

Time for fightback



Thousands of people around Australia took part in anti-Abbott "March in March" actions, last weekend. Photo: Adelaide.

Anna Pha

It was a miracle that no one was seriously injured or lost their life in the fire at the Lend Lease construction site at Barangaroo in Sydney's CBD last week. Thick black fumes poured out over the city centre as the inferno reached temperatures of over 1,000° C and surrounding buildings were evacuated. At the same time as 500 workers were evacuating the site, their union, the CFMEU, was being hit with more than \$680,000 in fines and damages, much of it for trying to keep a site in Perth safe.

The Abbott government and construction companies are waging all-out war on the unions and bankrupting them in the court system as part of their armoury of weapons. They have taken up where the Howard government left off and are determined to finish the job, using every means at their disposal.

The Productivity Commission has launched an attack on construction workers in its review of public infrastructure. The Fairfax media leaked the draft terms of reference for the forthcoming Productivity Commission review of the Fair Work Act and industrial relations in

Australia. It comes as no surprise that these also target unions and workers' wages and working conditions. The government has set up a panel of big business representatives to review restrictions on 457 visas for skilled workers.

It took almost 24 hours to extinguish the Barangaroo fire. Several thousand people had to be evacuated from nearby buildings, major city roads were closed, including the ramp onto the Sydney Harbour Bridge, for fear of a 20-storey crane toppling. Black plumes of smoke, containing who knows what dangerous particles, poured out over the city centre.

Previous incidents

It was the second fire on a Lend Lease construction site in 18 months. Unions have had issues over safety at Barangaroo since commencement of work on the site, beginning with the presence of highly toxic substances. In January this year, a worker died in a fall on the site.

In November 2012, a crane caught fire on Broadway in Sydney, shutting the building site down for a fortnight and causing traffic chaos and evacuations. Two workers were injured when scaffolding at a construction site

in Mascot, Sydney, collapsed a few weeks ago. Again, it was incredible luck that no workers, pedestrians or motorists were killed. (See *Guardian*, "Abbott wants bosses' unions or no unions", #1630, 12-03-2014).

Following the Barangaroo fire, Unions NSW called for an urgent safety review of all major building sites. "We have seen three major safety scares at building sites in the last 18 months. Only luck prevented mass tragedy on each occasion," UNSW secretary Mark Lennon said."

WorkCover and the government, under considerable public pressure, responded by announcing a six-week blitz of building sites in Sydney and regional NSW with 30 inspectors! That won't change much. Maybe a few slaps over the wrist with a few subcontractors fined peanuts. These sites need constant, independent monitoring with serious penalties for infringements.

The powers of union occupational health and safety representatives should be strengthened. The right of unions and workers to take industrial action around safety issues is vital. They should not face hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines and damages claims when

taking action around safety issues. But this is what is happening.


It has become a "crime" to attempt to enforce safety on a major construction site.


Massive fines

The Howard government's Australian Building and Construction Commission's (ABCC) has hit the CFMEU with millions of dollars in fines and costs since it began hounding unions and workers on construction sites. The attacks continued under Labor which brought the ABCC under the Fair Work umbrella and renamed it as the Fair Work Building Commission (FWBC). Since the election of the Abbott government the FWBC has stepped up its attack on unions and militants.

Last week, the CFMEU and several of its officials in Western Australia were hit with fines and costs of more than \$680,000 for contraventions of the Fair Work Act. This includes the union and its officials' alleged role in demanding payment from Brookfield Multiplex during a strike, until plant on site were inspected after a runaway water tanker almost killed two workers who were working in a trench.

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Guardian

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Pressure building for media "reform"

Prime Minister Abbott says his government has an "instinct for deregulation" when it comes to the media. And following a report from the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) commissioned by former Communications Minister Stephen Conroy, he is sounding more and more inclined to act on his "instincts". Giant broadcasting corporations are straining at the leash for new acquisitions and greater market dominance.

Conroy's successor, Malcolm Turnbull, is also dropping hints that "reform" is on its way. On the chopping block are media ownership rules concerning "reach", i.e. that restrict the audience for broadcasters to no more than 75 percent of the Australian population and the so-called "two-out-of-three" rule that prevents media corporations from controlling a newspaper, TV station and radio licence in the same market. Turnbull says he is "very sympathetic" to erasing these "black letter rules".

Deregulation of the media has been in the Liberals' economic Catechism for a long, long time. Foreign ownership and market share regulations have shifted in favour of the big players over the years and, if the neo-liberal zealots get their way, dramatic change is about to be foisted on audiences across the country.

Pushing these agenda items across the line is not easy politically. Australians don't support the sorts of pro-monopoly changes the Liberals have been backing since the days of the Howard government. A "magic bullet" argument is usually needed to silence important sections of the opposition to these measures. This time it's the advent of broadband internet.

"My view is the arrival of the internet, and the additional diversity and avenues for competition that it brings, really says we should have less regulation and more freedom," Turnbull said last week. He will be very busy in the weeks and months ahead because not even all of his Coalition colleagues are on side. Members from rural and remote electorates would find it difficult to support "reforms" that might finish off local news and other services guaranteed under current legislation.

Nine's CEO David Gyngel is backing the changes and is talking up his own channel's commitment to local news and current affairs. Channel Ten is behind the moves but Seven is not. Seven is not expected to do as well out of the rash of mergers and takeovers that would follow de-regulation. The main players are down-playing their ambitions but the face of the Australian media would be radically changed following the Turnbull/Abbott makeover.

Another obstacle to be overcome is public distaste for the Murdoch media empire and Rupert Murdoch in particular. Turnbull has acknowledged this and went to great lengths during the week to explain away comments he reportedly made about the "demented plutocrat".

"When you compare him to Conrad Black, to Kerry Packer, to Bob Maxwell, Jimmy Goldsmith ... Rupert is a very, very straightforward, normal person," the minister said. Feint praise, indeed.

Another political hurdle is any threat to free-to-air sport. News Corp owns 50 percent of pay TV provider Foxtel and, if News were free to buy out Ten, the anti-syphoning rules that protect free-to-air sport would easily be bypassed. And, of course, pressure to privatise the ABC and SBS will continue to build.

We can expect the poorly covered developments over media regulation to be steered away from the back-room deals leading to take-overs and mergers, the loss of local services and kept squarely on the alleged antiquated nature of the rules.

Why should Google (via YouTube), Apple, Netflix and others be able to gather big Australian audiences and pay virtually no Australian taxes in the process? The media monopolies already have a powerful influence on the way we are given information about what is happening in the world and why.

Trashing media ownership rules will devolve even more power and influence to them.

If Australians are to continue to receive local news and current affairs in rural and remote areas, to have some degree of media diversity and thus information diversity and hang onto the ABC and SBS as public broadcasters, we will need to get off the sidelines of the media regulation debate.

PRESS FUND

In a really embarrassing speech Prime Minister Tony Abbott once referred to the "goodies and baddies" of international relations. For the *Guardian* team the "baddies" are people like Tony Abbott! The "goodies", on the other hand, are contributors to the Press Fund, which we depend on to help fund production of the paper. So if you possibly can, please send us a contribution for the next edition - and while you're at it, why not make it a weekly practice. Many thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

Angelo Attard \$50, Jessie Kirk \$50, Mark Mannion \$5, F B Rouady \$50, "Round Figure" \$10

This week's total: \$165 Progressive total: \$ 1,660

Party action on Morwell mine fire

Because of the lack of adequate explanation on the effects of exposure to coal fumes, gases and dust particulate from the Hazelwood coal fire not given to the exposed population at Morwell, Victoria, Marie and Len Lean from the CPA West Adelaide Branch decided that something needed to be done for the people in the area about the coal fire burning since February 9.

