



## Ukraine

# Confronting the rise of fascism

Anna Pha and Bob Briton

Ukraine has been subjected to what is becoming an all too familiar practice of ousting legitimate governments that refuse to submit themselves to the diktat of the US. In Libya and Syria and now Venezuela (see page 9) and Ukraine, a similar formula for regime change can be seen. Anti-government protests and demands by forces seeking reforms are used as fronts for Western (or Saudi) funded, armed and trained ultra-right and terrorist/fascist forces.

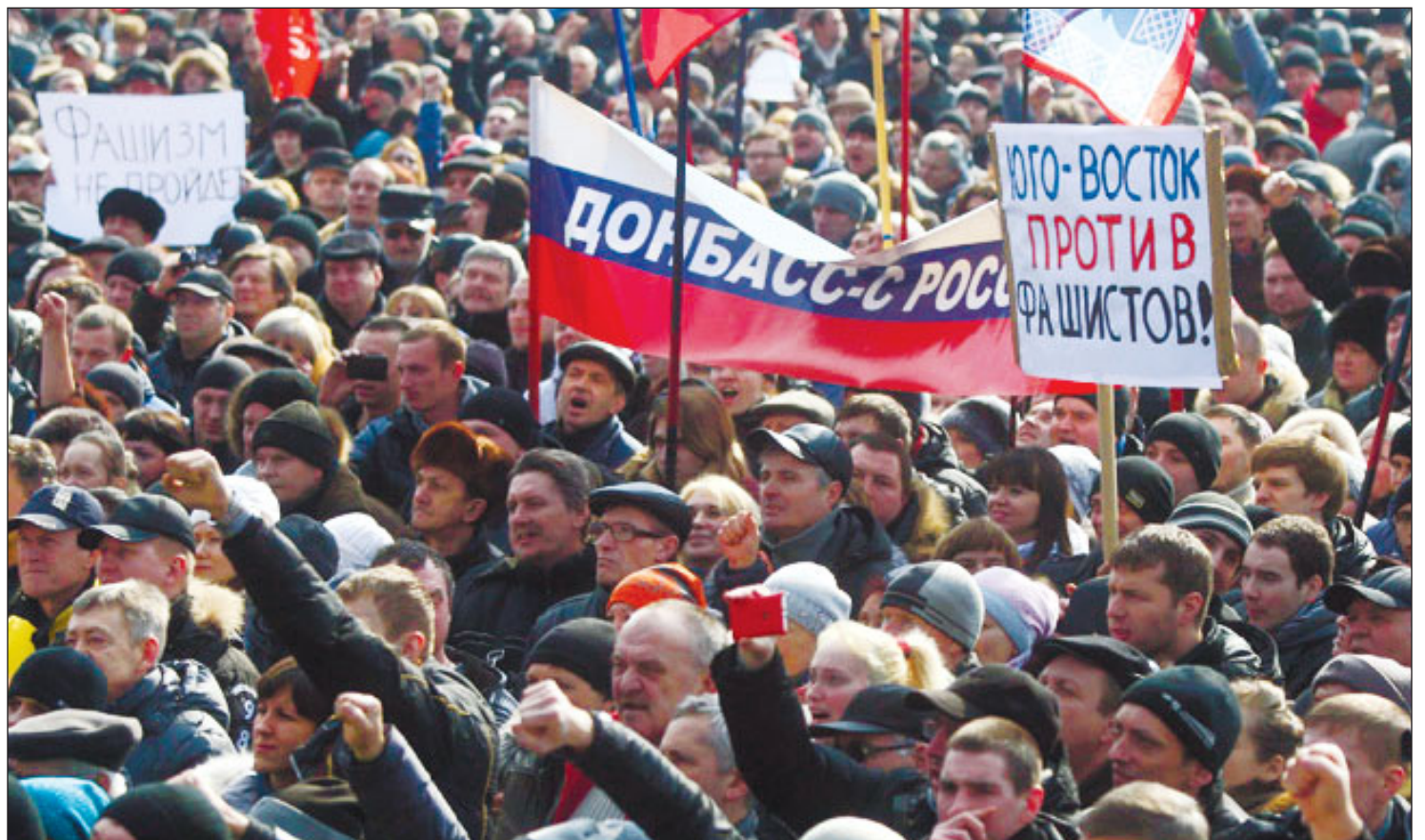
Western media flood news outlets with graphic images of the victims of terrorist assaults and massacres, falsely accusing government forces of perpetrating the atrocities. Ethnic or religious differences are fanned, and economic sanctions imposed to create economic hardship and increase pressure for a change of government. Attempts by elected governments to use state police and military to defeat the terrorists (including foreign mercenaries) and defend their people and sovereignty are portrayed as "crimes against humanity" while those carrying out the coup and atrocities are held up as being "pro-democracy".

In Ukraine, the US has installed what it calls a transitional coalition government which is heavily penetrated by neo-Nazi and other extreme right forces. Members of the Svoboda (All Ukrainian Union) and Pravy Sektor (Right Sector) have control over the armed forces, police and national security. Svoboda was formerly called the Social National Party, a deliberate reference to Hitler's Nazi party.

The US has hardly hidden its involvement in Ukraine's internal affairs. Last December, US Senator John McCain was publicly seen dining with opposition leaders including Svoboda leader Oleh Tyahnybok. US Secretary of State John Kerry and Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia, Victoria Nuland took part in the Maidan (city square) demonstrations, openly calling on the people to rise up and bring down their elected government. The role of the US in deciding on the new government was revealed in a secretly taped (private) discussion between Nuland and the US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt\*. It also revealed the involvement of the EU in orchestrating regime change.

### "Flowering of fascism"

"The United States and the European Union have embraced the revolution here as another flowering of democracy ...," writes Steven Erlanger, in the *New York Times*



Donbass workers protesting against fascism in the south-east of Ukraine.

("After Initial Triumph, Ukraine's Leaders Face Battle for Credibility", 01-03-2014). "Flowering of fascism" would have been a more apt description. The two main parties that have been installed by the US, EU and NATO, the Fatherland and Svoboda both pay tribute to Stepan Bandera who led collaboration with the Nazis and who played an active part in the massacre of Ukraine's Jewish population in the Second World War. The fascists are attacking synagogues and Eastern Orthodox Christian churches, xenophobia towards ethnic Russians, Tartars and other minority groups has surged, museums have been looted, Communists and members of Yanukovich's Party of Regions have had their homes raided. The Communist Party of Ukraine's offices have been attacked.

In the language of a school boy bully, Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott fell into line behind the US, telling Russia to "back off", that it is "simply unacceptable" for Russia to

interfere militarily in the Ukraine. Apparently, the US's and the EU's interference is acceptable. "Let Ukraine get on with being run in a peaceful and democratic manner," Abbott said. What hypocrisy!

The real source of external intervention in the sovereign affairs, the driving forces in the coup in Ukraine are the US, the European Union and NATO with the International Monetary Fund lurking in the background with an austerity program mapped out for the people. They have promoted and supported extreme right-wing, neo-Nazi and xenophobic forces and fostered tensions, divisions and conflicts with the aim of installing a compliant government that would give them political, economic and military domination over Ukraine.

The agreement of association with the EU that President Yanukovich had refused to sign is not, as often portrayed by the media, just an agreement to join the EU. It contains a dangerous military component which would

have opened the doors to a US/NATO military takeover. Yanukovich's refusal to sign away Ukraine's sovereignty and for it to become the staging point for US/NATO missiles and forces aimed at Russia and others, was the trigger that set in motion the regime change process.

### Russia the target

The situation is complex with a number of agendas at play. Ukraine is a strategically important to the US in its attempts to surround Russia with military forces and weapons. It has never let up in its plans to break up the Russian Federation and take control of oil, gas and other resources. The ongoing vilification of Russian Prime Minister Putin and Russia in the Western media is part of the campaign to justify the West's actions. The Crimea, a semi-autonomous region of the Ukraine, is of particular strategic importance.

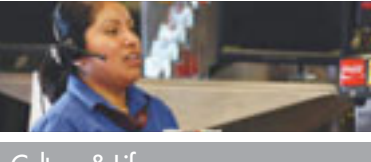
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## Guardian

Issue 1629

March 5, 2014

### Qantas and the death of the private enterprise myth

Qantas is just the latest big company operating in Australia to announce that it is in trouble and planning to shed thousands of jobs. The stressful impact on the over 5,000 workers involved, their families and communities is immense and the numbers will boost the high (though greatly understated) jobless rate in the country. The difference in the case of Qantas is that it was once a public enterprise offering world class service and holding an unmatched safety record. It was held in high esteem by the Australian and international travelling public.

The current perilous situation for the airline did not have to develop and there is a growing public awareness of that fact. More and more Australians are coming to realise that there was nothing inevitable let alone desirable about the various privatisations carried out over the past few decades. The myths built up around "free" enterprise are now clear for all to see and the call for re-nationalisation has gone mainstream.

Qantas was typical. The mantra was and is that the government has no business in business; that it shouldn't take on functions that could be carried out by private interests. And besides, everybody knows that government enterprises are full of overpaid public servants who don't try very hard to please the ever more discerning customer. For a long time these threadbare arguments have been winning the day.

Now the ideological and economic chickens have come home to roost. Governments like that of Tony Abbott have to choose whether to give cash grants or debt guarantees to struggling corporations (protectionism is not allowed under totally globalised capitalism, remember) or to let them go to the wall. So far Abbott has elected to let them crash and then blame and punish the unemployed victims of corporate failure.

The neo-liberal rear guard will argue that the *Qantas Sale Act* of 1992 ties the airline's hands in the battle with wholly foreign owned Virgin; there's government red-tape and meddling in the operation of the otherwise perfect market system. Fewer and fewer people are listening to these voices. Realities are pressing in. Who will provide services in regional Australia if private corporations can't turn a satisfactory profit? And what does it say about the sovereignty of the country if we can't point to a majority Australian owned national carrier? What happens to the engineering skills base of the country if all aircraft maintenance is shunted off to low-wage centres?

The truth is that these bigger picture issues are of no interest to corporate investors. It's all about profits. No stone is left unturned or corner left uncut in that cause. Wages will always be a battle ground and a freeze has already been moved by Qantas management ahead of enterprise bargaining negotiations. Unions have given notice that they will fight and they are absolutely correct in taking that stance. A defensive attitude on the part of workers in the industry would encourage airlines to press on with plans to increase the numbers of international crews working on lower wages – so low as to be unliveable in Australia.

Abbott has said he will push for the lifting of the foreign ownership limit for Qantas from 25 percent to 49 percent. It is hard to see how that measure will help. What's to stop another group of profit-chasing executives from taking some ill-advised gambles? South Australian Senator Nick Xenophon has called for an urgent inquiry into the running of Qantas and its future. The Greens are supporting the call. Labor won't back it though an investigation is clearly warranted to understand precisely how the airline wound up with a \$252 million half-year loss and in need of a \$2 billion restructure.

