them face poor pay and conditions.

"It is nothing less than a disgrace that company bosses are piling up profits while Kenyans on flower farms struggle to feed themselves and their families, and live in slum housing. British corporate leaders must ensure a living wage and decent conditions for them."

Mr Collins added that with London Fashion week due, "we urge shoppers not only to press retailers on flower workers' treatment, but on the need to guarantee a living wage and good, safe conditions for those who make our clothes or supply fruit, tea and wine sold in UK stores."

Morning Star ✪



Sir David Attenborough: Enough with the creationists and climate change deniers!

Nico Hines

Sir David Attenborough is one of the great naturalists of our time, celebrated for decades of peerless documentary making, an infectious love of the animal kingdom and that distinctive and enthusiastic whisper. Once criticised by campaigners for his reticence to address contentious issues, Attenborough is no longer willing to speak in hushed tones.

Sitting opposite the kangaroo enclosure at London Zoo, he told *The Daily Beast* he had lost patience with the “ignorance” of creationists, polluters, and climate change deniers. “To simply say that you must accept unquestioningly what you learned at your mother’s knee is not the act of an intelligent person,” he said.

It was a rare flash of frustration from a man who has spent more than 60 years in the public eye. He now walks with the aid of a stick but thanks his “lucky stars” that he is still making wildlife documentaries at the age of 87. As I arrived to meet him, he was describing to a former colleague how a cameraman had recently asked him to look directly into the lens while filming a segment instead of turning to face the creature that he was holding in his outstretched left hand. “How could I be so disrespectful?” he said. “No one wants to look at me.”

But we have been happily looking at him since the 1950s. In the US Attenborough is perhaps best known for the *Life on Earth* series that was broadcast on PBS in the 1980s, on the other side of the Atlantic he is an institution, recently winning a BBC poll to find the greatest living British icon. His work has often been diluted for an American audience, with his masterful narrations for *Planet Earth* and *Life* re-recorded by Alec Baldwin and Oprah Winfrey before they were broadcast on the Discovery channel.

There have also been accusations that the US network sought to downplay climate change in the shows.

In fact, Attenborough says he has finally grown sick of America’s attitude to climate change. “I think it’s very sad that people won’t accept evidence for what it says – it’s extraordinary that one of the wealthiest, materially advanced societies in the world can support irrational myths in that way,” he said. “That they should do it privately is up to them but since what they do affects that whole world it’s pretty serious that they should not accept that humanity has been responsible for these changes that are absolutely evident to everyone else.”

You could hardly describe the response as knee-jerk since Attenborough has made a career of resisting controversy, often describing himself as “a reporter” with no views of his own. He does also have sympathy for those who resist the prevailing science on climate change. “There are very good reasons why people should not wish to accept it, because it interferes with their business,” he said. “I would much prefer it wasn’t true – but it is true and unless we can do something about it we are going to be in trouble.”

He has less time for those who deny the existence of evolution, however. “Every society in the world has found it necessary to produce a story to account for the fact that humanity is on earth,” he said. “The Australian Aboriginals think that the first humans were regurgitated by a great rainbow serpent in the sky, the people in Thailand think the beginning of the world was a huge pool of milk and a snake was pulled by demons, and the milk coagulated and that formed human beings and there was a time, two and a half to three thousand years ago, when people on the east end of the Mediterranean thought woman was made from the rib of the first man.



Sir David Attenborough: “If somebody says to me I believe every word of the Bible is true, you can’t argue against that degree of irrationality ...”

“If somebody says to me I believe every word of the Bible is true, you can’t argue against that degree of irrationality ... there is actually a way of looking at the natural world and seeing the evidence and it’s all there. And what’s more it’s the same evidence whether it’s in Australia or Northern Europe or wherever. It’s all the same – it all produces the same answer and you can all see the evidence – if you reject that then there’s nothing I can say.”