Scientific information must be made available to residents, they decided, and volunteered to go to

Morwell to give out a Party leaflet explaining some of the long term health effects and hazards.

They travelled by car from Adelaide to Morwell and handed out the leaflets at the Morwell Coles supermarket on February 14, commencing at 8.30am.

The response was tremendous; about 9am a staff member came out and they thought they were going to get the big shove but she smiled nicely and said can I please have a copy?

Shoppers took the leaflet readily

once they saw the heading "Serious health risks remain". Many came back for a second copy for their neighbours; others took copies to distribute in their area. Len Marie were asked by a few shoppers "Where do you live in the area?" When they told them they weren't locals and came from Adelaide, people were astounded that they'd had the conviction to travel that far and inform them of what the state government, Health Department and EPA failed to tell the community. ✪

Abbott government's \$2.7bn drone plan

The Abbott government has approved plans to buy Triton drones to patrol Australia's borders at a cost of \$2.7 billion. The government claims the drones can help to prevent asylum seeker arrivals.

The fleet of giant, hi-tech drones will be used "to secure ... ocean resources, including energy resources off northern Australia, and help to protect our borders," Prime Minister Tony Abbott said, authorising the move last week.

Asylum seekers frequently attempt to enter the country from Indonesia and Sri Lanka on unsafe boats, which are turned back or

sometimes sink offshore.

"They will provide the Australian Defence Force with unprecedented maritime surveillance capabilities, operating at altitudes up to 55,000 feet over extremely long ranges while remaining airborne for up to 33 hours," Abbott said. The drones are to be based in Adelaide.

The drones are expected to be used to scan the Indian Ocean. The South and East China Seas are also considered flashpoints.

The Triton Unmanned Aerial Vehicles are still under development by Northrop Grumman, and have a 40 metre wingspan - approximately

the size of a small airliner. Drones have infrared sensors and optical cameras and a wide-ranging 360 degree radar, which can cover a distance from Sydney to London.

Patrol drone use has been on the agenda for some 10 years in Australia. The previous Labor government blocked their introduction, considering the technology to be too immature.

Abbott outlined his defence policy prior to the September 2013 election, stating his Liberal Party's support for the introduction of Triton-type vehicles, saying it would "closely consider the possibility."

RT ✪

Secrecy, misinformation on CSG contamination

Reports that stock have been drinking from an aquifer polluted by uranium and other toxic materials in the Pilliga in north west NSW proves that the farming community is at risk because of secrecy and misinformation from CSG companies, the Lock the Gate Alliance says.

LTG spokesperson, local farmer Anne Kennedy, said the latest news was outrageous and demonstrated the scant disregard the CSG industry was showing for human health, environmental monitoring and existing agricultural industries in the Pilliga.

"First we learn that for around 12 months CSG miner Santos and the EPA have known that the aquifer has been contaminated by uranium and other heavy metals and the public has been kept in the dark.

"Now we find out that stock have been drinking from the very same aquifer just a few kilometres from the point source of the contamination, despite repeated denials of this fact by Santos," Ms Kennedy said.

This is the same aquifer that a local farmer uses to drink and to wash in and to water their stock. But it gets worse. The leaking tailings pond responsible for the pollution is still in use a year after it was found to be faulty. How is it possible that Santos is still operating in the Pilliga, asked Anne Kennedy.

"Where are the authorities that are supposed to monitor pollutants and protect human health and our existing agricultural industries? Where is the public's right to be kept informed about radioactive

contamination at levels 20 times safe drinking standards?"

"This sad episode has exposed the secrecy and misinformation in the CSG industry but it is the local farmers who will end up paying the price with their health and their livelihoods."

The site of the contamination, the Pilliga state forest, is a recharge basin for the Great Artesian Basin, the vast and vitally important underground water resource that sustains much of inland Australia.

"It is high time the state government intervened to close this polluting industry down at least until it can prove beyond all reasonable doubt that it will not impact on our health and it will not contaminate our water, our land and our food producing areas." ✪



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Privatisation and appalling transport decisions



Corner Booth and Johnston Streets, Annandale, NSW 1955.

Peter Mac

Proposed changes to Sydney's public transport will complicate travel arrangements for passengers, and some commuters who travel by train for part of their journey will pay more for doing so.

This will particularly affect passengers in the eastern suburbs, which lie east of the central business district between Sydney Harbour and Botany Bay. The existing Eastern Suburbs rail line runs eastwards four stations from the city to Bondi Junction. The rest of the eastern suburbs area is currently serviced by buses, which run to the city.

The government decided against extending the rail line through the eastern suburbs, even though that had widespread popular support and would have been far more efficient than relying on trams or buses.

The government intends to reintroduce a light rail tram service, to reduce dependence on buses, which are often caught in traffic jams. However, the trams will only run from the city to Randwick and Kingsford, which lie roughly in the centre of the eastern suburbs.

Neither trains, trams nor buses will carry passengers who travel from the outer eastern suburbs to the city. They will have to catch a bus and transfer to a train on the Bondi Junction line, or else to a tram, in order to reach the city.

Official estimates predict tram overcrowding in peak hours. However, the government is now planning major new residential development to follow construction of the new

light rail line, and may override any objections from local governments.

Moreover, under the new Opal ticketing system a single fare will be charged for connecting tram and bus journeys, but those who transfer to the rail line must buy a separate ticket. The Opal tickets will not provide price reductions currently available for yearly or quarterly rail tickets.

Getting the wrong train

The proposed north-west rail line also involves major problems, which have been the subject of repeated warnings to the government from transport staff and consultants.

In order to serve areas which currently only have bus transport, the new line would run northwest from Chatswood, seven stations north of the city on the existing North Shore line.

However, the government has broken a pre-election promise that northwest line passengers could travel from Rouse Hill, the outermost station, all the way to the city in the existing double-deck trains. The government now wants the new line to terminate at Chatswood and to utilise single deck carriages to get there. It argues this would achieve faster passenger discharge times and would require far smaller tunnels, offering cost savings of \$500 million.

The discharge time for single deck trains is certainly shorter. Nevertheless, the double-deckers are 25 percent more efficient because they can discharge far more passengers at each stop. The government agency,

Transport for NSW, has claimed that single deck trains can carry up to 1,300 passengers and the double-deckers only 1,200, but a double-decker can actually carry up to 1,700 passengers. They also provide more than twice as many seats as the single deckers.

The money saved by drilling smaller tunnels would be offset by the enormous additional expense for providing and maintaining the new single deck carriage engineering system.

Moreover, Chatswood station, which has recently experienced a massive makeover at enormous cost, would have to be reconstructed again to accommodate northwest line passengers transferring to another train to the city.

Privateers thinking small

The government is sticking rigidly to its incredibly bad decisions about Sydney's public transport, because its primary concern is to back the private sector and privatise as many government services as possible.