The ACTU is calling on the government to issue a debt guarantee. That may get the airline out of its present predicament but is only postponing the inevitable. The airline needs to be re-nationalised. Public enterprises under capitalism are not little islands of socialism in a sea of exploitation but at least the public has some influence on their social functions and their standards.

#### PRESS FUND

The wealth of the world's 85 richest people now equals the wealth of the poorest half of the world's population, 8.5 billion people. Putting it another way, on average each of those 85 people is 100 million times richer than each member of the poorest half of the world's population. If those statistics make you hopping mad, you should do something about it by contributing to the Press Fund. But here are some other statistics. On average this year we've received only four contributions per week. Last week we only had three, the same this week. Come on everybody! We really need your support for the Fund, which helps cover our operating costs, so please send in a contribution for the next edition. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

Max Callaghan \$10, Mark Mannion \$5, David Anthony \$10, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$40 Progressive total: \$1,410

# The CPA welcomes the release of Fernando Gonzalez

**On February 28 Fernando Gonzalez completed the final minutes of the unjust incarceration that kept him from his homeland, his people and his family for more than 15 years.**

The solidarity movement around the world celebrates the release of the second of Five Cuban anti-terrorists arbitrarily sentenced to unjust sentences of 15 years to more than double life.

The Cuban Five were unfairly tried in Miami, a city hostile to Cuba, and more recently it has come to light that the US government paid journalists to mislead public opinion during the trial.

Against all the odds the solidarity campaign has expanded to all corners of the world including inside the United States where the media has long tried to hide their story. It is an imperative that the American people learn about the plight of the Cuban Five heroes punished for

fighting against terrorism against Cuba, organised from US soil.

Cuba and its people have been under siege for more than 50 years. In fact from the very beginning of the Cuban revolution the US sponsored and organised the economic blockade on the island. The blockade on Cuba punishes the entire population and its right to self-determination.

The attacks on the Cuban revolution have ranged from a direct invasion during the Bay of Pigs to numerous clandestine operations aimed at damaging the economy and promoting terrorist attacks that have seen more than 3,000 Cuban lives lost.

The Cuban Five never hurt anyone and were no threat to the US national security. What they did was monitor the activities of the anti-Cuban groups based in Miami and reporting plans that would have resulted in the loss of Cuban and American lives.

We welcome the release of

Fernando Gonzalez, who together with his other four brothers never gave up, even to the final moments of his unjust sentence.

We encourage all *Guardian* readers to continue the campaign for the unconditional release of Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero and Ramon Labañino. President Obama can exercise his presidential powers and rectify this political and legal wrongdoing by pardoning them and sending them back to Cuba to reunite with their families who together had been suffering this collective punishment.

The Communist Party of Australia welcomes Fernando home and pledges to continue working for the release of the other three Cuban heroes.

**Vinnie Molina**  
CPA National President

For Campaign info visit:  
[www.freethecuban5.com](http://www.freethecuban5.com)  
and [www.freethefive.org](http://www.freethefive.org)

## Invasion Day in Brisbane Murri Families locked out of the Australia Day celebration

Don Wilson

**Sunday January 26, Brisbane: A Rally and march was held in Brisbane to commemorate Invasion Day and remember the elders who struggled to resist this invasion and conquest by British Imperialism.**

The rally started at 10am at parliament House.

A number of militant speeches were made including issues of making the G20 event in Brisbane in November this year an event for Aboriginal issues to be strongly put forward.

Around 12 noon the march started towards Musgrave Park. Stops were made at Premier Newman's office on the way, calling on him to hand over wages stolen from

Aboriginal workers over the years. At the top of Queen Street mall a group of ultra-right thugs from the Australia First Party tried to interfere with the march. They were quickly confronted and were forced to make a very rapid retreat.

At the same time the intersection of Queen and George Streets was turned into a performance venue where Murri kids performed traditional dances to the throbbing sounds of the didgeridoo. They received a great reception from the surprised onlookers.

The march proceeded to South Bank where the "official" Australia Day ceremony was being held. We wished to proceed to Musgrave Park via South Bank. However gates and police prevented us from entering from the cultural centre. Dances,

music and speeches were performed here with hundreds of onlookers from the bus terminal. After we had asked repeatedly to enter the Australia Day ceremony we marched again into Stanley Street. Another gate and fence and even more police stopped us entering the South Bank Parklands and the Australia Day celebration.

A speaker from the South Bank Corporation read a statement that the march of Aboriginal families was banned from the park.

We then proceeded to Musgrave where the sacred fire was relit and a smoking ceremony held. At 4pm the premier of the John Pilger film *Utopia* was held. Hundreds of people were crammed into the large hall and many could not get in. The film was very well received. ☺



# United with the Cuban people

## 31st Brigade to Cuba from Australia – Statement

As members of The Southern Cross Brigade from Australia, now in its 31st year of visiting Cuba, this great country, we would like to thank the Cuban people for the example of strength, valour and solidarity with the people of the world despite the inhuman blockade that they have suffered for the last 56 years.

We had the opportunity to take part in a very impressive and broad social program. We were able to travel through parts of Cuba; we visited polyclinics, local hospitals, cooperatives, organic farms, primary and secondary schools, medical universities where we had talks with the foreign students. Through watching documentaries and discussions with many people we discovered the impact and consequences of the blockade and how the Cuban people have to live with constant shortages, including medications.

At the meeting with the families of the Cuban 5 we had the opportunity to listen to their stories and we realised the hypocrisy

of the United States who jailed the innocents while the criminals are walking free. We saw the need to continue to spread the world about their cases so justice may happen and they can return to their families and country.

Our last petition is for Guantánamo Naval base to be returned to the Cuban people and that the prisoners that are kept there have a proper trial in accordance to the International Law.

We observed that the revolution liberated the Cuban people from the exploitation of capitalism and it developed a socialist system for the benefit of the people rather than big corporations. We saw that the education and health services within Cuba are free and focus on a preventative approach. We visited protected ecological areas, and a sustainable organic agricultural enterprise near the city.

At the National Theatre we appreciated the creativity and artistic performance of one of the world's best ballet companies, the Cuban

National Ballet, with their performance of the *Nutcracker*.

In Santa Clara we were honoured to meet and hear the stories of men and women who had fought alongside Che. We also visited the Che Guevara Memorial Museum and as a result of that visit, the stories and photos we saw we will never forget the history of Santa Clara. We were fortunate in being able to visit Matanzas on its water bays and to spend time at Playa Giron where we visited the museum documenting the invasion of the Bay of Pigs where the imperialist Americans suffered their first defeat in Latin America at the hands of the Cubans fighting to defend their own country.

We visited Mariana Grajales Coello primary school near the Australian sugar cane mill as it was repaired, after hurricane Michelle, with the support and assistance of the Australian Cuban Friendship Society; we were warmly welcomed by the children as they sang and then performed a beautiful ballet commemorating the life and death of Che and

we taught the children a little about Aboriginal Australian culture.

Life in the Julio Antonio Mella Camp give us opportunities to work on the agricultural fields alongside the workers from the camp and we were able to share the true spirit of solidarity and friendship.

We are extremely gratefully to all ICAP workers for the well thought out and organised program, their dedication, warmth and professionalism; during our stay they welcomed us like members of their own families and we were able to learn and experience life in this beautiful country and to know its people.

When we return to our country and our homes we will do our best to ensure that the Australia people and our government know what is happening in Cuba and also we will ask the United States government for:

- The return of The Cuban 5 to their families and country
- The cessation of the blockade against Cuba
- The return of the Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay to Cuba.



We are united with the Cuban people in their struggle  
We will win!  
Long live Cuba  
31st Brigade to Cuba from Australia – La Brigada Cruz del Sur – January 20, 2014 ✪

## Trans-Pacific Partnership Act now!

The latest target date for completion of negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is October. It remains to be seen whether agreement can be reached between all 12 governments by then. Even if agreement is reached and the government signs it, there is still a chance to block Australia's ratification.

The special rights for foreign investors in the TPP would allow corporations to sue governments if their investments are "harmed" by a law or policy (see articles *Guardian* #1628, February 26, 2014).

The government cannot ratify the TPP until Parliament has passed the necessary implementing legislation to bring our laws into line with

the agreement. It would come down to the strength of the campaign to defeat the TPP and the balance of forces in the Senate.

From July, the Coalition may have control of the Senate relying on the Palmer United Party and several other small right-wing parties. The outcome of the new Senate election in Western Australia is extremely important. The Greens are strongly opposed to the TPP and should be supported. Pressure must be maintained on Labor to stand firm on its opposition to the Interstate Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions and not fall into line behind the US.

Apart from taking the countries involved one step closer to the

complete direct dictatorship of transnational capital, the TPP also raises the question of the undemocratic treaty processes that the government is relying on to rob the Australian people of their democratic rights.

The *Guardian* urges readers to lobby MPs and Senators and to inform more people about the dangers involved. One way of doing this is to support the AFTINET campaign. ([www.aftinet.org.au](http://www.aftinet.org.au))

The TPP can and must be defeated. Once in place, it cannot easily be undone.

For more info:  
<http://democracyctr.org>, report titled "Unfair, Unsustainable, and Under the Radar" ✪

## Govts must step up employment of people with disabilities

The National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN) has called on the federal government to set realistic and achievable targets for the employment of people with disabilities in the Australian Public Service. State governments and Territories should do the same.

"Over the last 20 years the employment of people with disabilities in the public service has almost halved, falling by 45 percent", said the NWRN's Maree O'Halloran, "We note that the Greens have tabled a private member's bill to require the public service to double its employment of people with disabilities over the next five years. Hopefully, this bill will spark a public debate."

The numbers of people with disabilities in the public service is at a 20-year low, and the service is losing three times as many people as it is hiring. The public sector cannot force the private sector to employ people with disabilities; however, it can lead the way.

In 1994, there were 8,063 people with disabilities employed in the Australian Public Service. However, by 2013 just 4,450 people with disabilities were employed. This represents about 2.9 percent of the 167,000 people in the public service, down from 5 percent in July 1999. Last year, a strategy was launched by the Australian Public Service to increase the numbers of people with disability among its ranks. Unfortunately, the employment of people with disabilities is still at its lowest in two decades.

The Department of Human Services has adopted a target of 5 percent for the employment of Indigenous Australians which is very welcome. Ms O'Halloran said that in the face of the current debate about work participation and income support for people with disabilities, it is astounding that it refuses to adopt a target for people with disabilities. People with mental health conditions and chronic illnesses, for example, may need a great deal of flexibility in the workplace and the public service and other big employers have the best chance of providing this flexibility.

"The labour force participation rate for people with disability is only 53 percent, significantly lower when compared to people without a disability, which stands at 83 percent. We know that the rates of employment of people with disabilities are shockingly low."

A report by the Australian Public Service Commissioner found that Australia's performance in employing people with disabilities is "well behind other international jurisdictions", with the proportion of civil service employees with a disability in the United Kingdom at percent in March 2011 and 5.6 percent in the Canadian Public Service. The successful result in Canada is linked to the passage of the *Employment Equity Act* in 1995.