Attenborough and his fellow naturalists have been demonstrating the science behind evolution and the fossils that show the development of animal species for decades, and yet recent years have seen an uptick in the number of Americans who

believe God put humans directly on earth. One suggested explanation has been the surge of unchecked disinformation available online.

“Never before in history has the entire world been able to speak to one another. We are at the beginning of an extraordinary evolution as a species – one species is able to communicate instantly with every member,” Attenborough said. “I’m not so cynical as to think that ignorance will always win.”

Far from cynical, Attenborough’s eyes still glint with a boyish enthusiasm when he returns to the latest discoveries about the natural world. “We found a scientist in Bristol who discovered that plant roots not only make subsonic sounds when they go down but other roots hear them and

react,” he explained, with hands recreating the subterranean movement. “What happens is that the root goes down and *this* root will grow in an opposite direction. The mechanism nobody had known before. It’s completely new!”

With his 90th birthday on the horizon, he says he has no plans to give up making documentaries. “It isn’t because I exercise, or diet, or live a virtuous life or something, it’s just that fortunately my legs still work, they don’t work as well as they did, but they can get me around,” he said. “That I should be invited to keep doing it is just a huge delight and privilege, and I propose to take advantage of it.”

Daily Beast ☘

Venezuela

Fascists turn to violence on streets

Armed motorcyclists launched an attack on a confrontation between anti-government demonstrators and police in the Venezuelan capital Caracas on Wednesday, setting off a stampede by firing into the crowd.

Two people were killed in the attack, which President Nicolas Maduro blamed squarely on fascist groups conspiring to overthrow his government.

He said he had ordered security forces to protect major cities and block any actions to destabilise the country. “Whoever goes out to provoke violence without a permit to demonstrate will be detained,” Maduro said.

The two dead were anti-government student protester Bassil Da Costa and the leader of the pro-government January 23 Collective. National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello said the “revolutionary” known by his nickname Juancho had been “vilely assassinated by the fascists.”

About two dozen people were injured during the clashes and were being treated at local hospitals, said human rights group Provea spokesman Inti Rodriguez.

But Maduro’s warnings showed no signs of deterring hard-line opposition leaders, who in a late-night news conference vowed to remain on the streets.

Extreme right-wingers within the opposition are conducting a campaign called La Salida – The Ousting – to remove Maduro’s democratically elected government before his mandate ends in 2019.

Opposition figures such as Leopoldo Lopez – a campaign manager for failed right-wing presidential candidate Henrique Capriles – and María Corina Machado – a signatory of the 2002 coup declaration – have called on their supporters to take to the streets to force the government out.

Morning Star ☘

MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS IN SOLIDARITY WITH CUBA, 2014



International Commission of Inquiry into the case of the Cuban Five

Date: 7-8 March, 2014

Place: The Law Society, Chancery Lane, London, UK
More information in: www.voicesforthefive.com

Third Week of Denounce and Solidarity “5 days for the Cuban5”

Date: June 4-11, 2014

Place: Washington DC, USA

More information in: www.thecuban5.org

III World Meeting of Solidarity with Cuba, “Cuba Solidarity 2014”

Date: October 27 - 31, 2014

Place: Havana, Cuba

More information in:

www.icap.cu & www.facebook.com/cubasolidaridad2014

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



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United we must stand

Over the last four months we have had a new government not fit to govern and an opposition that does not oppose while the rest of the world is coming out of greatest economic downturn since the 1930s. Australia is sliding into recession being created by our government for it seems only one reason and that is to create despair and divide the people.

We are seeing the LNP chopping and changing the rules, Hockey asked for up to \$500 billion to shore up the economy: the Greens gave in and gave it to him, the LNP now have their war chest for Work Choices Mark 2.

Australia is in a very good shape financially, but the closure of key manufacturing and manipulation from their owners, from overseas working along with those who hold the power of government, Rio Tinto mines and smelter closures, Ford, Holden all came out a lot quicker than was expected.