It sees public transport as a means to that end, and its intention is for the new eastern suburbs light rail line and the north-west rail line to be privately operated. Sydney Ferries was privatised last year. The existing Rozelle light rail line, soon to be extended, is privately operated.

The government says it will determine fares and timetables on the new lines. However, the privately-operated airport line has demonstrated that the government is quite

willing to set private line fares five times higher than for the public lines, to guarantee the profits of the private owners.

The coalition government's strategy is to privatise components of the existing public transport network wherever possible, and to ensure that new components such as the light rail network and the northwest line remain under private control.

However, public loyalty towards railways is very strong. The O'Farrell government therefore wants new transport facilities to be distinctly different from existing ones, so they'll be less readily seen as our public assets that have been unjustifiably sold off.

The single deck northwest trains and the termination of the northwest line at Chatswood will assist in that respect. The small tunnels will also prevent double-decker trains being used on the line if some future government wants to incorporate it into the publicly-owned rail network, in order to achieve greater efficiency.

The amalgamation of eastern suburbs bus and tram fares, but not bus and train fares, will encourage commuters to transfer from buses onto the privately-operated trams, rather than the publicly-owned state rail system.

The government's refusal to disclose the contents of a consultant's analysis of the north-west line proposal has been criticised by the NSW Information and Privacy Commission. The analysis showed that in peak hours 40 percent of commuters would not be able to get onto the first city-bound train that arrived at Chatswood after they had disembarked from the northwest line train.

The vast new \$11.5 billion WestConnex expressway, which will have a massive environmental impact on the older inner city suburbs, has received the Prime Minister Tony Abbott's enthusiastic support.

In 2009 Abbott declared: "the humblest person is king in his own car". He referred to "... inefficient, over-manned, union-dominated, government-run train and bus systems", and argued for a major shift in allocation of funding away from public transport to roads.

He concluded: "... there just aren't enough people wanting to go from a particular place to a particular destination at a particular time to justify any vehicle larger than a car, and cars need roads".

And he's one of the people that are now determining the future shape of public transport in Australia. They will have to go. ☹

Pete's Corner



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Time for fightback

Continued from page 1

Keeping organisers off the sites

As if the hefty fines and damages payments to employers were not enough, the court banned the union's militant assistant secretary Joe McDonald from entering Brookfield Multiplex sites for three years.

The right of entry provisions are already extremely limited. Now, elected union organisers and other officials are increasingly being denied entry to workplaces. The aim is to prevent contact with members and make it as difficult as possible to organise, defend members, collect membership dues and recruit new members.

The Master Builders' Association of Victoria has sent out a list with photos of 13 CFMEU officials to 7,500 building companies saying they do not have right of entry permits. The letter says that these officials "can be refused entry onto your site under all circumstances as they do not have authority to enter your workplace under the Fair Work Act 2009." They can call the police if they wish if an official attempts to enter.

Treated like criminals

Last month, Theiss management on the Regional Rail Link job in Victoria called the police when a CFMEU organiser went onto the job. He was handcuffed and thrown into a police van last month. His crime? He was responding to a call from workers on the site regarding safety issues. The safety issues involved access and egress to a wall that was being pulled, and lifting tilt up panels.

CFMEU national construction secretary Dave Noonan said the organiser had authorised right of entry and had been on the job many times before. He happened not to have his papers on him when he walked on the job that day.

"The fact that they called the police on an organiser who had been on the job many times and who had been called by workers on the site in relation to a safety issues raises serious questions about what Thies are trying to hide."

76 charged

The FWBC has now singled out 76 building workers in WA for prosecution in the courts. Without warning, process servers began turning up at their homes at all hours, serving summonses on workers in front of stunned partners and children – scare tactics designed to create tensions in the home. Their crime? They allegedly walked off the job to attend a rally on February 28, 2013. The 76 were working on the new Children's Hospital in Nedlands at the time. They face individual fines of \$10,200 – totalling over three quarters of a million dollars – and possibly more.

The rally was part of a union and community campaign for local jobs and local content in WA's resources sector in which the CFMEU, MUA, ETU, AWU and plumbing unions also took part. The union has not received answers to why these 76 were singled out for charges when in all 4,000 or more construction workers took part, including around 300 from the same hospital site.

FWBC has targeted these workers for exercising their democratic rights in defence of jobs. They are not in dispute with their employer.



Perth.



Sydney. (Photo: Bernadette Smith)

The fact they are being charged a year after the event demonstrates the political, anti-union motives behind the charges.

To get an overview of the intensity of the campaign against building unions and the CFMEU, it is worth visiting the FWBC's site, fwbc.gov.au/latest-news. There is page after page of reports on the ABCC's court victories against unions and their officials. Any industrial action or attempt by a union official or workers to respond to safety issues is "unlawful" and hence subject to court penalties.

As in the case of the 76 Perth workers, it is not about employers taking the union to court to resolve a dispute. The employers are sitting by, watching the government spend millions of dollars attempting to rid them of unions and militant workers.

Multi-pronged attack on unions

The FWBC/ABCC is not the only weapon in the Abbott and Minister Eric Abetz' assault on trade unions and workers' wages and working conditions. Nor is the target limited to building and construction unions.

The terms of reference of the \$100 million Royal Commission into trade unions are broad when it comes to looking into any union it wishes but exclude employers and their corrupt and illegal practices.

The Productivity Commission's draft report on public infrastructure costs released last week, expressed concerns over "widespread unlawful conduct", adverse industrial relations

cultures and problems with enterprise agreements.

The draft terms of reference for the Productivity Commission's review of the Fair Work Act and industrial relations system, where "everything is up for grabs", were leaked by Fairfax media on March 7. They include penalty rates, pay and conditions, unfair dismissal, enterprise bargaining flexibility (spin for individual contracts) and "union militancy".

The panel inquiring into 457 visas for skilled workers is stacked with big business representatives and, as is the pattern with Abbott-appointed committees, there is not even token union representation. Unions can make a submission if they wish! Immigration Minister Scott Morrison made the outcomes clear, saying the changes were about "regulation reduction, removing union red tape which was put there by the previous government."

In particular, the requirement that employers test the market first for local labour is set to be lifted.

This week the government launched its "Red Tape Challenge" propaganda website for companies and others to put up their wish lists for deregulation – including labour, health and safety, planning, environmental and other laws. It has already identified 8,000 laws and regulations it plans to scrap including sections of the Fair Work Act and 457 visa regulations. (Details were not available at the time of writing.)

There are a number of bills to amend the Fair Work Act and legislation to restore and expand the powers

of the ABCC, now before the Senate. The ABCC bill extends the ABCC's tentacles to maritime, transport, construction and manufacturing unions and workers that serve the construction industry.

The FWBC/ABCC offensive, the legislation and the host of reviews is an indicator of what the Abbott Coalition government has in store for unions and workers, the worst of it scheduled for a second term of office. At present that looks a distinct possibility.

Profits first

Apart from attempting to quash action and deunionise construction sites by intimidation, the ABCC is being used to try to bankrupt trade unions.

It is time for an investigation into the FWBC/ABCC, in particular, a total of how many millions of dollars have been drained from union funds – members' money – in fines, damages and legal costs in relation to legitimate union activity.