"NWRN urges all governments and employers to step up and provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities including mental health conditions," said Ms O'Halloran. ✪

### Pete's Corner



# West Australians in Senate re-run

Richard Titelius

**On September 7, 2013, Australians went to the poll to elect a new government. The Liberal/National Coalition was elected but the final result in the Senate is still undecided. This was due to a close vote in Western Australia for the last two Senate spots. The initial count went to the Palmer United Party's Dio Wang and the Labor Party's Louise Pratt. However after a recount these two seats were won by the Sports Party's Wayne Dropulich and the Greens Scott Ludlum.**

Then came revelations during the recount that 1,370 Senate ballot papers could not be found and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) petitioned the High Court sitting as the Court of Disputed Returns to make a ruling on the matter.

On February 20, the Court of Disputed Returns ruled that the Senate vote in Western Australia was invalid and subsequently that all six WA Senate seats would need to face a fresh election on April 5.

Initial estimates of the cost of the re-run of the Senate election were put at \$13 million but that has since been revised upwards and currently stand at \$20 million.

In the 76-seat Senate the government needs 39 votes to pass legislation and currently it has 30 seats, the ALP has 24 seats, the Greens 9, Palmer United Party 2 and five other individuals or entities have the remaining five seats.

If the Liberals repeat their 2013 result they will have 33 seats on July 1 meaning they will need only six other votes to pass legislation.

Unemployment in WA in January 2014 rose from 4.6 percent to 5.1 percent with most of the jobs lost being full-time positions which were replaced by some casual and part-time jobs.

Other issues which will define the election campaign are cuts to education, public health, asylum seekers, transport (especially the cuts to Qantas), water availability and climate change.

The Greens candidate Scott Ludlum in ABC Online said that West Australians have been handed a unique and extraordinary opportunity to make history.

"There's never been a situation like this before, and the Greens believe its an opportunity for West Australians to send a very strong message to Tony Abbott and back to Canberra not to take this state for granted, and in the lead up to what is potentially a horror (federal) budget for West Australians, to say that we've had enough and that we want our country back," he said.

"Whether it's cuts to Medicare, cuts to education funding, attacks to the clean energy sector and jobs in the renewable energy industry, attacks on public broadcasting or the extraordinarily degrading way we are treating people who have sought refuge in this country", continued Ludlum.

This writer has worked over

ten years as a paid polling official for the AEC and over a further 10 years as a voluntary campaign worker for the Greens outside polling booths on election day and it is disappointing to see every election how many people come to a polling booth on election day and do not know what the issues are, their own interests, who the candidates are and who or what they represent.

Initial observations by many West Australians since the election date was announced can be distilled into one sentiment, "What a waste of time."

That is why between now and April 5, we will see a massive election campaign by capital to promote and protect their interests by choosing to focus on the carbon and mining tax and not the creation of sustainable energy, industries and jobs and the maintenance of an accessible, quality and affordable public service.

Out of the limelight will be: the Trans-Pacific Partnership deal and how this will rob this nation of its sovereignty and the absence of employment opportunities for our youth, food security and the effects of climate change.

The Communist Party of Australia calls on West Australian voters to vote 1 for the Greens and put the Liberal/National parties and other right-wing groups, including the Palmer United Party last to prevent Abbott and Co. gaining control of the Senate. ☛



Greens Scott Ludlum.

## Ukraine Confronting the rise of fascism

Continued from page 1

The Russian Black Sea Fleet has been stationed in Sevastopol (Crimea) since the 18th century. Crimea has a rich history of attachment and occupation over centuries. In more recent times it was part of the Russian Federation until Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev transferred it to Ukraine. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, when Russia and Ukraine negotiated arrangements relating to military (including nuclear weapons) forces and weapons, the fleet remained under a new agreement. Russia is now being accused by the West of interfering in Ukraine because of its military presence in Crimea. "We have an arrangement with Ukraine about the stationing of the Russian Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol and we are acting within the framework of that agreement," Russian ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, told reporters. This agreement, which was extended for 25 years in 2010, includes discounted prices for Ukrainian purchases of gas from Russia.

Crimea is critical to Russia's defence and President Putin and Russia's parliament are determined to retain their presence and maintain their security. They do not recognise the so-called government that has been installed by the West. The

Western propaganda machine has been hard at work with a flood of lies about Russian activity and interference in the Crimea.

In Crimea, where more than half the population are ethnic Russian, there is strong support for President Yanukovich. There have been large protests against fascism and in support of ties with Russia, misreported in Australia's media as being simply anti-EU. People have set up self-defence units against the fascists. There is strong opposition to the presence of US or NATO missile and military forces there. Russia's package of a \$15 billion debt deal and gas discounts is far larger than the EU's and is not tied up with the IMF austerity and other strings attached to the EU's. But that is not the main question. Russia has responded quickly to defend its interests and ethnic Russians in Crimea.

### Changing the balance

Control of Ukraine would give the US and NATO control over the Black Sea. The other countries bordering the Black Sea – Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Georgia – are at present firmly in the imperialist camp. Russia has four naval fleets – Black Sea, Pacific, Northern and Baltic. The Black Sea Fleet is the most important because of the links

to the Middle East. Sevastopol is a large and deep port. The ports along Russia's coastline with the Black Sea are shallow. It is also Russia's only warm water port. It is vital to Russia's security.

Ukraine is a strategic piece in the US's attempts to encircle Russia, which are well advanced. The US already has Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Romania, Poland and Azerbaijan at its disposal for military operations. Crimea is only 30 metres from Turkey, which the US used as a launching pad for wars in the Middle East. In Afghanistan the US originally trained and armed the Taliban to bring about regime change and install a government hostile to the Soviet Union. US geo-political meddling hasn't stopped since but it has not gone all their way. Iran is lined up for regime change. The US's anti-missile shield, with bases in Eastern Europe, is targeted at Russia. Afghanistan and Iran are also critical to the US's moves to encircle the People's Republic of China.

The EU is waging war against the Russian Gazprom company which, with its partners, has been battling EU demands regarding a new South Stream pipeline, which would stretch 2,400 kilometres bypassing Ukraine, taking gas to Europe – Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria,

Italy, Croatia, Macedonia, Greece and Turkey. EU competition policy prevents the same company owning a pipeline and what flows along it, a policy which the Russian government and Gazprom have been fighting. One of the objectives of the EU relates to control of natural gas pipelines and enforcement of "competition" policy on Ukraine and Russia.

While constantly supporting NATO expansion, the US had a setback recently when it lost its Manas base in Kyrgyzstan. NATO responded provocatively with plans to hold military exercises in Georgia, which is strategically placed between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea. The West failed in earlier attempts to break off Chechnya from the Russian Federation but pressure will doubtless be maintained. The Black Sea is important to the US's Middle East plans, including the strengthening of neo-fascist forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

### Aid for fascism – threat of war

The open involvement of US, EU and NATO leaders in the build up to the coup exposes it as part of the drive to change the geo-political balance in Europe in ways that threaten security and peace in Europe and

the world. The support accorded to the interim government by the EU leaders will give encouragement to right-wing and fascist forces across Europe.

The headline of the *New York Times* article quoted above, "After Initial Triumph, Ukraine's Leaders Face Battle for Credibility" raises an important point. The "revolution" in Ukraine lacks credibility amongst the people. The February 21 agreement reached with Yanukovich and opposition leaders to hold early elections was swept aside with the support of the US and EU. Having trashed the agreement, a bunch of criminals and fascists has been installed. The situation is unfolding quickly and the outcome is by no means certain.

The removal of the Russian fleet from Sevastopol and the installation of Western forces and missiles would seriously weaken Russia's defence capabilities. The US would also like to see Russia lose its veto powers on the UN Security Council and, as a result, we can expect to see the "cold war" against Russia intensify. Any escalation by the West of the situation on the Crimean peninsula raises the prospect of war, which could spread well beyond the borders of Ukraine and Russia.

\*Transcript at [bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957](http://bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957) ☛

# \$10m funding blow for MJD Foundation

Rudi Maxwell

**Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion has withdrawn \$10 million in funding from the Aboriginals Benefit Accounts (ABA) to a charitable foundation that looks after Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory with a rare hereditary wasting disease and their families.**

In July last year, the Machado Joseph Disease Foundation (MJDF) received written confirmation from Labor's Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin that she had approved an extension of its original ABA grant in 2010 from \$6 million to \$16 million.

But following the election of the Coalition government, Senator Scullion overturned the decision, advising the MJDF that it was not in line with the policy of the ABA, but saying his department would work with the foundation to explore other funding sources.

"This grant was for \$10 million to invest so it could use the earnings to cover operational and other ongoing costs," Senator Scullion said. "This is an unusual use of Aboriginals Benefit Account monies.

"The only other example of a grant being used to provide earnings to cover operational costs that has been brought to my attention was a previous \$6 million grant to the same foundation in 2010, which was to be invested to 'cover operational cost for the MJD foundation to enable it to be sustainable for many, many years to come'. The Aboriginals Benefit Account advisory committee had concerns about the \$10 million grant, but it appears the Minister ignored that advice."

Ms Macklin did not reply to a question asking what advice the advisory committee had given her.

MJDF vice chair Gayangwa Lalara, a Warnindilyakwa woman of Groote Eylandt, has lost six brothers and sisters and her father to MJD and has written to Senator Scullion asking him to reconsider.

"On January 10, 2014 my sister's

daughter died from MJD," she wrote. "She was only 44 years old, she is the first of her brothers and sisters to die so young but she has two brothers and a sister so far with MJD and we know that they will die very young too.

"There are many more in my family and in other families in communities across the NT who have MJD and who are living with dying bodies every day. My niece's life was very hard, but it was a better one at the end because of the MJD Foundation.

"You know that the services we have in our communities are not like the services in towns and cities. We wait a long time for help, especially for disabled people. We wanted to help ourselves and take responsibility and so we made this MJD Foundation.

"Our communities supported it and so did our land council on Groote Eylandt, the ABA and a number of business and philanthropic sponsors. Our MJD Foundation gives us hope that there is help for people with MJD.

"By reversing the previous approval of a \$10 million grant variation, you have damaged some of this hope. It makes us feel like this new government no longer wants to help us. For so long we felt shame and we blamed ourselves for this disease, we tried to help ourselves with this MJD Foundation, and did not need to feel ashamed any more."

Ms Lalara said she attended a meeting of the Northern Land Council last year and was told it supported the ABA grant. The ABA is an account established under the NT Aboriginal Land Rights Act to receive and distribute royalty money generated from mining on Aboriginal land in the Territory. The ABA advisory committee consists of 14 members elected by the four NT land councils and an appointed chair, but the final decisions on how Aboriginal money is spent rest with the Indigenous Affairs Minister.