It has always been a capitalist dream in Australia to drive down wages and conditions, to create a pool of part time workers. This goes back as far as 1898 when it was said a meeting was held at Delegetes Stock & Station Head office in Elizabeth Street Sydney, where the Nation Farmers Union, (the forerunner to the National Farmers Federation), mine owners, shipping companies, stevedoring companies and large retail companies were present.

Banks and overseas finance companies agreed to pay union wages and conditions until workers' decided they could do without unions and when this had happened they would cut all wages by 25 percent across the board.

This was denied by all involved; they could not put this plan into effect as workers had had enough of low wages and atrocious working conditions, the war for wages

and conditions went on until 1906 when unions, Tory governments and employer groups gave in and agreed to the Arbitration Commission which lasted until 1984. It was not the best but it was better than what workers had.

Then the Hawke government talked the ACTU into accepting the prices and incomes accord. This is where workers started to be deceived into believing that their wages and conditions were the best they could ever get. Unions were forced to amalgamate.

Can anyone remember the Weipa strike in the top end in 1998 and who negotiated a settlement? Bob Hawke and Jennie George pushed individual contracts onto workers, the first of what was to come.

Unless the workers stand and fight united we stand divided

We will be back to the wages and conditions of the 1950s & '60s.

Allan Hamilton
The Riverina

A shiny jewel in the crown

The Business Council of Australia is determined to see Australia

Post and other government assets including real estate sold off as pointed out in last week's *Guardian* article "Gov't property and services: Big Business wants the lot!" Peter Mac hit the nail on the head with the headline. Australia Post is one of the shiniest jewels in the crown.

Big Business and its media mates are pushing hard for Australia Post's sale. If you could make a mint out of it why not? The much publicised \$187 million loss reported in the *Guardian* was not the overall result for the public corporation. It was the loss claimed by Australia Post for letter delivery services. Australia Post reported a net profit of almost \$312 million and paid the government a dividend of \$244 million out of that.

Who knows how that loss for letters was arrived at.

Last year my local postie, after more than 20 years as a permanent employee was being pressured to surrender his permanent position and go onto a contract. Looks like they have been preparing for the three-day a week delivery for a while.

The neo-liberal philosophy is to dump services that do not make

big bucks. They are not prepared to subsidise the less or unprofitable bits by the areas that make a killing. The neo-liberal business managers want every section of Australia Post to make a profit every year, and for that profit to increase every year.

The majority of people who will be hit by loss or decrease in letter delivery will be older, disabled or living in more remote and rural areas. Some have already seen their services diminish.

If post offices still owned the land and buildings and were not paying out large rents, then profits would be even higher.

It would be interesting to know what Australia Post has done with the money from their sale. One of the reasons private corporations prefer to rent is that their rental is tax deductible. The claim that capital is idle because they own their own premises is rubbish, it is saving them a fortune in rent.

The idea of the likes of ANZ or BHP assessing their own tax is laughable, laughable all the way to the bank for the big corporates. The sooner that mob in Parliament go the better.

M Santos
Fairfield

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Exorcising the public broadcasting demon

There are many very clever people in the United States of America – brilliant scientists, writers of great talent and imagination, extremely talented performing artists of every type, highly skilled engineers and technicians of every type. And, at the same time, something like 37 thousand gun deaths last year alone, and more loonies and purveyors of ignorance not only running around loose but commanding audiences and airtime than any sane person can conceive of.

The ABC is about to run a program called *Teen Exorcists* (ABC2 Wednesday 26 February at 8.35pm) about three teenage American girls from Scottsdale, Arizona, who have been raised to be a crack team of exorcists. Yes, exorcists. These unfortunate girls are the daughters of the Reverend Bob Larson, one of those loony American preachers who think "the Devil" is a real person, and that demonic possession is not only possible but that it happens all the time.