The unions are the only force on building sites and other workplaces consistently fighting to enforce safe working conditions and protect the public. The government is hell-bent on bankrupting unions in the courts and giving employers a free reign to ignore health and safety regulations. It is all about cost-cutting short-cuts to maximise profits.

Without the union, construction sites would deteriorate overnight. It is not just workers who would be injured or lose their lives. Building standards would collapse and endanger future occupants and the public.

Act now

The Communist Party of Australia is calling for the immediate repeal of the FWBC legislation. A secretive police force that hounds innocent workers has the makings of a police state, not a democratic society. The legislation has been found to be in breach of international conventions. The Abbott/Abetz government bill to restore and strengthen the hand of Howard's ABCC must be defeated.

The Fair Work Act still contains many of the provisions of the old WorkChoices legislation. It should also be repealed. Before any government can refer to Australia as a democracy, basic trade union and workers' rights as recognised in international must be enacted.

The right to join a trade union and be active in a union is a basic human right. In particular, no worker should be subjected to massive fines, threatened with the loss of their home or job if they take industrial action, join a political protest or attend a union meeting. Nor should they be subjected to secret interrogations under threat of jail if they refuse to answer questions.

As Dave Noonan asked, "What sort of a country are we living in when a worker is handcuffed for not having his papers on him?"

"What sort of a country are we living in when workers are treated like criminals for attending a peaceful protest?"

"It's something you might expect in an authoritarian state, not in a democracy like Australia".

Our changing climate

Steven Katsineris

For those still doubting our climate is changing and the frequency of extreme weather events increasing, 2013 was the hottest year on record in Australia, according to the Bureau of Meteorology (January 3, 2014). In that record-breaking summer of 2012–13, Australia registered the hottest September to March period on record, the hottest summer on record, the hottest month on record and the hottest day on record and the longest national-scale heatwave. It was also the hottest summer on record for Australian sea-surface temperatures.

And 2013 was the fourth warmest year on record for the planet since records began and saw some of the longest heatwaves and the most chaotic weather experienced in decades. In 2013 heat extremes dominated the year, with record heat waves, floods, rainstorms and cyclones. The last four months of 2012 were abnormally hot in Australia, but January 2013 was the hottest month ever measured on the continent, with record temperatures set in every state and territory. And the highest recorded maximum of 49.6°C at Moomba in South Australia. Temperatures were regularly above 48°C and the Bureau of Meteorology reported that Sydney experienced its hottest night on record when it was still 34°C at midnight on January 10.

During the latest summer period the hot conditions extended well into 2014 in the south-eastern states, with Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra all setting summer heatwave records. For instance between January 14 and 17, 2014 Melbourne recorded four

consecutive days of temperatures exceeding 41 degrees, two of which the temperature exceeded 43 degrees.

As climate change proceeds, some extreme events are likely to increase in frequency, intensity and duration, while others are likely to decline. Across Australia we can expect increases in extremely high temperatures, extreme rainfall, extreme fire weather, large hail on the east coast, tropical cyclone intensity and extreme sea level events. We can also expect decreases in the frequency of extremely low temperatures, in addition to increased cyclone frequency, extreme wind, and large hail across southern Australia. According to the CSIRO there will be more hot days and less cold days. The last 20 years have produced many more severe weather events than any other.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's fifth Assessment Report (2013), which is considered the consensus of world scientists, was unequivocal that climate change is happening fast. In September, it stated that each of the last three decades had been successively warmer at the Earth's surface than at any preceding decade since measurements started in 1850. The period 1983–2012 was probably the warmest in the past 1,400 years, it said, and both the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets were losing mass, along with most glaciers worldwide.

"The scientific evidence for anthropogenic climate change has strengthened year by year, leaving fewer uncertainties about the serious consequences of inaction, despite the fact that there remain knowledge gaps and uncertainties in some areas of climate science," said Qin Dahe, Co-Chair of IPCC Working Group I.

In Australia, trends in observed temperature extremes have slowly emerged. In particular, the rate and number of weather stations recording highest on record minimum temperatures has increased since the mid-1970s while the rate of record maximum temperatures has increased over the past two decades. Climate model simulations indicate that the rate of global warming depends on the rate of change in greenhouse gases and aerosols.

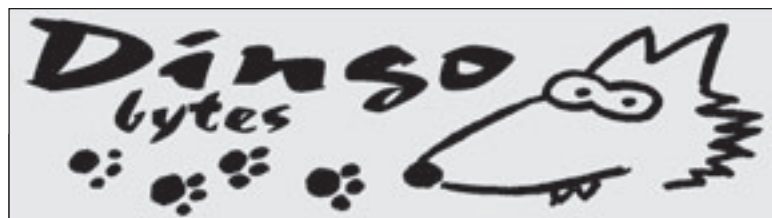
For a low emission scenario, the warming is 1.1–2.9 degrees Celsius by the year 2100, while for a high scenario; the warming is 2.4–6.4 degrees Celsius by 2100. While these changes appear small, the impacts on extreme weather are likely to be significant.

Projected changes in the frequency of extreme temperatures have been estimated by the CSIRO for 2030 and 2070. These projections show there are significant increases in the number of hot days and decreases in the number of cold days (For reference Google: "CSIRO Climate Change Technical Report 2007").

According to the (now disbanded) Australian Climate Commission, Australians should get used to it: not only are heatwaves getting longer, hotter and more frequent, the number of record hot days is expected to quadruple in Sydney by the end of the century.

The message is very clear: the world is indeed warming and if temperatures go on rising, the price of our inaction is to expect more extreme weather events and severe heat over the next 100 years.

We must therefore redouble our efforts to take action to urgently tackle climate change. ☘



Fears for families

Darren Coyne

Aboriginal victims of family violence could be left without support if the federal and state governments reduce funding to frontline services.

The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (FVPLS) Victoria has warned that Aboriginal services for women are at risk unless governments re-sign the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH).

Since 2009, NPAH funding has supported 180 services across Australia, servicing 80,000 clients and 3000 staff.

The NPAH has provided \$209.7 million in state and federal government funding in Victoria since 2009. The Agreement is due to expire on June 30, 2014.

As a result, the FVPLS program nationally faces funding cuts of \$3.6 million from the federal government.

FVPLS chief executive Antoinette Braybrook said such funding cuts would be devastating.

"If funding cannot be confirmed beyond 30 June 2014, we may have no choice but to turn clients away from our service," she said.

"This result will have a devastating impact on Aboriginal women and their children and is likely to result in further violence, disadvantage and homelessness."

She said more than 90 per cent of FVPLS Victoria's clients were Aboriginal women and Children, and that Aboriginal women were 15 times more likely to seek assistance from the Support Accommodation Assistance Program to escape violence in comparison to non-Aboriginal women.

Ms Braybrook joined the chief executives of other community organisations for an International Women's Day event to raise the issue with governments.

"Aboriginal women who are escaping family violence often have multiple and complex issues stemming from past and present experiences of disadvantage and trauma," she said.

"Over the past four years we have had two positions funded under this program to provide holistic case management and support.

"With rates of family violence increasing, now is not the time to cut critical frontline services. Aboriginal women's safety is at risk."

Ms Braybrook recently

challenged Attorney-General George Brandis to visit remote and regional services so that he understands what they do.

The invitation followed remarks from Mr Brandis during a Senate Estimates hearing about his visit to Aboriginal legal services, in which he referred to a generalist, non-Aboriginal community legal centre (CLC).