ABA advisory committee member Maurie Japarta Ryan told



Sisters Sharon Thompson and Stephanie Nganjmirra have Machado Joseph Disease, a rare degenerative wasting condition that mainly affects Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, where there is little to no access to mainstream medical care. Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion has overturned a \$10 million grant from the Aboriginals Benefit Account to the Machado Joseph Disease Foundation, which provides on-the-ground care, advocacy, research and support to people with MJD and their families. (Photo courtesy of the Machado Joseph Disease Foundation)

the *Koori Mail* newspaper that he believes responsibility for the account should be in Aboriginal hands.

Calls for Senator Scullion to reinstate the grant have come from Country Liberal Party MPs Larissa Lee (whose electorate covers Groote Eylandt) and Alison Anderson, as well as Labor NT senator Nova Peris. "My biggest disappointment is the federal minister, Nigel Scullion – I am appalled by his action – disgusted," Ms Lee told the NT Parliament.

"I am related to the Groote Eylandt people. Pulling that funding out is the worst thing you can do. These people only have a 20-year life span and that is devastating. They will not live for long. It comes to a disability point where they start dribbling – they will not be able to hold their body fluids in. This is what MJD is.

"They cannot eat any more. Pulling the services out is the worst thing to do. You have to have a heart when you walk into this business. You have to stay true to yourself."

MJDF Board and ABA advisory committee member Tony Wurramarra also expressed his disappointment that "the decision to overturn the grant variation was decided by a Minister who refused to meet or be briefed by the MJDF on the implications of overturning the previous approval. It is also disturbing that the Minister appears to have made his decision without recognising the overwhelming challenges involved in meeting the current and projected needs of people and families living with MJD, who, because of this terrible disease, are arguably amongst Australia's most disadvantaged Aboriginal citizens," he said.

MJDF research and community services director Libby Massey said that on the expectation of receiving the funds, the foundation had made commitments to families living with MJD. "We read Senator Scullion's letter with disbelief, we were quite dumbfounded and confused, and in fact had to go hunting for information

because we believed we had a solid agreement in place," she said.

"These funds are needed so much that 'desperately' doesn't even cover it. Apart from what the MJDF does there are no hands-on therapy services in any of the communities affected.

"We really like to respond directly to issues raised by families, find out more about ways things might be done to slow down progression of the disease."

Ms Massey said that because MJD is genetic, families could end up with three generations – grandparents, parents and children – all suffering from it at once.

"That informal care that families often provide and that Aboriginal people are so good at providing isn't possible, and that's another reason people need extra support," she said.

**The MJDF has launched a campaign to ask Senator Scullion to visit Groote Eylandt and to change his mind.**

To sign the petition go to [www.communityrun.org/p/mjd](http://www.communityrun.org/p/mjd)

For more information about the MJDF and MJD go to [www.mjd.org.au](http://www.mjd.org.au)  
*Koori Mail* ☺

## The facts about MJD

Machado Joseph Disease (MJD) – also called spinocerebellar ataxia Type 3 (SCA3) – is one of about 30 recognised, dominantly inherited forms of ataxia. Ataxia is a general term meaning lack of muscle control or coordination.

- People with MJD exhibit clumsiness and weakness in the arms and legs, spasticity, a staggering lurching gait (sometimes mistaken for drunkenness), difficulty with speech and swallowing, involuntary eye movements, double vision, and frequent urination/incontinence. Sustained muscle contractions cause twisting of the body and limbs, repetitive movements, abnormal postures, and rigidity or symptoms similar to those of Parkinson's disease.
- MJD is an inherited, autosomal disorder, meaning that each child of a person who carries the defective gene has a 50 percent chance of developing the disease.
- People with MJD retain their cognitive capacity and intellectual function.
- The mutation is typically worsened when it is passed to the next generation. This means that the symptoms of the disease can sometimes appear around 8-10 years earlier in each successive generation, and are more severe.
- There is no known cure.
- Progression to dependence occurs over five to 10 years after the onset of symptoms and most people are wheelchair bound and fully dependent for all activities of daily living within 10 to 15 years.
- Previously known as "Groote Eylandt Syndrome", the effects of MJD have been known to the Aboriginal people of this region for at least four generations.
- There are people living with the disease on Groote Eylandt (Angurugu and Umbakumba), Bickerton Island (Milyakburra), Yirrkala, Elcho Island (Galiwin'ku), in Darwin, at Ngukurr, Birany Birany, Numbulwar, Papunya, Hermannsburg, Santa Teresa and Gunbalanya (Oenpelli).
- There are about 550 people thought to be at risk of developing the disease across the Top End (direct descendants of those with the disease).

Information sourced from the MJDF

Sydney

## International Women's Day march and rally

**Fight for the Right to Choose Your Own Future!**

**No to Zoe's Law!**

**Equal Pay now!**

Saturday 8 March 11am  
Assemble Sydney Town Hall

Family-friendly event

Parents are encouraged to bring their children!

The march will finish at Hyde Park

Stalls and entertainment on the lawns

More details: [facebook.com/events/275435865939502](https://facebook.com/events/275435865939502)



# Coal seam gas the new gold rush

A talk given at the Melbourne Unitarian Church by Burt Blackburne and Margaret Williamson

“Every environmental struggle on the job or in the community comes up against corporations that own the factory or the mine or the mineral deposits. This ownership and the vast wealth of these corporations give them the power to oppose changes to protect the environment.

“The power of corporations is defended by governments which support corporate interests. This is often done behind declarations that environmental protection measures will not be allowed to damage the economic interests of the country – meaning, of course, the economic interests of the capitalist ruling class.

“It is sometimes suggested that the environmental crisis is so serious that it transcends class. It has been called ‘a common crisis’ which affects everyone equally, and requires social divisions to be set aside for the ‘common good’.

“Nothing could be further from the truth. The crisis is certainly common to all who live on earth, but it does not affect all equally, nor can it be solved by ‘common action’ for two simple reasons – those whose actions have caused the crisis possess political power and show little inclination to change their present course towards disaster ...”

**This is a quote from a powerful booklet *Hot Earth* which I encourage all of you to read. So, it is important to recycle and to put solar panels on your roof but unless you examine the very nature of the system that is harming and poisoning the earth, there are limitations on what we do as individuals.**

Government support for market-based policies including CSG mining has stifled almost all voices that question this policy and effectively ruled out the planning, regulation and legislation which are essential to ensure a sustainable future.

Fracking, otherwise known as hydraulic fracturing, is a process to extract gas and oil from deposits that were previously considered too difficult to mine. Fracking is the process of pumping water, sand and a cocktail of chemicals underground at great pressure in order to break open the ground and allow the gas to flow out.

The wastewater often contains high levels of salt and other contaminants from the coal seam, including mercury, cadmium, arsenic, and other elements in harmful quantities. There is no safe way of disposing of this water. In a frack, 20-80 percent of the water pumped into the ground remains underground. This water often finds its way into ground and surface water endangering the health of local communities and ecosystems that rely on this water.

The technique can also create mini-earthquakes that cause the connection of naturally separated geological layers. This process can contaminate ground water with volatile organic compounds, methane, other gases, heavy metals, enormous quantities of salt, as well as naturally occurring radioactive material.

The regulations in Australia do not require mining companies to list the chemicals they use in fracking fluids. However, experiences in Queensland and New South Wales show the use of carcinogens, as well as other chemicals including ethylene glycol that affect kidney function, the lungs and heart; the BTex group of chemicals (benzene, toluene, ethyl benzene and xylene) that affects bone marrow, the blood system and can cause leukaemia; and there are other toxins that affect hormone regulation and the reproductive system.

Water tested from the Condamine River that connects to the Murray-Darling system, was found to contain ten times the safe level of boron and cadmium and more than 1,000 times the safe level of silver, chlorine and copper. In the Pillaga Forest in a creek near Narrabri in NSW, testing confirmed the presence of harmful substances including ammonia, lithium, cyanide, bromide and boron. These chemicals

**Farmers,  
greenies  
and  
community  
groups are  
fighting  
back.**



are dangerous by-products of CSG mining and were not found in sites tested upstream of the mining.

In Victoria the exploration licences granted cover some of the most productive agricultural land. In Gippsland, the licences cover an area from Western Port Bay to Bairnsdale, from Warragul to Bass Strait. This area is renowned for dairy and beef cattle industries, vegetable and fruit growing.

Gippslanders listen to the experiences of other states in considering their view on this matter.

Elaine Armstrong is the NSW president of the Country Women's Association. She has said, “Our members have heard anecdotally and have experienced personal examples of what has happened from unregulated exploitation of prime land by the granting of mining and coal seam gas explorative permits. Many have personal experience of irreparable damage done to their properties because of non-regulated activities.”

In October in 2012 the *New York Times* ran an article entitled “After the Boom in Natural Gas”. It was not about pollution or ruined land values or jobs. Their concerns: “The gas rush is a money loser so far for many of the gas exploration companies and their tens of thousands of investors.”

Gas producers drilled too many wells too quickly and the price of gas fell below the cost of production.

Energy researcher Richard Heinberg states that the industry has massively oversold its jobs record. Since 2003, oil and gas jobs account for less than 1/20th of one percent of the overall US labour market. Numerous industry-funded studies count strippers and prostitutes as new jobs created by the spread of fracking.

## Fighting back

Opposition to fracking is happening around the world, particularly in the US and Canada, but also throughout Europe. A recent huge demonstration in Romania attacked the giant northern Californian-based corporation Chevron that plans to start fracking there.

On October 9 last year, the European Parliament approved rules forcing every company to carry out in-depth environmental audits before drilling. France has banned fracking. In Bulgaria they have outlawed fracking after major protests against Chevron's plans to drill in Dobrudja – the most fertile farm region in the country.

The great thing is that farmers, greenies and community groups are fighting back here as well. “Lock the Gate”, which started

in Queensland and NSW to provide protection to rural communities from this industry, has ramped up in Victoria because of the lack of government action against the powerful mining interests.

Despite the legal implications, farmers across Gippsland have started locking their gates to the mining companies, refusing trucks and equipment access to their land. We have escalated to the extent where we are now locking roads from mining companies and protecting entire regions from devastation.

In April 2012 a coalition of over 50 different community, environmental and farming groups launched a call for a moratorium on all new coal and CSG projects in Victoria. This forced the Victorian government to address community concerns and institute a moratorium on all fracking in August 2012.

In more recent months, the Victorian government hired former federal industrial relations minister Peter Reith to investigate the implications of fracking and CSG extraction in Victoria. For this work, Reith was reportedly paid \$2,000 a day.

When Reith attended a public meeting in the township of Mirboo North, he refused to engage with the community, but did an interview with the local media. There is no doubt in locals' minds that Reith was a spokesperson for big business.

You will all recall his pedigree when he claimed refugees had thrown their children overboard to force a rescue by the Australian Navy. You will also recall that the defence department had to come out and explain that Mr Reith was incorrect and that no children were thrown overboard.

Reith has stated publicly that there are no problems with fracking and recommended that full-scale mining should go ahead. This position ignores the evidence to the contrary both here and overseas. Notwithstanding, the Victorian Liberal government has decided to continue the moratorium on fracking until 2015. Coincidentally, this is just after the state election next year.