The Reverend Bob's delusions warrant some sort of mental health intervention but instead he is given a microphone, radio time and publicity and encouraged to "spread the word" as he and his daughters drive demons out of emotional church-goers. To do this they need special crosses (which are made for Bob by a special contractor) and which he and the girls sell at their religious "meetings" and services.

Their exorcisms also require a lot of "holy water" and a heck of a lot of yelling as they

"command" the demon to leave the person who is supposedly "possessed".

This hokum should have their audiences rolling in the aisles with laughter, but of course sensible, rational people don't go to events of that sort. Instead, the Larsons' audiences comprise that huge chunk of "Bible Belt" Americans who devoutly believe that angels and demons are real, along with wizards and sorcerers and practitioners of black magic of every description.

Don't for a moment think that this craziness is limited to Americans, however.

Brynne, Tess and Savannah Larson have been on missions to England and Ukraine, conducting spectacular public exorcisms. The inclusion of Ukraine is interesting. Since the overthrow of socialism in the USSR, representatives of every evangelical church with the money to allow it have flooded into Ukraine to "help save the people there" from their (godless, materialist) socialist past.

They have the blessing of imperialism, of course: both Germany and the USA – for their own reasons – would like to see the former breadbasket of the Soviet Union torn away from Russia's influence. In joining the EU, Ukraine would quickly become in effect a German colony. For its part, the USA would have struck a serious blow at Russia's economy and defences.

The overthrow of socialism in the USSR, an overthrow remember that did not come from below, from the people, but from above – from the highest levels of the Party and government

– left the people of the USSR leaderless and rudderless. Party leader Gorbachev didn't mind: he proudly revealed later that he had plotted for several years to "bring down" the Soviet government. That the people of the USSR didn't appreciate what he had done for them was shown by the way they spurned him in all subsequent elections.

Nevertheless, the apparent overturning of the belief in the working class and the ideology of socialism left a lot of people groping for some thing they could believe in instead. Evangelical churches in the US rushed to fill the void, especially those in the Bible Belt who had previously endeavoured to smuggle bibles into Russia when it was "Godless and Communist" (a purely propagandist activity since during Soviet times the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church published more than enough copies of the Bible from its own very prolific publishing house).

But substituting a belief in "the Devil" and demon-banishing exorcisms for their previous confidence in socialism does not seem like much of an advance for the people of Ukraine. During their visit to Britain, because they were not from a mainstream church but were from the USA's Southern Bible Belt – usually perceived as "loony" among educated people – the Larson girls copped a bit of a battering from the more perceptive of the British bourgeois media who accused them of profiteering (never!), fame seeking (surely not) and charlatanism (really?).

I doubt that any of this will have affected

them adversely: it would obviously have been the work of the Devil! The Larsons, father and daughters, are physically living in the 21st century, but mentally they are stuck somewhere in the tenth or eleventh century. They are hip as far as using all the technical benefits of modern science and electronics in particular, but their understanding of the world has fossilised sometime during the Crusades.

Not that they have the slightest awareness of this. For them, everything bad that happens is the work of the Devil, everything good is God's doing. They just keep smiling and trusting in their magic talisman, "the Power of Christ". They are so backward and ignorant it is positively painful. And yet they are surrounded by hordes of people who are just as ignorant and superstitious as they are. Where are we? In the leading capitalist country of the 21st century or in Al Capp's comic strip hillbilly village of Dogpatch? It's hard to tell.

What is really worrying about this program is that it is being run on the ABC, which has apparently abandoned its Charter completely now. You may remember, the original Charter for the ABC gave it the task (amongst other things) of raising the educational and cultural level of the Australian people. Promoting this kind of nonsense does not seem to really be living up to that Charter. But, then, these days one has to wonder if the heads of the ABC are actually concerned about doing that, or if their real brief is after all to turn it into a clone of the commercial channels? Murdoch would approve, I'm sure. ☘



These unfortunate girls are the daughters of the Reverend Bob Larson (left), one of those loony American preachers who think "the Devil" is a real person, and that demonic possession is not only possible but that it happens all the time.