Ms Braybrook pointed out that the work done by CLCs was different to Aboriginal services.

"While we work closely with community legal centres, and strongly value the work they do, CLCs are quite different to Aboriginal specific legal services," Ms Braybrook said.

"Visiting a mainstream community legal centre will not give the Attorney-General a good understanding of the work FVPLS or other Aboriginal specific services do."

Ms Braybrook also rejected the Attorney-General's claim that any funding cuts would be designed to target policy and advocacy services, rather than frontline services.

"There is simply no such funding provided to individual services for policy and advocacy, nor has there ever been since the commencement of the program in 1998," she said.

"Already under-resourced services will have to cut back frontline service delivery given that this is where funding is directed."

Koori Mail ☘

Nurses generally come on top of surveys when people are asked to evaluate professions. Politicians usually come last. Nursing is hard, stressful but much appreciated, especially by anyone who has been a patient. While looking after the sick, nurses themselves do not rate well on their own health. A study into the well-being of nurses has found that there are many health issues that are not addressed properly. Nurses themselves rate their own health as between "poor" and "average". Almost 5,500 nurses were surveyed across the country and the results show that it is an ageing workforce with 40 percent aged over 50. The study found 30 percent of the country's 320,000 nurses had a chronic condition with the most common being osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and back problems. It was followed by obesity and mental health issues.

The Abbott government has officially removed poverty reduction from the goals of the foreign affairs budget. It means that the legal obligation on the government to spend funds "to assist developing countries to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development" will disappear. AusAid, the agency that was responsible for aid programs, will disappear as well. The aid budget itself will not disappear but it will be funnelled through private companies "to promote economic growth", according to Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, The government is going to "explore innovative models for private sector partnerships for development". So Australian private companies will be given taxpayers' money to do promote "economic growth" overseas – a recipe for corruption.

It's hard to remember a more vicious attack on the ABC than the one being waged now. Everything and the kitchen sink is being thrown at it. However, the majority of voters (and these are the people the powers-to-be are interested in) felt the ABC news and current affairs was not politically biased and that the ABC provided more balanced views than commercial TV. To quote a recent Nielsen poll, 59 percent of voters believe the ABC news and current affairs is not biased while 31 percent believe it is.

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Abbott's Green Army

Smashing wages, not helping the environment

The Abbott Liberal-National government is setting up a "Green Army" of 15,000 young people who will be paid as little as half the minimum wage for a near full-time job.

"Weeding, planting, fencing" – back to the good old days

Green Army recruits – aged 17 to 24 years of age – will "volunteer" to work 30 hours a week for up to six months, in teams of ten, cleaning up creeks and waterways, planting trees and putting up fences. The program will target Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, gap-year students, graduates and unemployed jobseekers.

Green Army workers will earn \$304 to \$494 a week, compared with \$622 a week for the minimum wage and a basic rate of \$250 week for a single person on the dole.

They will not be covered by Commonwealth workplace laws – the Work Health and Safety Act, Fair Work Act, or Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act – because they are deemed to be volunteers, not employees.

Abbott Environment Minister Greg Hunt claims the Green Army is a "voluntary environmental and training program, not an employment program", but tell that to a jobseeker, constantly threatened with being thrown off the dole if they miss a job interview or knock back a job offer, that the Green Army is voluntary! What's more, the government will use these "volunteer" jobs to cut the official youth unemployment rate, currently more than 12 percent.

Green Army 2014 is a new, meaner version of Abbott's 2010 work-for-the-dole election campaign proposal, but with a \$100 million smaller budget. The only person with a real job in this program is the team supervisor who will collect an annual salary of more than \$60,000 and be covered by work laws, including workers compensation.

Abbott's Green Army program aims to give the impression of doing something substantial about climate change without doing anything much at all – it is more like a permanent "Clean Up Australia" project!

A government with real concerns for the environment would be investing in new industries, new technologies, new infrastructure, better

design and real jobs to steer society's transition from fossil fuel based energy sources to solar and renewables. It would be aiming for a more equitable and frugal society based on principles of energy efficiency, not excesses of wealth and consumption for the few on one hand and deprivation and lack of public services and amenities for the great majority on the other.

Most importantly, an Abbott government "volunteer" Green Army creates a sub-class of low paid workers.

Over the medium to long term it will push down wage rates and conditions of other workers, especially those on or around the minimum wage.

To do this the Abbott government targets the most vulnerable and marginalised in society and blackmails them into "volunteering" to do full time work for little more than the dole.

This is not a one-off. This reactionary government wants to bring workers under the employer's thumb: it wants to drive down wages, cut conditions and increase profit rates – despite already high productivity gains, wage increases below the rate of inflation and soaring profits and executive salaries.

The Green Army is just one of the ways the Abbott Liberal-National government is attacking workers and our ability to organise, or bargain. It is trying to criminalise unions and industrial action through new "WorkChoice" laws, industrial courts and criminal investigations of unions.

Abbott attacks workers and unions, to accelerate the shift in wealth to capital from labour that has been the hallmark of neo-liberal economic policies, whether under Labor or Coalition governments since the 1980s. Less wages for us means more profit for them.

The jobs slaughter across manufacturing, aviation and the public sector in Australia and elsewhere in the "developed" world also puts downward pressure on wages and conditions and accelerates growth in global profit rates.

Can we resist a green army operating on poverty wages? Can young workers get wage justice and real jobs?

Yes, but it involves more than talk. It requires serious campaigning. Young workers targeted by

the program need to reach out to the groups that support a struggle for work justice; they need to gain active union involvement, and build community awareness and support. Union and labour activists have a responsibility to reach out to young workers in the Green Army program, to support their cause for recognition as workers with workers' rights, as well as advocate better alternatives for green job creation!

Some critical views on Abbott's Green "Volunteer" Army

Ged Kearney, ACTU President: "This is about taking away well-paid, well-protected jobs from people and replacing them with low-paid, unsafe jobs. This is not about getting people on the margins of the workforce into work; this is about providing a low-paid workforce." (the ACTU sees this program as threatening to reset youth wages sharply lower).

Greens MP Adam Bandt: "Only Tony Abbott could create a 'workforce' where workers aren't legally workers and have no workplace rights. If a green army supervisor and a worker under their command get injured ... the supervisor will have the same safety net and compensation protections as ordinary employees but the worker won't."

Murdoch University Professor of Sustainability Glenn Albrecht: "The Green Army ... would never make a long term difference ... it's really just weeding and tree planting ... None of these things is going to make one iota of difference if we have an environment that's heating to the point where all of the major ecosystems of Australia change."

Neil Perry, University of Western Sydney: "from a political perspective, it can certainly be seen as green washing. If they've got pro-polluter policies, then this is a nice little program that's hard to argue against and takes the focus away from the Coalition's other policies, which potentially encourage carbon emissions."

Help Change the World! Contact:
Young Communist League ycl.australia@gmail.com
or youth@cpa.org.au ✚



Most importantly, an Abbott government "volunteer"

Crimea self-determination amid West

Finian Cunningham

Ahead of the referendum in Crimea on whether the Ukrainian autonomous republic should secede and join the Russian Federation, Washington and Europe are piling on the pressure to scupper the poll with unprecedented threats of reprisals.

German chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated provocative American claims that Russia is using "19th and 20th century tactics" and "law of the jungle" (meaning military aggression), when the reality is the reverse: it is Western states that are railroading political aims with wild threats of war.

US secretary of state John Kerry, ahead of his meeting with Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, in London, said that if the Crimea referendum goes ahead then that would "close off any available space for diplomacy", notwithstanding the fact that Washington has already done its best to close off diplomatic options for de-escalating tensions by mobilising fighter jets, warships and troops on Russia's borders, as well as brandishing punitive sanctions.

Both the US and European leaders have warned of "massive sanctions" and other veiled threats of "serious steps" should the Crimea referendum pass. Such threats are reckless moves towards war – conducted by Western states that arrogantly presume to be the standard-bearers of law and order.

With a majority ethnic Russian population in Crimea and its parliament having already voted for a declaration of independence from the rest of now-lawless Ukraine, it seems certain that the electorate will approve of joining the Russian Federation.

But the Crimean population is going to the polls to exercise their right to self-determination under conditions of extreme and completely unacceptable duress. That in itself constitutes gross interference in the internal affairs of the autonomous southern peninsula.

Hypocrisy

The ironies, contradictions and hypocrisies of Washington and its European allies towards the people of Crimea are staggering. Western standards are readily being seen to be nothing but empty, cynical rhetoric, used to

conceal their own rapturous embrace of "law of the jungle".

The crisis stems from the Western allies engaging in a tug-o-war to incorporate Ukraine into the European Union, allegedly so that the former Soviet Republic would benefit from EU standards of economics, law and culture. This supposedly high-minded objective has been pursued by Washington, London, Paris and Berlin by destroying the sovereignty and constitution of Ukraine in their illicit support for putschists who overthrew the elected authorities in Kiev last month – after nearly four months of Western-backed street violence conducted by neo-Nazi paramilitaries.

That violence also included acts of mass-murder, most probably, the evidence shows, carried out by covert snipers working for the Western-backed agitators, in which up to 100 people, protesters and police, were shot dead and hundreds more wounded.

Now the Western sponsors of the coup d'état in Kiev turn around and accuse Russia of violating Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity because Moscow has welcomed

the decision by the Crimean republic to hold a legally constituted referendum.

A century ago, Western powers embarked on the First World War allegedly to uphold the principle of "self-determination of small nations". Evidently, that principle does not apply now to the people of Crimea.

What other Western standards are being trampled on when it comes to the Ukraine and Crimea?

Independence

This year across Europe, there are much-anticipated referendums within EU states for regional political independence. In September, Scotland is to hold a vote on becoming an independent, separate state from the United Kingdom. Already, the Scots have their own devolved parliament dating from 1999, which has since given the go-ahead for a vote on setting up a fully independent state.

To be sure, the Westminster parliament in London and the central government led by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron are not happy about the prospect of the Scots abandoning the UK. The British monarchy

Left candidate win in El Salvador

Emile Schepers

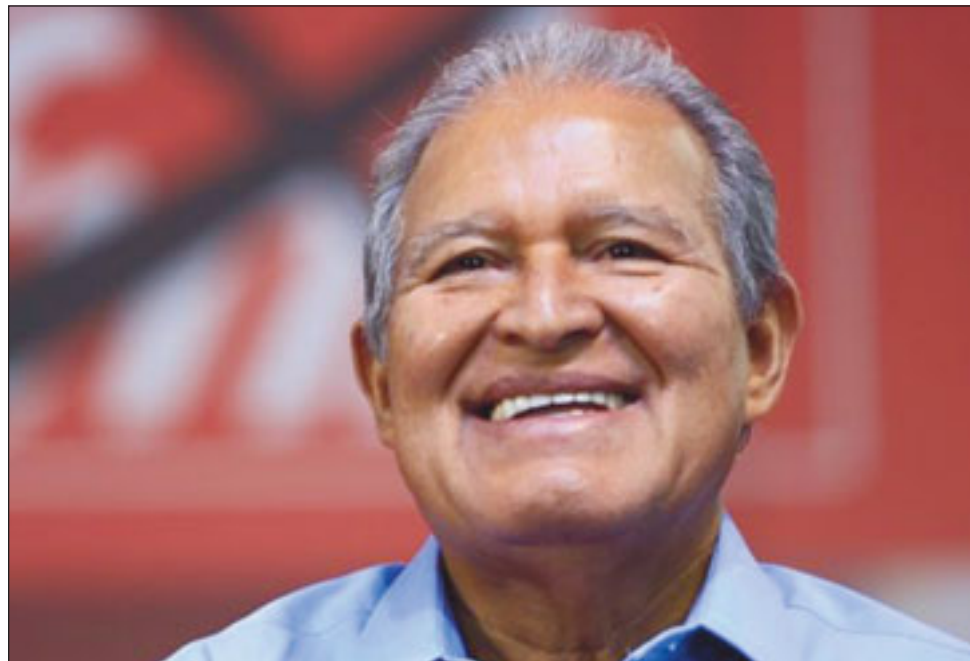
The candidate of the left wing Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), Salvador Sanchez Ceren, appears to have won the March 9 presidential runoff elections in El Salvador, although by a much smaller margin than polls had predicted.

Sanchez Ceren had won a plurality of votes in the first round of the election on February 2, but with 48.93 percent of the vote, to 36.96 percent for the right wing ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance) party's Norman Quijano, Sanchez Ceren was not able to avoid a runoff. In the first round, former President Antonio Saca, also a rightist, had won 11.44 percent of the vote.

Polls going into the runoff showed Sanchez Ceren far ahead of Quijano, but when the votes were counted, although the FMLN candidate was still ahead, the difference was much smaller, at 50.11 percent for Sanchez Ceren to 49.89 percent for Quijano. Both candidates claimed victory and Quijano, yelling fraud, asked for a recount, while also hinting that intervention by the military might not be a bad idea. The recount is going forward but election officials think the original count will hold.

If his election is confirmed, Sanchez Ceren will succeed current President Mauricio Funes, who was also elected with FMLN support in 2009. But whereas Funes, a popular media personality, was not part of the FMLN in its guerrilla days in the Salvadoran Civil War of 1980 to 1992, Sanchez Ceren, currently Funes' vice president, was an important commander of Marxist guerrilla forces which fought against a series of extreme right wing, military-dominated governments supported by the United States. Specifically, he was a leader of the FPL, the Farabundo Marti People's Liberation Forces, which became one of the five main branches of the FMLN. So by some both in El Salvador and out, Sanchez Ceren was seen as "to the left" of Funes. Sanchez Ceren's running mate for vice president, Oscar Ortiz, is the popular mayor of the city of Santa Tecla, and was a member of the same guerrilla group as Sanchez Ceren during the civil war.

President Funes has emphasised improving social and economic conditions for poor Salvadoran workers and farmers, through programs of economic justice and social betterment. These programs are very popular and explain the increase in the rural vote for Sanchez Ceren.



Sanchez Ceren.