This is an important window of opportunity for the anti-CSG movement. We are under no illusions about the current government or a potential Labor government on this matter.

The fact that the moratorium has been extended is a result of the courageous stand taken by the Gippsland/Western Victoria communities, but the war is not yet over. We can expect the mining companies and their extensive network of highly paid lobbyists to ramp up their activity as well. The battle for hearts and minds continues.

If we look to the interstate experience, we see the CSG mining industry trying to present a human face in the Hunter region of NSW.

A CSG operator tried to sponsor the Singleton Outstanding Business Awards, but its sponsorship was rightly rejected by the local Chamber of Commerce. A CSG company tried to sponsor the hugely attended Broke Valley fair, but this was rejected by the community and their cheque returned. CSG companies are now offering local primary schools cash donations in their efforts to win community support.

In Victoria, CSG company Lakes Oil (part of the Gina Reinhardt stable), sponsored a local bike ride throughout Gippsland. To its credit, Bass Coast Council withdrew its name as a sponsor of the event once it learned of the mining company's involvement. This council has refused to sponsor the event if Lakes Oil is involved next year.

While the government has extended the moratorium on fracking, communities across Victoria, in Gippsland and now in the Southern Western District must continue the campaign and build community strength against these powerful mining companies. The state Victorian government in mid last year produced a policy on mining. This 17-point policy states that the government will facilitate the operations of mining companies and intends to hold an international conference inviting miners to come to exploit Victoria further. So, our communities must continue to be vigilant and continue to keep up the fight. We must at all costs protect the food-growing capacity of our water supply from the incursions of the miners.

Locking up roads and towns is more than a symbolic action. When hundreds of landowners in a community refuse access then the mining company is faced with a rapidly diminishing return if they try to force access into that community. The political and economic costs of launching numerous individual actions against landowners will inevitably cause a tidal wave of political backlash.

In Queensland and NSW and now in Victoria an exciting movement is growing. Faced with the imminent threat of large-scale mining, all different kinds of communities are making their roads and towns CSG free.

*Hot Earth* is available from the CPA website and 74 Buckingham Street, Surry Hills. The booklet is free but a donation towards its production and postage would be appreciated. Phone 02 9699 8844 or email [info@cpa.org.au](mailto:info@cpa.org.au) for copies. *The Beacon* ❖

# Scientists and experts agree GMOs not proven safe

The number of scientists and experts who have signed a joint statement saying that GM foods have not been proven safe and that existing research raises concerns has climbed to 297 since the statement was released last October.

Dr Angelika Hilbeck, chair of the European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER), which published the statement, said, "We're surprised and pleased by the strong support for the statement. It seems to have tapped into a deep concern in the global scientific community that the name of science is being misused to make misleading claims about the safety of GM technology."

The statement indirectly challenges claims by EU chief science adviser Anne Glover that there is no evidence that GM foods are any riskier than non-GM foods.

Dr Rosa Binimelis Adell, board member of ENSSER, said, "It seems that Anne Glover chooses to listen to one side of the scientific community only – the circle of GMO producers and their allied scientists – and ignores the other. Thus she is giving biased advice to the EU Commission. For a science adviser, this is irresponsible and unethical."

Signatories to the statement include Dr Sheldon Krinsky, professor of urban and environmental policy and planning at Tufts University and adjunct professor in the department of public health and family medicine at the Tufts School of Medicine. Dr Krinsky said: "As a GMO crop sceptic, I have a more nuanced view of adverse consequences than uncritical proponents. Adverse consequences of GMO crops are not restricted to keeling over dead after eating genetically adulterated unlabelled food (GAUF).

"My concerns include subtle changes in nutritional quality or mycotoxins, increasing food allergens, unsustainable farming practices, dependency on chemical inputs, lack of transparency in evaluating food quality and safety, and the transformation of farming practices into a modern form of serfdom, where the seed is intellectual property leased by the farmer.

"To demonstrate the safety of GMO products, one must begin by assuming that they can be harmful, and carry out sensitive tests that are capable of detecting harm. As with other technologies like aeronautics and nuclear power, those who manufacture the products must not be the definitive source of safety data. Because



rigorous safety testing has not happened with GMO crops, I remain sceptical."

Another signatory, Dr Margarida Silva, biologist and professor at the Portuguese Catholic University, said, "Even if researchers did largely agree on GMO safety, that doesn't make them correct. To paraphrase Albert Einstein, it only takes one study to prove a whole theory wrong – no matter how many scientists believed in it.

"In addition, research has been mostly financed by the very companies that depend on positive outcomes for their business, and we now know that where money flows, influence grows. The few independent academics left must work double shift to address the vast array of unanswered questions and red flags that keep piling up."

A third signatory, Dr Raul Montenegro, biologist at the University of Cordoba,

Argentina, said: "Usually, analysis of GMO safety fails to consider four main issues.

- One: GMO plants, seeds and byproducts contain not only residues of commercial chemical pesticides, but also insecticidal proteins produced by the plant, like the Bt toxin Cry1Ab.
- Two: each commercial pesticide contains a cocktail of chemicals that undergo chemical changes within pesticide containers, when mixed with other pesticides, and when released in the environment.
- Three: In GMO agriculture each crop cycle begins with a higher background level of commercial pesticides and insecticidal proteins accumulated in agricultural soil, people's homes and gardens, and exposed people.
- Four: GMO agriculture adds unwanted biodiversity (GMO genes) in countries

having less and less natural biodiversity as a consequence of deforestation, pesticides, GMO insecticidal proteins and uncontrolled flux of engineered genomes."

Dr Montenegro said countries such as Argentina and Brazil are paradises for GMO agriculture because their governments have not established monitoring systems for disease and deaths from all causes, along with monitoring of the accumulation of residues of pesticides and GMO insecticidal proteins in exposed people and the environment, and variation of natural biodiversity indexes.

"If these monitoring systems were in place, it would be possible to measure the effects of GMO agriculture. As things stand, the governments of these countries deny that there is a problem even in the face of numerous reports from the people who are affected and the doctors who must treat them." ✳

## Chinese solutions

Claudia Fonseca Sosa

**China continues to surprise. The government of the nation which, in the not so distant future, could displace the United States as the first economy in the world has announced a new reform package which seeks to reorient its growth model toward internal consumption and limit the country's dependence on external markets.**

In 1979, a process of socioeconomic transformations designed to unleash the country's productive forces began. The development model implemented was based on stimulating foreign investment and exports, with excellent results sustained over the years, which allowed it to accumulate a surplus of billions of dollars.

The Chinese economy was also able to manoeuvre in order to survive the explosion of the international financial bubble in 2008.

However, the Asian giant now has a dream: to double the gross domestic product and per capita income by 2020, comparing these indicators with those attained in 2010 when the country grew by 10.3 percent. For that, President Xi Jinping has stated that the country must make strategic readjustments to its economic structure and increase efficiency in state supervision mechanisms.

The government aspires to the entire population of 1.3 billion Chinese equitably enjoying the benefits of development and the measures announced by the 18th Communist Party Central Committee in its recent third plenum are directed toward this goal.

"The fundamental objective of the reforms approved is to improve and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics and to move forward with the modernisation of the system and the capacities of the country's government," states a communiqué read in the event's closing session.

The document places emphasis on the need "to establish an appropriate relationship between the government and the market" in order to grant the latter "more decisive participation in the assignation of resources."

According to the official press, the Communist Party of China (CPC) is to create fair, open and transparent market regulations, as well as to improve the mechanism of market prices so that businesses can operate in an independent manner.

At the same time, China is to undertake fiscal reforms, lower the threshold of foreign investment, intensify the development of free trade areas and increase the opening

of interior, coastal and border areas, with a view to creating a new kind of relationship between industry and agriculture.

Other measures approved will allow small farmers to enjoy more property over land and production means, establish a sustainable social security system, create new urban-rural relations in order to solve difficulties arising from large waves of internal migration, and increase the population's standard of living in terms of access to health and education services.

Also announced was a modification of the family planning policy, taking into account demographic changes in the country with the highest number of inhabitants in the world – and the oldest – to satisfy the desire of many families to have more than one child, which has been the established limit.

The communiqué also announced the decision to direct more resources to the army and to promote scientific and ecological development.

But what is the nature of these reforms? As Cuban analyst Eduardo Regalado, at the International Political Research Centre, explained to *Granma*, given the financial crisis in its principal markets (Europe and the United States), the Chinese leadership has been obliged to reduce its dependency

on foreign capital and strengthen the internal market, one of the largest in the world.

Chinese products which, prior to the crisis, sold very well given that they were cheaper, began to be prejudiced by the competition of European and US products (in other words, from the same countries to which they sold them). At the same time, Chinese acquisitive power has increased and this raises the question of why sell to others if the same goods can be purchased in China.

For Regalado, these adjustment measures seek to further raise the population's standard of living and to close the gap in development between rural and urban areas. They would also provide a solution to the country's internal difficulties, which have occurred as a consequence of development itself, such as environmental contamination, migration from rural areas to cities, among others.

Moreover, an important transformation within the projections of Chinese leaders is to transition from a rapid growth model – with the country growing as more factories open – to a model of intensive growth, in which science and technology play a significant role in production processes, a model which, at the same time, is to address ecological issues and depends less on external markets.

*Granma* ✳

# America vs the world

Margaret Kimberley

**President Obama has placed whole nations on his Kill List. Syria and Venezuela are to join Libya and Iraq as states that have been made to fail, while Ukraine is snatched into the NATO-EU orbit. The word imperialism fell into disuse in recent decades. If it seems slightly retro, that is only because there aren't enough Americans committed to telling the ugly truth about their government.**

During the cold war era we were told that communism increased in influence via a domino effect, knocking down nations one by one and forcing them into Moscow's or Beijing's orbit. In the 21st century there is a new domino theory which puts every part of the world into America's cross hairs.

Barack Obama has succeeded in expanding America's influence in ways that George W Bush and Dick Cheney could only dream about. The neo-conservative project for a new American century has reached full fruition under a Democratic president, who now has many notches on his gun. He and the rest of the NATO leaders began the trail of destruction with Libya, tearing that country asunder under the guise of saving it.

Using lies and their servants in the corporate media, they constructed a tale of a tyrant and a people yearning for protection. That evil success emboldened them and their gulf monarchy allies further and they decided that Syria would be the next domino.

That plan didn't work quite as well as Obama and the rest of the murder incorporated team thought it would. When the British parliament said no to new military adventures

Obama was left sputtering on national television. He was forced to back down from an adamant position he had taken just days earlier.

The semi-comedic setback was only temporary because the monster must be fed at all cost. The system can no longer sustain itself and brute force is the only out. There is nothing old fashioned about imperialism. This malevolent force is still alive and well.

George W Bush made efforts to overthrow the democratically elected Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela when he plotted with the opposition against the late Hugo Chávez. Obama is clearly more committed to violence than his predecessor and has helped to stir up right-wing Venezuelans who want to rid themselves of Nicolas Maduro. Maduro has been weakened by the ginned up protests and is now forced into talks with an opposition that won't be satisfied until he is dead and gone too.