Sunday February 23 –
Saturday March 1

Two hundred and twenty million years ago dinosaurs were beginning to spread over the land. But another group of reptiles was about to make an extraordinary leap: pterosaurs were taking control of the skies.

In *Flying Monsters with David Attenborough* (ABC1 Sunday, February 23, at 7.30pm), the famous television naturalist examines the modern understanding of how and why these still not very well understood creatures took to the air. The earliest were small and had solid bones, although some were covered in hair which was already evolving into feathers.

Over time, they evolved into giant creatures with hollow bones and other adaptations for flying. The largest had wingspans of up to 40 feet (equal to that of a modern day jet plane) and they soared on the thermals like modern day gliders do. They easily flew from one side of the world to the other.

The story of the evolution of the pterosaurs unfolds in stunning locations in New Mexico, on the Jurassic Coast of Lyme Regis in Britain, an ancient pterosaur landing site in Southern France and a fossil pit in Germany where near perfect pterosaur specimens have been found.

In seeking to answer the question

how and why did pterosaurs fly, Attenborough shows us a modern-day gliding lizard that might suggest how reptilian flight began at least. Surely it must have been an extraordinary sight when lizards the size of giraffes soared through prehistoric skies?

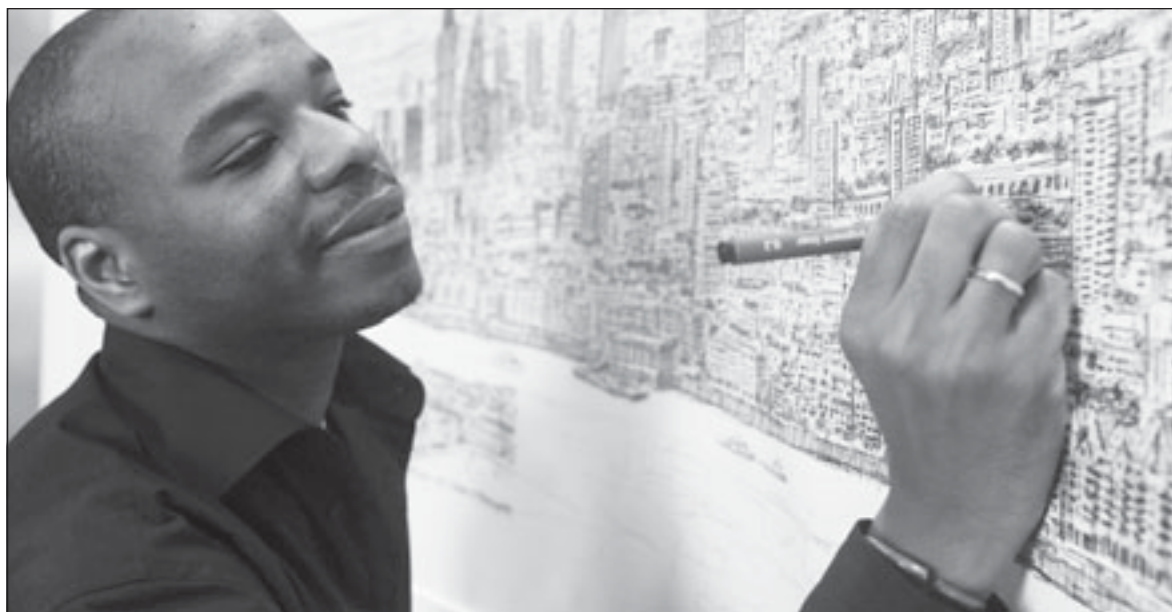
Some autistic children display remarkable artistic talent, drawing with an adult's sophistication quite unlike the primitive efforts of most young children. *The Human Camera* (ABC2 Sunday February 23 at 8.40pm) deals with one such amazing artist.