However, El Salvador suffers from a very high rate of violent crime, a topic which Quijano hammered on during the campaign. The reasons for this high crime rate are not hard to understand. In the first place, during the civil war, thousands of Salvadorans fled to the United States, which refused to recognise them as refugees or give them asylum. Many of them ended up eking out a living in slum areas of Los Angeles and other US cities, and some young people got sucked into the life of street gangs. Many of these got caught and deported, creating a dangerous problem of gangs, called "maras," in El Salvador. On top of this, El Salvador (like neighbouring Honduras and Guatemala which have similar problems) is on the route for drugs coming up from South America through Central America and Mexico to the huge market in the United States. Battles to control the drug routes, in which very violent Mexican drug cartels are now involved, have intensified the problem.

Mauricio Funes' government has tried to deal with this by providing economic and social alternatives for poor youth, and by supporting a negotiated peace pact among the maras. The peace pact held for a while but some complain it is falling apart, there is public scepticism, and

the right has called loudly for more repressive measures.

During the last part of the Salvadoran presidential campaign, rioting, instigated by the right, was going on in Venezuela. The right in El Salvador, advised by Venezuelan right-wingers, tried to use doctored and manipulated images of the Venezuelan events to frighten Salvadoran voters into not supporting Sanchez Ceren.

In that section of the US political right that has links to fascist and ultra-right groups in Latin America, there was considerable propaganda activity which tried to depict the FMLN and its candidates as tied to criminal gangs and drug pushers, as well as being puppets of Venezuela, which for them now has almost replaced Cuba as the source of all evil. The old neo-cons left over from the Reagan, Bush I and Bush II administrations, such as Roger Noriega and Elliot Abrams, continue to focus on destabilising existing left wing governments in Latin America and elsewhere, as well as keeping others from coming to power. This type of misinformation campaign is an important part of their bag of tricks. This time, they appear not to have succeeded.

People's World ✪



Green Army creates a sub-class of low paid workers.

ern law of the jungle

has also expressed concern that Scottish independence may lead to the eventual break up of the entire kingdom. Nevertheless, the right to Scottish self-determination is irreproachable and unstoppable, even by the reactionary British imperialist establishment.

Britain is itself due to hold a referendum on whether to remain inside the European Union. Tory leader Cameron has vowed this year to "let the people decide" if his party is re-elected in the next general election, with the eventual poll on Europe to be held sometime in 2017.

Following the Scottish ballot this year, in November the people of Catalonia in Spain's northeast region are scheduled to go to the polls to cast their vote on whether to set up an independent Catalan republic. Again, the central government in Madrid and the Spanish monarchy are far from pleased about the move. But it seems incontestable that the Catalan people will avail of their right to self-determination.

Ironically, among the voices within the EU supporting the referendum in Catalonia are the leaders of Lithuania and Latvia, who

are now among the NATO allies making a hue and cry about the Crimean republic exercising this very same right.

So, what the people in the Crimea are doing is conforming to a very European standard and indeed a supposedly universally recognised standard, which Washington in particular has long espoused, going all the way back to president Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations.

More recently, it was Washington that affirmed the right to self-determination for Kosovo when it voted to secede from Serbia in 2008. A later ruling by the UN International Court of Justice in 2010 upheld that "Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate any international norms".

Added to these precedents is the fact that the Crimean parliament has conducted the referendum process constitutionally, with overwhelming majority approval from its members. On March 11, the parliament voted for a declaration of independence, as legally required, to underpin the outcome of the referendum. If the process can be accused of being hasty, as president Obama asserts,

then that is because of the political crisis and insecurity that Obama and his Western allies illegally imposed on the Ukraine, prompting the referendum in Crimea.

Precedent

Moreover, there is the important precedent that the Crimea region was historically part of Soviet Russia up until the 1950s.

For Washington and Europe to now decry that Crimea is acting "unconstitutionally" and "illegally" defies their own avowed principles and practices elsewhere. It is especially odious that the Western-backed unelected regime occupying Kiev is condemning Crimea and Russia of illegality and "violating Ukrainian territorial integrity".

This regime is occupying Kiev after it violently seized power from a legally constituted elected government on February 22. That power-grab destroyed the constitution and rule of law in Ukraine, and it was given full support by Washington and European governments. The installed junta comprises neo-Nazis and fascists who have openly declared war on Russian-speaking people

within Ukraine and who are calling for the "cleansing of occupiers" from the East of the country.

The neo-Nazi ministers for National Security, Andriy Parubiy and Dimitry Yarosh, are also warning that their paramilitaries will launch attacks on Crimea if the referendum passes. The prospect of a Western-induced civil war in Ukraine and a wider war with Russia is frighteningly real.

The thuggish threats emanating from the junta in Kiev are integrated with the wider political threats being issued by Washington and its European allies towards Russia.

Despite all the lofty standards of law and rights articulated by Western states, what we are witnessing with regard to the Ukraine and Crimea are the real Western "standards" in practice – of hypocrisy and resort to violence when it suits their aims.

Angela Merkel is half-right. The "law of the jungle" is being practiced. It's standard Western practice all down through history and presently over Ukraine.

Information Clearing House ✪

Free Bahareh Hedayat, Iranian activist

Jane Green

Bahareh Hedayat will be 32 years old next month. She looks likely to mark that birthday in prison unless the Iranian government can be persuaded to free her. Hedayat is one of the leaders of the powerful student movement in Iran and a woman's rights activist. She was a member of the executive committee and spokesperson for Iran's pro-democracy student movement, the Daftar-e Takhim-Vahdat (Office for Consolidating Unity). She was also an initiator and active in the One Million Signatures Campaign that seeks to end legal discrimination against women in Iran.

Hedayat has been sentenced to nine and a half years in prison and is serving that time in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran.

Around midnight on December 31, 2009, she was arrested by the Intelligence Ministry of theocratic regime in Iran for the fifth time in four years and taken to unit 209 of Evin prison. Hedayat met with one of the harshest punishments ordered against the student activist movement over recent years. She was sentenced for participating in legal, peaceful activities and for challenging the existing discriminatory laws against women.

The injustices and oppression inflicted upon Hedayat are retaliation for her activism as a female university student.

The sentence imposed upon her by a Tehran court comprised two years for "insulting the Supreme Leader"; six months for "insulting the President"; and five years for "acting against national security and publishing falsehoods." She was also sentenced to an additional two years in prison for "acting against national security through holding a protest gathering for women," currently suspended.

Hedayat is suffering from serious health issues that require urgent

medical attention, without which her life could be in danger.

As well as Bahareh Hedayat at least 14 other high-profile women rights campaigners are incarcerated in Iran's political prisons for demanding their rights. In recent weeks, we have witnessed the passing of inhumane long-term jail sentences against a number of women activists.

One such example is Mariam Shafi' Pour, a university student activist who was arrested in 2010, in Qazvin. She was suspended from the university and was expelled in her eighth term at the university. She had been sentenced to one year's suspended sentence, but this was extended to seven years after 67 days in solitary confinement. She suffered torture and beatings, because she had refused to admit to crimes she had not committed. She had been threatened by her interrogator that she would get a long sentence, and her seven-year sentence suggests the power of interrogators in the judicial system.

This year, the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women celebrates the 71st anniversary of its foundation. In all these years the organisation has campaigned tirelessly for women's rights and freedoms, and against traditionalist and reactionary laws.

However, the regime in Tehran continues to enforce laws that worsen the lives of women in Iran and marginalise them in the economic and social arenas.

In March last year, the employment of women by the state became limited to those who work part-time. Their salaries, benefits and pensions were halved accordingly. The presence of women in workplaces has been limited further by the introduction of home work for women. This is publicised as a progressive move to enable women to look after their children by working from home.