The Venezuelan people have voted for their revolution numerous times. The US, a country that never ceases to call itself a democracy, has thwarted their clearly expressed will time and time again. But that is the essence of empire after all.

While armed force against Syria was temporarily blocked, the West, the Persian gulf monarchies, Israel, and jihadists have not given up their effort to topple the Bashar al-Assad government in Syria. The savage war has made thousands of Syrians homeless and starving refugees, all because the empire needs its next domino.

Not only does the United States meddle in its own backyard, it also relentlessly interferes on the other side of the world in far away Ukraine.



Obama and the rest of the NATO leaders began the trail of destruction with Libya, tearing that country asunder under the guise of saving it.

Popular discontent against that country's president became a successful effort to bring that country into the western sphere of economic influence but with the awful strings of austerity attached. Ukraine has the choice of going bankrupt or being bailed out and dying a slow death a la Greece.

While the machinations were afoot, president Obama warned Vladimir Putin away with threats of sanctions. The scenes of sometimes violent street protests in Ukraine made a fortuitous tableau for the United States which claimed the infamous "responsibility to protect" which never protects anyone who actually needs help and which has

brought so much suffering to people around the world. Every invasion, occupation and disruption in recent years can be laid at the feet of the United States and its allies. Iraq has been destroyed quite literally, Iran has been destroyed economically. Libya was taken out and Syria is on the brink.

The United States quite openly makes it clear that it wants to have its way in the world. If Russia attempts to use its influence then it is vilified and caricatured as a cruel dictatorship controlled by a tyrant. No matter how many elections Chavez and now Maduro won, they are called dictators by American talking heads.

A superpower can foment conflict anywhere it wants to at anytime it chooses. Venezuelans must knuckle under or face the prospect of more turmoil and violence. Ukraine must sign onto economic policies which have already proven disastrous. The United States leaves its fingerprints in these and many other places and that is the essence of imperialism. It is all about control with the rawest brute force available.

The United States hasn't officially made Venezuela or any other country a colony but it doesn't have to do that. It just has to show that it is boss and the dominos will fall wherever it chooses.

Information Clearing House

## EU promises loans to Ukraine for Greek style austerity

Gael de Santis

**Faced with the country's enormous economic problems, several European foreign affairs ministers are promising to help Ukraine obtain a loan from the International Monetary Fund.**

The European Union has tried to support the demonstrators demanding change in Ukraine. But will it keep its promises in the months to come? The question is urgent.

On Nov. 21, when President Viktor Yanukovich turned his back on the European Union in order to join the Russian customs union, it was no great secret that his choice was driven by the catastrophic condition of his country's finances. On Dec. 17, Russia offered a lifeline: a loan of \$15 billion and a reduction in gas prices. Three billion dollars were disbursed at the end of December. A further \$2 billion should have been given out in January, but Moscow preferred to await a return to calm.

In this area, what does Brussels propose? Nothing, unless you count 610 million euros planned since at least 2012, conditional on Kiev's signing an association agreement with the EU. For the emergency,

Europeans seem to have in store the same fate as Greece for the Ukrainians, summoning the IMF.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague revealed an agreement with his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier to "press for vital financial assistance from the IMF."

On Feb. 21, Standard & Poor's downgraded Ukraine's credit rating to triple C, a score close to default. Kiev must repay \$13 billion in 2014. Without Russian help, this is an impossible task. Short-term bonds are being traded at a prohibitive rate of 34.5 percent, compared with 5 percent five months ago. And that is without taking into account the currency, the hryvnia, which has lost 10 percent of its value. Ukraine's currency reserves will last only two months, according to Thomas Baumann of the German Association of Chambers of Commerce. If the IMF offers Ukraine a loan, it will be at the price of neo-liberal structural reforms (austerity).

In the long term, EU countries hope to take advantage of Ukraine's current weak situation in order to impose the EU association agreement that Yanukovich refused to sign in November.

"I believe that, yes, they're

going to sign this agreement," the EU's Trade Commissioner, Karel De Gucht, said happily – while Lithuania sought "a signature without delay."

However, this agreement could well accelerate Ukraine's disintegration. It is essentially a free-trade treaty, which pushes Kiev to take on large amounts of EU law. Once Ukraine has adopted European directives, 99 percent of customs tariffs will fall away. This model had a catastrophic effect for countries such as Tunisia before the Arab Spring.

In order to survive, Ukrainian industry would have to become just as competitive as that of the EU. This is far from being the case. The country's industry is situated for the most part in the Russian-speaking east of the country and is oriented towards Moscow. Since 2004, exports to Russia have leapt by 58 percent, notes the economist Jacques Sapri on his blog. Ukraine needs to orient itself equally westwards and eastwards in order to develop its economy – a fact that European leaders should not forget, or else they risk playing with fire.

L'Humanite

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# The truth behind the uproar in Venezuela

Paul Dobson

**Venezuela's right wingers have been taking to the streets for weeks, blocking roads, starting violent confrontations with lethal results and causing as much mayhem as they can to try to overthrow the Nicolas Maduro government.**

The ever-predictable media coverage in the West has been of a democratic popular movement facing off against a dictatorship.

The Venezuelan opposition has lost four elections since October 2012 – that is in the last year and a half. On three of the four occasions it lost by significant margins.

This is the first year in a long time in which no elections are planned – the next ones, for the parliament, are due at the end of 2015. It's clear that the Venezuelan right have only minority support and it seems that for the time being it won't be able to oust the Bolivarian government through the ballot box.

Many right wingers have obviously noticed this – since the last vote all of two-and-a-half months ago saw them routed in local elections an increasingly loud minority among the opposition alliance has called for a non-democratic way out of their dilemma.

This approach has been led by the Voluntad Popular (VP) party leader Leopoldo Lopez. VP is the fifth-largest party in Venezuela and usually gets 3-5 per cent of the vote.

We should bear in mind that Venezuela's constitution gives the people the right to a recall referendum on the president's mandate after three years – something the opposition tried with Hugo Chavez, only to find it lost the referendum as well.

There is a democratic way for the right to challenge Maduro's majority if it wanted to. But instead on January 23 the opposition called its supporters out under the banner of "la salida," "the ousting."

The protests have turned violent and have spread to various parts of the country. A poll released last week showed 81.6 percent of Venezuelans see the protests as violent and over 85 percent oppose opposition roadblocks.

The protests draw significant

numbers on to the streets because of very real and recognised problems caused by the economic war being unleashed by the bourgeois class – shortages, inflation and problems of production.

Following numerous deaths as a result of opposition violence the courts ordered the arrest of Lopez as the inspiration for these crimes.

Since then the defence of Lopez has itself become a key theme of the protests, which reiterate the usual confused discourse of the far right. Placards demand the right to free speech, for example, when weeks of protest show that the government has respected this right even at the cost of significant disruption.

Despite cries of repression the protests have not been touched by the organised revolutionary people or the armed forces. In some cases police and the army have been on the receiving end of Molotov cocktails, beatings and live bullets without responding with force. In no country in the world would you see the security forces putting up with this abuse with such patience.

Some people have of course been arrested – but these are not political prisoners. They are citizens under arrest for breaking laws by, for example, shooting at the police.

And 90 percent of the Venezuelan press continues to be vehemently anti-government and spews racist, hate-filled headlines against the working-class president. The idea that there is no freedom of speech is laughable.

And media manipulation is intense. Facebook and Twitter are serving as tools to "prove" repression via uploading photos, which are often manipulated. The pro-government demonstrations have less access to such means as few demonstrators own expensive smartphones.

One image of police beating a protester that went viral turned out to not be from Venezuela at all, but from Egypt.

The government of Maduro, who was himself elected less than a year ago, has opened the door to talks with opposition leaders not involved in "la salida" as a way of defusing the violence.

Some of the deaths so far, such as that of pro-government activist Juan



This is not a popular uprising: Supporters of the forces trying to displace the government.

Montoya, have been political assassinations. It has also been proven that the opposition has killed some of its own – forensic reports show that bullets used to kill opposition marchers came from within the march. This is then used to blame the government for the violence and further ratchet up the tension.

As I write 18 municipalities in the country are affected by the violence, which means incidentally that over 300 other municipalities have seen no disruption. And every single municipality that has seen violence is run by an opposition mayor or governor.

There are near-daily marches by both sides, with the revolution's supporters calling for peace and the opposition calling for the "ousting." And those taking part in the opposition marches are mostly from the wealthier sections of the population. Some say it's a student uprising, but it isn't. Most people protesting are business owners and white-collar workers, stirred up by the far right to act because of their economic problems.

There has been some support from student leaders at right-wing universities but many of these people don't even study but enrol in order to lead political activity on campus.

Working-class support for the government has stayed firm.

This is not a popular uprising. It is a bid by a minority to cause chaos.

And in this it is not unsuccessful. In areas where the protests are strongest, such as the cities of Merida and San Cristobal, some streets have been taken over, with barricades erected.

Those manning these barricades have started to charge "vacuation," or extortion payments, for safe passage through the street. In residential sectors thousands have literally been trapped in their homes, afraid to go out and with no way of getting past the barricades, where the opposition burn tyres and trees and patrol the streets with armed gangs.

Theft and violence are rife in these areas. Anyone wearing anything red is sure to be beaten, robbed or worse. No exception is made for mothers, children or the elderly.

Other grisly tactics have included stretching taut wires across roads, which have killed at least five people riding past on motorbikes at night, and spreading oil to make motorbikes skid so bike and rider can be "captured."

It is clear that support for these protests is coming from outside Venezuela. Opposition groups have

been found with Israeli weapons and numerous Colombian paramilitaries have been caught in the border states.

These are professional mercenaries, expert in firing up violence and street-fighting. Some are qualified snipers. Weapons found on those arrested for violent acts have included grenades, machine guns, pistols and rifles.

Armed gangs have attacked hospitals, power stations, schools, ministries, public institutions, telephone companies, the offices of revolutionary parties, public transport, police stations, universities, hotels and supermarkets.

Revolutionary activists are shot at when out and about – I myself have been fired on.

US President Barack Obama and others are calling for foreign intervention, a clear sign that outside interests are at work. This is dangerous. The Venezuelan people will not have their revolution sabotaged by a far-right minority whose constitutional rights have been fully respected.

All progressives worldwide need to see these protests for what they are and oppose any interference with Venezuela or its democratically elected government.

*Morning Star* ✪

## Cypriot parliament blocks bailout sell-off bill

**Cypriot MPs blocked a sell-off Bill last week that had been demanded by international lenders as part of the country's bailout. But the vote threw into doubt whether Cyprus would receive the next batch of cash from the troika creditors.**

They had given the government until March 5 to pass the Bill, which was staunchly opposed by several parties including the communist Akel and socialist Edek.

MPs voted 25 in favour, 25 against and five abstained. The tie meant that the legislation was turned down. Parliament will probably be asked to vote on an amended Bill next week, a government MP insisted.