At 12 years old Stephen Wiltshire drew London's St Paul's Cathedral from memory, perfectly, without any art training. Twenty-one years later Stephen still has the ability to sketch huge urban landscapes from memory in almost photographic detail, but he is now able to etch, paint in oils, draw portraits and produce immaculate still-life pictures as well.

One of the world's most prodigious savants, Stephen has drawn many of the world's great cities such as Rome, New York and Hong Kong; yet he has never drawn, in full, the city of his birth, where he works and lives. Spending 30 minutes taking in the London skyline from a helicopter, Stephen is then provided with a 360-degree, 20 metre-wide canvas and a box of pens and pencils to sketch the view from memory, street-by-street and building for building, the largest ever panoramic view of London to be put on public display.

It is a remarkable feat, to be sure, but the program has little to say about autism itself, other than here's someone who has learned to live with it successfully.

Imagine if someone made a film of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in which every sequence was scripted and directed by a different person. This peculiar approach is just what Tim Winton chose to do in adapting his novel *The Turning* (ABC1 Sunday, February 23 at 9.30pm and on ABC ARTS Online abc.net.au/arts from 11pm).



The Human Camera (ABC2 Sunday February 23 at 8.40pm).

Seventeen Australian directors from diverse artistic disciplines each create a chapter of Winton's novel. The linking and overlapping stories explore the turning points in ordinary people's lives in a portrait of a small coastal community. It's too gimmicky for my taste, but artistic people seem to like it (seven AACTA award nominations but only one actual award – for Best Lead Actress: Rose Byrne) and it has an impressive cast that includes Cate Blanchett, Rose Byrne, Miranda Otto, Richard Roxburgh, Hugo Weaving, Callan Mulvey, Susie Porter, Harrison Gilbertson, Brenna Harding, Matt Nable, Wayne Blair, Robyn Nevin, and Dan Wyllie.

Traffic collisions are the single biggest killer of young people today in Britain (and also in Australia). In *Licence To Kill* (ABC2 Wednesday February 26 at 9.30pm), Sophie Morgan – permanently confined to a wheelchair after her own traffic accident – wants to know why.

She meets people who, like her, have seen their lives changed forever in a single instant – whether they were injured, or they were driving the

car. And she hears emotional stories of regret and recovery, and finds out what it means to be responsible for a death on the roads.

She also encounters drivers who race illegally on public roads with no thought for anyone's safety. She ends up agreeing with some of the experts: that driver training needs to be completely rethought, to make it more effective, all-rounded and professional.

The ABC's new five-part drama series *Line Of Duty* (ABC1 Fridays from 28 February at 9.30pm) is yet another cop show, this time set in a fictional police anti-corruption unit AC-12. Naturally, there's as much interpersonal drama within the unit as there is in the cases they are pursuing. In fact, the catchcry for the series is: In the pursuit of corruption, how far will they go to uncover the truth? (Oh, how I hanker for the good old days when cop shows were concerned with catching villains and the coppers' private lives were left to the soap operas!)

Line of Duty is a cat-and-mouse thriller that spreads a multi-stranded investigation over five hour-long

episodes. There are some familiar faces among the "all star" cast:

Lennie James, Martin Compston, Vicky McClure, Adrian Dunbar, Neil Morrissey and Gina McKee.

In *Culture And Life* this week I deal with a weird manifestation of the ignorance and arrogance that emanates from the USA's Bible Belt. But the ABC is also showing another example that is even weirder: *Secrets Of The Living Dolls* (ABC2 Friday, February 28 at 9.30pm).

This British-made documentary (for Channel Four) looks at the sub-culture phenomenon, the "female maskers". These are not females but men, who parade around in private fantasising about being some sexual fetishist's rubber doll. They wear doll-like facemasks and elaborate, specially-made silicon "femskins" (complete with vaginas) manufactured by a small family company in the Bible Belt of all places.

Now they are preparing to appear in public in their "doll" personas. Only in America? No, it's also in Britain. ☺

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POLITICS IN THE PUB

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;

February 27
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;

March 6
THE FAR RIGHT AGENDA OF THE ABBOTT GOVERNMENT NOW REVEALED – EG: GONSKI EDUCATION REFORMS BETRAYED; MORE PRIVATISATIONS; CUTS TO THE PUBLIC SERVICE; REGRESSIVE TAX & WELFARE CUTS; HOW TO RESPOND?
Angelo Gavrielatos, Fed. Pres. Australian Education Union;
Jenny McAllister, National Secretary, ALP;

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This Sydney newsagent regularly stocks *The Guardian*

They spur another Syria in Ukraine

Joe Cachia

"Anyone who interferes with the destiny of another thing never will discover his own."

Paulo Coelho

The fact that we have exposed the lies and exaggerations of the global elite – from Iraq's illusionary weapons of mass destruction to hysterical warnings of Syria's chemical weapons – does not count for much. The Obama administration – now an imperial presidency in serious violation of the Constitution and the will of the American people – and its partners, primarily the EU (European Union) countries, continue to push for all-out wars despite the transparent quality and facile nature of disinformation put out every few days.

A fresh new report says that the US Congress has *secretly* voted to fund the delivery of arms to Syrian opposition factions till the end of September 2014. But then comes the utmost hypocrisy!

At the Syria Geneva II Peace Conference in Switzerland, (where, of course the US takes a centre stand) the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon said: "Syrians must come together to save their country, protect their children and find a peaceful path to a better future." Mr Ban spoke of the suffering in Syria, saying: "Enough is enough. The time has come to negotiate."

And now, here we go again! This time it's Ukraine. And it's a "déjà vu" situation.

What makes Ukraine different is that US policy could *theoretically* change. For years the NATO establishment has been debating its stance towards Russia. The case for NATO enlargement largely depends on Western perceptions of Russia to begin with. These protests could be the perfect opportunity for a more assertive US in the region; as if it already hasn't been. I strongly suspect that enlargement will be on the "to do" list!

Regional influence

The US/EU bloc is in the process of chipping away at Russia's regional influence and, no doubt, as an added plus, doesn't mind gaining control over the major natural gas lines passing from Russia, through Ukraine to Europe. Besides, Ukraine could become a new borderline base for the US's "missile shield". Nothing more than a big, fat provocation to Russia!

The Euromaidan (Ukrainian: literally "Eurosquare") is a wave of ongoing demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine, which began on the night of November 21, 2013 with very large public protests demanding closer European integration.

How many times do we have to hear about "peaceful protestors seeking democratic freedoms" facing a "crackdown by their repressive government" and desperately in need of "humanitarian intervention"?

This time the protesters, definitely in the minority of not more than, perhaps, 18 percent, are calling for closer relations with the European Union – even though that entity is fast becoming an extension of NATO (Uncle Sam's version of the UN), whose purpose is to bring the planet under US domination.

What we are hearing from the US and from the EU is of course the most cynical hypocrisy. After the last few years of brutal police repressions of the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US and the anti-neo-liberal austerity dictates that have been instituted around the



The legitimate protesters in Ukraine, being tricked by the globalist propaganda into joining the EU and the banking cartel that's sucking the life out of the working class in Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and all Europe, should take heed of where they are heading and what awaits them.

EU, which brought literally tens of millions of protesters out onto the streets, they are calling against the violence in Ukraine, where the majority of the injuries for the past few days have been from the police.

And what is happening in the Ukraine is not a peaceful protest ... they are rioting and demanding regime change. The present administration was democratically elected and furthermore there is another election coming sometime next year. So the process is in place for them to peacefully make a change if they choose that path. However, a mob of less than 20 percent of the people doesn't have the right to put down what the majority voted for, just because they name it "democracy". The EU deal sucked and was rejected by the Ukrainian government. So why not let democracy rule and not rioting thugs and extremists?