"Privatisation is a necessity," Averof Neophytou, who leads the ruling right-wing Democratic Rally Party, told state broadcaster CyBC. "I hope that wisdom will prevail in the next few days."

However, Akel leader Andros Kyprianou told parliament before the vote that his party would never consent to the "sell-off of the nation's wealth" and denounced the "blackmail" of international lenders.

Mr Kyprianou and Edek MP Giorgos Varnava said the government must renegotiate the Bill and consult opposition parties. The centre-right Democratic Party had suggested that it would

support the Bill, but five of its MPs abstained because their party's proposed amendments safeguarding jobs and benefits at privatised companies had been rejected.

Privatisations were a key component of the €10 billion bailout that Cyprus agreed with other eurozone countries and the International Monetary Fund last year.

Hundreds of people protested outside Parliament against the Bill, including state electric, telecommunications and port workers, whose companies were slated for privatisation.

*Morning Star* ✪

Adelaide

## IWD march and speech

On Friday the 7th of March join us on the South Australian State Library Lawns to celebrate International Women's Day! The march will begin with a speech for special guest Lucky Giire, the launch of the Gladys Elphick Award nominations and the announcement of the 2014 Barbra Polkinghorne Award for women supporting women. We will then march to Vaughan Place for live music and a free BBQ!

When: **Friday 7th of March**

Where: **SA State Library Lawns, Nth Tce**

Time: **5pm**

Wear: **Feminist colours – green purple & white!**

Bring: **Noise makers!**

Do: **Enjoy yourself!**

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

### Sans compassion

I find it deeply distressing, heart-breakingly so, to see photographs of members of our parliament, Scott Morrison, Tony Abbot, Julie Bishop and Christopher Pyne, laughing, smiling, smirking, sneering and enjoying themselves playing their political games in parliament, after a young man, Reza Berati, has just been killed on Manus Island and many others injured.

This terrible incident demands serious treatment.

Do these people live on another planet; this is real life and a profound tragedy has just occurred. They seemingly have no semblance of dignity or respect for people. Have they so completely lost any sense of compassion and empathy? I find this attitude utterly appalling and a terrible disgrace to this country.

We must put an end to this sordid

offshore processing and rediscover our humanity.

Steven Katsineris  
Vic

### Environmentally destructive Head & Shoulders

A breaking Greenpeace investigation has linked a rainforest-wrecking scandal in Indonesia to a product used by millions worldwide every day. It could even be in your shower right now. We've uncovered evidence that the palm oil used in Head & Shoulders shampoo is being obtained at the expense of ancient rainforests. It's making consumers everywhere complicit in forest destruction and driving animals like the mighty Sumatran tiger to extinction.

The makers of Head & Shoulders shampoo buy palm oil from the companies tearing down the trees. If we can build mass public pressure on Head & Shoulders right now, we can reduce the demand that's driving the deforestation.

You might not know it, but palm oil is used in many of the products we love in supermarkets today. The problem is, most brands choose to ignore where it's coming from. Just months ago, we were alerted to an "orangutan graveyard" – the sad

and shocking site of these beautiful animals found dead on the edge of a plantation where, until recently, the rainforest was largely untouched.

It's heartbreaking, and just one of the stories we've uncovered. But we know it doesn't have to be this way. Greenpeace is made for campaigns like this.

We know global brands are sensitive to our pressure, and sustainable solutions exist. We've already forced Nestlé, L'Oréal, Unilever and others to use sustainable palm oil in their products. Head & Shoulders is scrambling like mad to stop a PR backlash, and now is the time to ramp up the pressure.

We can't beat this entire, multi-billion dollar industry overnight. But if we can shift the policies of the biggest brands palm oil companies rely on, we can lift standards around the world and stop our last remaining rainforests being flattened for palm plantations.

Reece Turner  
Greenpeace Australia Pacific

### Don't be afraid of democracy

In the lead up to the Mardi Gras parade in Sydney, the MP whose legislation achieved marriage equality in New Zealand has urged Tony Abbott to allow a free

### Sydney

## Get-together to celebrate International Women's Day

After the Sydney IWD march (Saturday, March 8) come along to a get-together to celebrate International Women's Day

Where – 74 Buckingham Street, Surry Hills

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Organised by the Sydney Central Branch

### vote on the reform.

In a video released by Australian Marriage Equality, NZ Labour MP, Louisa Wall, says her message to Tony Abbott is, "don't be afraid of democracy and don't be afraid of the people".

Directly addressing Australian Coalition MPs, Ms Wall says, "Marriage equality is about democracy.

"For those of you who believe in

democracy, who want to engage your communities, I would encourage you to ask for a free vote."

Marriage equality was achieved in New Zealand with the governing National Party allowing a free vote.

Australia's Liberal/National government is yet to allow a free vote, despite growing support in party ranks for the move.

Rodney Croome

# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

## Fascists running amok and bogus jobs

Has anyone else noticed the similarities between the EU putsch in Ukraine and the near-successful US-backed putsch in Hungary in 1956? Like the events in Kiev, those in Budapest in '56 also depended on a largely foreign-based media blitz, lauding the participants as "freedom fighters" and labelling the events as a "revolution". There too, the aim was supposedly to achieve democracy, but in Budapest as in Kiev, prominent among the "freedom fighters" were avowed fascists. In Hungary, they actually appeared wearing their pre-war green uniforms of the Nazi-style Arrow Cross outfit, Hungary's equivalent of the Brown Shirts.

Prominent in both events was the meddling hand of German imperialism. In '56, the West German air-force flew planeloads of Arrow Cross members into Hungary. They had fled to West Germany with the retreating Hitlerite armies in 1945. Now they hoped to regain what they had been forced to give up in the wake of the Nazis' defeat by the Red Army. If that sounds familiar it could be because the same thinking was displayed by the Cuban émigrés who landed in Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. And, as the Ukrainian Communists have pointed out, fascists pushing an extreme anti-Russian line were also prominent among the supposed "pro-democracy fighters" in Kiev's main square.

And Germany, of course, has been very prominent in the devious diplomatic and economic pressuring that has been going on over the question of EU membership in some

form for Ukraine. Twice in the 20th Century Ukraine was earmarked to become a German colony but each time the attempt failed. Today, German imperialism hopes to achieve the same result without having to actually go to war. Either way, falling under the sway of German imperialism won't do the people of Ukraine any good at all.

Changing the subject, did you see where Wyong Council, on the NSW Central Coast, has given the go-ahead to a 24-hour drive-thru McDonald's fast food outlet amidst claims that it will "provide a much-needed jobs boost for the shire". Actual job numbers are a bit rubbery however, estimates ranging from 80 to 120 "full and part-time positions". As well as the large McDonald's the development will include a service station with a 7-Eleven store and four light industrial units. None of those are labour-intensive businesses, so the majority of any jobs created will be at Macca's – and as we all know they are not real jobs but the notorious McJobs (jobs deliberately employing under-paid youth).

The land on which this shiny new Macca's is to be built is currently occupied by a Mitre 10 hardware store, which just happens to be owned by the family of Wyong's Mayor, Doug Eaton. Not by the Mayor, you understand, but by his family, so that's all right then. When the vote was taken in Council to approve the project, Mayor Doug absented himself from the proceedings so that no one could suggest that anything untoward was going on. As if they would!



McJobs – jobs deliberately employing under-paid youth.

Mayor Doug's family (not him, you understand) also is part owner of the land on which the new project is to be built. So Mayor Doug will do all right out of the deal even if it doesn't create many real jobs. Lack of jobs is a sore point in Wyong Shire. Recently two major employers – the Kellogs factory at Charmhaven and the Bluetongue Brewery at Warnervale – have closed. No McDonald's – no matter how big – can substitute for that loss of real jobs.

In Britain, since March last year, it has been mandatory for all unemployed people trying to claim the miserable "jobseeker's allowance" to register and use a government website, Jobmatch. The name implies that its function is to match up an unemployed person with a suitable and appropriate job. But capitalism in Britain, like capitalism everywhere else today, just does not have sufficient jobs for everyone who needs one. There as here, the unemployed are made to apply, in writing supplying their CV, etc, for lots of jobs advertised in the press. In most cases, they never hear a word in response, not even an acknowledgement.

In Britain, however, they face an extra hurdle. An investigation by Channel 4 News found that thousands of jobs being advertised were in fact bogus. The investigation found that nine apparently unconnected recruitment websites across the country are all controlled by one man in Coventry – Mark Coward, "a businessman and Baptist deacon". Coward has posted thousands of jobs on his websites. Jobseekers who answered any of his many

ads were encouraged to visit a legitimate recruitment business, CV-Library, using links showing that Coward had recommended them.

The enterprising Mr Coward then received £1 for every CV successfully submitted to CV-Library. But usually the jobs themselves simply did not exist. Typically, his ads were for jobs in different parts of the country, but the job descriptions were always identical.

Coward seems to be cut from the same cloth as the "job providers" that plague our own unemployed. They have no jobs to provide, but they can – and do – order the unemployed to attend endless and repetitive "training" courses, for which the job providers get paid a fee by the government for every unemployed person on the course.

No matter how much the government massages the unemployment figures, the number out of work will continue to grow until there is actual investment in job creating industries. However, the federal government has no job creation plan, other than Prime Minister Abbott's pious hope that small businesses will somehow lead us out of the slump.

Small businesses are by definition small. They do not employ many people. And the majority of them go bust in their first year. Pinning one's hopes for economic recovery and a jobs boom on small businesses shows an alarming ignorance of economics on the part of Abbott and his government.

Clearly, before jobs can grow, Abbott's got to go. ☹



Sunday March 9 –  
Saturday March 15

The proliferation of media courses at tertiary institutions plus the availability of high-quality digital video cameras has meant an upsurge in the number of films about people's intimate or personal moments, from films about sex problems to films about people's last moments. The help of professional filmmakers to edit these essentially home movies into a professional-looking finished film makes all the difference between them remaining at home or ending up on television.

**Alex: A Life Fast Forward** (ABC2 Sunday 9 March at 8.30pm) is one such effort. It is essentially a family movie about their son and brother – Alex Lewis – who was diagnosed with terminal bone cancer as a teenager. Determined to live what life he had to the fullest, Alex remained upbeat and positive, an inspiration to his relatives and friends. On the night after the first day of filming, Alex met a girl at a party and fell in love. Over a period of nine months we follow his story, as his girlfriend, Ali becomes his fiancée and then his wife. Five days after they marry, Alex dies.

It could have been maudlin, it could have been morbid. It isn't either, even though by the time we get to the wedding, Alex has lost the use of his legs, is on oxygen and morphine. It is a story about making

the most of your life, when you know you don't have long to live.

A Windfall Films production for BBC3, this is a quietly moving film.

Fundamentalist "biblical scholars" spend a great deal of time and money fossicking around in the Near East seeking to prove the truth of various Bible stories. If they can positively identify a place or an object as one mentioned in the Bible, they feel they have in some way "proved" the truth of the Bible as a whole. And this is important to them, for Christian Fundamentalists maintain that everything in the Bible is literally true, whether it is people with 900-year life spans, imperviousness to fire, rising from the dead, talking to angels, or saving two of every animal on Earth from the great flood.

The Bible says Noah's ark landed on Mount Ararat, so fundamentalist archaeologists have spent years searching for its remains there. But as British actress Joanna Lumley, a religious lady who was schooled by nuns, discovers in the two-part series **Joanna Lumley: The Search For Noah's Ark** screening on **Compass** (ABC1 from Sunday March 9 at 6.30pm), the legend of Noah and the great flood is much older than Biblical times, going back via ancient Mesopotamia to the Indus valley in India.

The significance of the Flood story to fundamentalists is that they believe that if it could be proved to be true it would shoot down evolution in flames. Joanna Lumley seems to merely be intrigued to know if the story has any basis in fact at all. Was there a flood and if so where? Could flooding of the Arabian Gulf thousands of years ago be the inspiration for Noah's story?

She is not exactly rigorous in her sorting out of fact from legend or fact from opinion. But the program is nonetheless interesting, as far as it goes.

**Deaf Teens: Hearing World** (ABC2 Wednesday, March 12 at 9.30pm) deals with the problem



Alex: *A Life Fast Forward* (ABC2 Sunday 9 March at 8.30pm).

of being deaf in today's world. A Century Films Production for BBC3, it follows five deaf teenagers as they take their first steps into the hearing world. The film highlights how not all deaf teens want to be able to hear and are often defiant against being part of the hearing world, but also the lengths some deaf teenagers will go to improve their hearing.

Sara and Asher wouldn't choose to hear even if they had that option, they are fully deaf and proud of their Deaf culture. Not only do they not hear, but they also don't speak. This makes Sara's first days at university a real challenge: she is supplied with two support workers, one to translate the lecturer's words into sign language, and the other to take notes as Sara cannot watch the translator sign and take notes at the same time. She worries that this makes her look like she has "special needs".

Others in the film are 19-year-old

Meghan who has a cochlear implant fitted the week before she starts at university, a fully-hearing environment; Jake and Adam, identical twins, except that Adam is hearing but Jake is profoundly deaf. Adam and Jake have their own one-handed form of sign language. Christianah is entering her final year at her specialist Deaf School where she and her friends have a very sassy attitude to their deafness, being quick to deride anyone who won't take them seriously. It is their last year of living in a safe, deaf environment and the nerves are beginning to set in ...

In 2011 24-year-old Jesse Jones went missing. After five days his body was found at the bottom of a cliff. During the search for Jesse it emerged that unbeknownst to his family, he was suffering from acute depression and felt Roaccutane, a commonly prescribed acne drug, was largely to blame.

**Dying For Clear Skin** (ABC2 Wednesday March 12 at 8.30pm) is an attempt to raise concerns about the safety of Roaccutane. Acne affects 80 percent of teenagers in various forms of severity and can be a debilitating condition. Even mild outbreaks can make people insecure and miserable and they will do anything to get rid of it. Roaccutane is the most effective treatment now available and is commonly safe. But it can have serious side effects, producing mood swings and suicidal thoughts.

The dermatologists remain firm in their advocacy of Roaccutane, but the program certainly makes you wonder about the need for safeguards.

I have not yet been able to see any of the new series **Simon Schama presents The Story of the Jews** (SBS ONE Saturdays from March 8, at 8.30pm) but will review it next week. ☼

Adelaide

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# International Women's Day

## Women's rights & class struggle



### Mati English

**Childcare, reproductive rights, land rights, women's services, education, equal pay, jobs and trade union rights: these are central, pressing issues facing women. So many gains are threatened.**

Though it was no way the beginning of the women's rights struggle, in those four and a half decades the struggles of the women's movement, the trade unions and left and progressive political forces resulted in many social and economic gains for women.

It was a powerful part of that impetus that saw the Whitlam Labor government come to office in the early 1970s with a platform for social change.

Women benefited from the introduction of Medibank (now Medicare) and funding for women's health that resulted in free, safe abortions, family planning, women's refuges and other women's services.

International Women's Year in 1975 saw special programs for childcare, for migrant women, Indigenous women, and other disadvantaged groups. There were programs

to eliminate sexism in schools and discrimination in the workforce.

Over the years the number of childcare places rose dramatically, with funding from the government and assistance to parents. Equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action and other legislative measures were introduced.

Tertiary fees were removed and TAFE was developed, offering women opportunities to return to studies in special access programs and community learning centres. The formation of the Family Court removed the blame, trauma, high cost and long delays of the old punitive divorce system.

The equal pay case of 1972 resulted in the average wage (ordinary time earnings) for full-time female workers rising from around 60 percent up to 80 percent of male earnings by the end of the 1970s.

The ACTU adopted a Working Women's Charter in 1977, trade union women's committees were set up, women's officers appointed and specific issues affecting women taken up. Childcare became union business.

The right of women to work, including married women, was won. Married women in the public service were given permanency and allowed to join superannuation schemes.

Campaigns were waged and over time gains won in family leave, carers' leave and childcare provision. However, like all concessions won under capitalism, they were not permanent.

### Ascendancy of the Right

Now we are experiencing a reversal of many of these gains. Today's attack is coming from the reactionary policies of the economic rationalists, and the extreme Right of politics including, the Christian Right.

As governments privatise and deregulate industries, and employers introduce technological change, casualise and downsize workforces to compete on international markets, the pool of unemployed grows.

Australia still has a relatively highly segregated workforce, with women concentrated in a narrow range of occupations and industries.

They are predominantly employed in shops, banks, insurance offices, education, health and community services, the public service, accommodation, cafes, restaurants and clothing and textiles.

Some of these areas have the highest rates of casualisation and part-time work and most appalling exploitative conditions. With the exception of the tourist sector, they also account for much of the job cutting taking place.

An attempt is being made to drive women back into the home to try and cover up the failure of the system to provide work for everyone.

This is being done by a number of means.

### Childcare

The Howard government cut the operational subsidy to long day care community based childcare centres and outside school hours centres and slashed fee relief for parents. As a result fees rose, centres closed, and staffing were cut, affecting the quality of care.

Some families had to find alternative care, often of dubious quality or withdraw from the workforce. It is usually the woman who is forced out of the workforce – for either social or economic reasons (women's wages are still lower than men's).

### Abortion

The ability of women to plan their working and family life is also threatened by attacks on family planning and the right to have an abortion.

Abortion will be a big issue in IWD marches following the threat of Zoe's Law and the anti-abortion Christian fundamentalist nature of the Abbott government as expressed by the reactionary backbencher Cory Bernardi who accused women of using abortion as "an abhorrent form of birth control" and labelled pro-choice advocates as "pro-death". He called abortion "a death industry".

"Pro-family" (in reality anti-family) and "right to life" (who in

fact are putting the lives of pregnant women at risk) would drag us back to the dark ages of backyard butchery where lives would be lost and women traumatised and their health destroyed.

Only the wealthy would be able to afford safe procedures or receive the best advice and support.

### Changing work patterns

Women's participation in the workforce has been made more difficult by enterprise bargaining as it brings more flexibility for the employer in the workplace.

Full-time jobs are continuing to be replaced by part-time and casual positions. The weekend is being taken away from workers.

Women are still predominantly found in the lower paid, less secure jobs with poor conditions. Those who do have full-time jobs are working longer hours.

"Flexibility" and the drive for "efficiency" and "productivity" in enterprise agreements has translated into reduced job satisfaction, stress, health problems, and increased difficulties in balancing family and working lives.

If individual employment contracts replace awards and collective bargaining then the progress towards equal pay for work of equal value could be set back decades.

### Govt attack

Just as the Abbott government is set on turning the clock back on multiculturalism and Indigenous rights, so it is launching an attack on women's rights.

Cuts to women's health and welfare services, other community services and to legal aid, will set the position of women back decades. These attacks are part of the wider offensive on the working class and consequently must be met and defeated by the working class as a whole. ✪

### Clara Zetkin: Selected writings

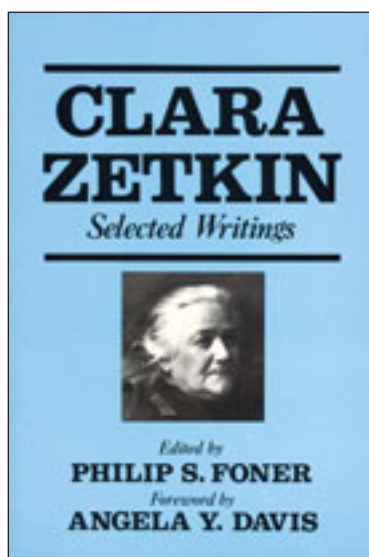
Edited by Philip S Foner Foreword by Angela Davis  
Paperback 206 pages \$25 including p&h

The communist activist Clara Zetkin is widely associated with International Women's Day but she also deserves to be better known for her Marxist analysis of women's oppression.

"Like her heroic contemporary, VI Lenin, she sought to understand the special oppression of women by placing it within the larger context of the socioeconomic evolution of humankind and consequently attempted to analyse most of the major events within the history of the class struggle of her era," Angela Davis writes in the foreword to the book.

The interesting and important collection of writings are still as relevant and of interest as when they were written. A great gift for International Women's Day!

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02 9699 8844 shop@cpa.org.au www.cpa.org.au



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Website: [www.cpa.org.au/guardian](http://www.cpa.org.au/guardian)  
Email: [guardian@cpa.org.au](mailto:guardian@cpa.org.au)

#### Central Committee:

General Secretary: Bob Briton  
Party President: Vinnie Molina  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
P: 02 9699 8844 F: 02 9699 9833

Website: [www.cpa.org.au](http://www.cpa.org.au)  
Email: [cpa@cpa.org.au](mailto:cpa@cpa.org.au)

**Sydney District Committee:**  
Wayne Sonter  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
P: 02 9699 8844 F: 02 9699 9833

**Newcastle Branch:**  
[newcastle@cpa.org.au](mailto:newcastle@cpa.org.au)

**Riverina Branch:**  
Allan Hamilton  
2/57 Cooper St Cootamundra 2590

**Melbourne Branch:**  
Andrew Irving  
[viccpa@netspace.net.au](mailto:viccpa@netspace.net.au)  
Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall  
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053  
P: 03 9639 1550 F: 03 9639 4199

**SA State Committee:**  
Bob Briton,  
PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,  
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366  
[www.adelaidecommunists.org](http://www.adelaidecommunists.org)  
Email: [sa@cpa.org.au](mailto:sa@cpa.org.au)

**West Australian Branch:**  
Vinnie Molina [perth@cpa.org.au](mailto:perth@cpa.org.au)  
PO Box 98 North Perth WA 6906  
P: 0419 812 872

**Brisbane Branch:**  
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152  
P: 0449 202 189  
[cpabris@live.com.au](mailto:cpabris@live.com.au)

**Tasmania Branch:**  
Bob Briton [tas@cpa.org.au](mailto:tas@cpa.org.au)  
P: 0418 894 366