However fraught its relations with its larger neighbour may be, I suspect that Ukraine does not want to be a US/EU puppet either!

Confronting

Why is the EU confronting Russia on Ukraine? I am bound to think that the EU is showing up neither authority nor confidence by taking this kind of approach. The idea that continental Europe, with its hairnet armies, could have the political will to "confront" Russia is just idiotic. The very most they can summon up is some fairly toothless economic sanctions that will do very little.

Isn't it time for the EU to stop following US hypocritical policy like a demented poodle and try to build bridges with Russia instead of antagonising its people? Scrapping NATO might be a good way of starting the process. It's not Russian hegemony that we need to worry about but the American version which appears to be trying to take over the whole world!

The EU Council chief, Herman Van Rompuy, has blamed Ukrainian authorities for "destabilising" Ukraine, as protests fan out to the east and west of Kiev. What cheek! The Polish Prime minister, Tusk, has also been

calling for €3 million of EU money to be channelled to opposition groups. No wonder all this has been irking and angering a democratically-elected Ukrainian President, Yanukovich and his main sponsor, Russian President Vladimir Putin. In this way, the EU will have exploited a sovereign country once again.

Quite appropriately, Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, told the press in Moscow: "We would prefer that some of our European colleagues refrained from acting unceremoniously over the Ukrainian crisis, when, without any kind of invitation, members of certain European governments rush to the Euromaidan and take part in anti-government demonstrations in a country with which they have diplomatic relations. It is just indecent," he added. But what does the European Union know about decency? Let's hope the "Commissioner for enlargement" is not going – once again – to launch irresponsible promises of eventual Ukrainian "vocation to accession" into the EU!

Try to occupy the central square and the city hall in any West European country and you won't last a day. Unfortunately, people like Barroso and Van Rompuy have been encouraging similar behaviour in Ukraine. They are the people destabilising Ukraine. And while some of the proposed laws in Ukraine seem excessive, many are very similar to laws that are already implemented in EU countries! Couldn't you just wait 12 months for the next Ukrainian election or are you 100 percent certain that these terrorists/thugs are in the minority? But no! This "bright new star" in the opposition wants power given to him out of the blue and without elections – in other words, he is fomenting a coup. Why can't we call a spade a spade?

I must say I was disappointed that the Ukrainian government said that they would not use the army to clear these thugs off the streets as, I know, that if these disturbances happened in the UK or USA that would certainly have happened by now. Hopefully they will change their minds.

I think Euromaidan truly succeeded with one thing: it successfully put an end to Ukrainian independency. After several Western leaders openly supported an attempt to overthrow the legitimate government in Ukraine and showed a neo-colonial style of attitude to the Ukrainian political environment, the very phrase "independent Ukraine" sounds rather strange.

Independent state

Which independent state would allow foreign leaders to go to the streets and interact with people who just violated the law and occupied several government buildings? What kind of diplomatic behaviour is that when foreign politicians openly pressure the Ukrainian government to "make a free choice" and sign an agreement, and if not, then threaten it with sanctions and overthrow? What is it if not neo-colonialism?

The legitimate protesters in Ukraine (not the paid infiltrators), being tricked by the globalist propaganda into joining the EU and the banking cartel that's sucking the life out of the working class in Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and all Europe, should take heed of where they are heading and what awaits them.

If these protests are about Ukraine not joining the EU and getting closer to Moscow, protestors should keep in mind that the country needs good trading relations with Russia, not with the banking mafia that controls the EU and the US, which only wants to turn Ukraine into another colony of exploitation, acquisition, expansion and corruption. The EU and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) have designs on controlling nations and their economies too. Hopefully, Ukrainians would not fall for the malicious machinations, already employed in Yugoslavia, Libya, Egypt, Syria and other countries, of splitting and breaking Ukraine in half.

Europe and America, forget the land of Ukraine! Your script Yugoslavia, Syria and Libya will not work.

Newshunt ☘



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