The last government (under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) initiated a policy for increasing the population by closing down the Family Planning Unit in 2010. The



As well as Bahareh Hedayat (pictured) at least 14 other high-profile women rights campaigners are incarcerated in Iran's political prisons for demanding their rights.

Minister of Health at the time said, "The Ministry's Pregnancy Prevention programs have been removed completely. No birth control is promoted any more – on the contrary – the Ministry of Health's new policy is population growth."

In the education sphere the regime has introduced the strict segregation of sexes in universities. The opening of 10 women-only universities in different towns and cities in Iran was heralded as the dawn of the Islamisation of universities. There has been a significant reduction in the acceptance of women in universities.

Against this background women such as Bahareh Hedayat, who are prepared to make their voices heard and speak out for the rights of Iranian women, continue to be dealt with severely.

Since his election as president in August 2013, Hassan Rouhani has been trying to present a more liberal face to the West, to give the impression that conditions for the opposition in Iran are not as harsh as solidarity movements suggest. It is

worth noting that the security forces prevented hundreds of women from holding an International Women's Day celebration last March 8.

While some political prisoners were freed in September and on the eve of Rouhani's much publicised appearance and speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations, many are still languishing in prisons. The continued incarceration of Bahareh Hedayat and others gives the lie to Rouhani's claims of liberalisation.

The women's movement in Iran has gained itself a prominent place in the struggle of the Iranian people for freedom and equal rights. It has been intelligent in its choice of tactics to reach the masses and to publicise its demands. Over the last decade the women of Iran have been at the forefront of major campaigns against the reactionary rulers of Iran. The One Million Signatures Campaign organised by progressive women against discrimination and inequality against women was very successful in galvanising women,

gaining international recognition and support and forcing the regime to take notice. The persecution and imprisonment of the activists has not succeeded in silencing it.

On the occasion of International Women's Day 2014, the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) renewed its call for the release of Bahareh Hedayat; renewed its call for the Islamic Republic of Iran to grant equal status in law to its female citizens; and reaffirmed its solidarity with the women in particular, and the people of Iran in general, in their struggle to achieve true peace and democracy.

CODIR calls upon all those concerned for women's rights and freedom in Iran to put pressure upon the Iranian government to free political prisoners in general, and to release Bahareh Hedayat in particular. If the claims of President Rouhani are to have any credence, such action would be a small but necessary first step.

People's Voice ☘

Millions snatched from school children by privateers

Luke James

BRITAIN: A tax avoidance racket by privateers leeching millions from the Tories' backdoor privatisation of education in England has been laid bare in a damning new Trades Union Congress exposé. A stunning £77 million in public money has been snatched away from schoolchildren and stuffed into the pockets of consultants since the Tory-led coalition took power in 2010.

Accountancy firm PKF – whose parent company BDO offers "offshore tax planning" to "high net-worth individuals" – has been handed £8 million.

Headhunters Veredus, which is part-owned by outsourcing giant Capita, gobbled up £4.7 million.

And lawyers, accountants, estate agents and management consultants are among the 12 other

profiteers to have cashed in, according to Department for Education figures.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said it was proof that Education Secretary Michael Gove's reforms are driven by "free-market dogma."

"Money that should be spent on children's education is instead being swallowed up by private firms and in expensive property deals," she said.

"Companies have been allowed to cream off millions in profits from running schools and support services.

"Let us be under no doubt – our world-class public education system is under threat from corporate interests and our schools, colleges and universities are now less accountable to taxpayers and local communities."

Millions more have been

siphoned off by school directors and trustees who charge for their services through companies that they own. The number of privateers applying to run schools has tripled since 2011.

The study also reveals how three of England's biggest academy chains – Ark, Harris Federation and the David Ross Foundation – are led by Tory peer Lord Fink and donors Lord Harris and David Ross respectively.

And over £500m has been splurged on building new free schools for a tiny fraction of pupils while England is gripped by a school places crisis.

Shadow schools minister Kevin Brennan said: "At a time when there is a school places crisis in some parts of the country funds should be prioritised to meet those needs, rather than spent on the bureaucracy of setting up free schools in areas

where there are already surplus places."

National Union of Teachers general secretary Christine Blower demanded that "every last penny" of taxpayers' cash "be used to improve our children's education not lining the pockets of a few." She warned that schools have started answering to shareholders instead of parents, pupils and communities.

Restoring democratic accountability is central to the TUC Education

Not For Sale campaign was launched last week.

It will see teachers from primary schools to universities unite with students and their parents to weed out profiteers' roots before they take grip.

Legislation to ban profits being squeezed from schools, ensuring that only qualified teachers lead classes and a public register of

interest for every school are other key demands.

Education union ATL leader Dr Mary Boustead said: "Simply banning sponsorship of schools would end the conflicts of interest, the cronyism and distorting a school's aims to making a profit."

Unions will also campaign for an end to massive public subsidies being given to profit-making colleges and universities without any quality checks.

Academics' union UCU leader Sally Hunt said that the government's actions have created an uncapped, unregulated shadow higher education market.

"Our schools, colleges and universities are being told to manage with less money while private companies make a fast buck out of our public education system," she said.

Morning Star ☘

Russia and China in agreement on Ukraine

Michael Snyder

So much for “isolating” Russia. The Chinese government is publicly siding with Russia on the crisis in Ukraine, and that is very bad news for the United States. Not only does it mean that the US is essentially powerless to do anything about the situation in Ukraine, it also means that Russia and China are starting to understand how much economic leverage that they really have. Yes, the Obama administration can threaten to slap “sanctions” on Russia or threaten to kick Russia “out of the G8”, but those actions would not actually hurt too much.

On the other hand, Russia and China hold approximately 25 percent of all foreign-owned US debt, and if they started massively dumping US debt it could rapidly create a nightmare scenario. In addition, it is important to remember that Russia is the largest exporter of natural gas and the second largest exporter of oil in the world. And China now imports more oil than anyone else on the planet does, including the United States. If Russia and China got together and decided to kill the petrodollar, they could do it almost overnight. So when it comes to Ukraine, it is definitely not the United States that has the leverage.

If China and the rest of the world abandoned Russia over Ukraine, that would be one thing. But that is not happening at all. In fact, China has chosen to publicly stand with Russia on this issue. The following is from a Sky News article entitled “Russia And China ‘In Agreement’ Over Ukraine ...”

“Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov discussed Ukraine by telephone with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi and claimed they had ‘broadly coinciding points of view’ on the situation there, according to a ministry statement.”

And Chinese state news agency Xinhua is publicly rebuking the West for their handling of the Ukrainian crisis ...”

China’s state news agency Xinhua accused western powers of adopting a Cold War-like mindset towards Russia, trying to isolate Moscow at a time when much needed mediation is needed to reach a diplomatic solution to the crisis in Crimea.

“Based on the fact that Russia and Ukraine have deep cultural, historical and economic connections, it is time for Western powers to abandon their Cold War thinking. Stop trying to exclude Russia from the political crisis they failed to mediate, and respect Russia’s unique role in mapping out the future of Ukraine,” Xinhua wrote in an opinion piece.

Apparently clueless as to how the geopolitical chips are falling the Obama administration is busy planning all sorts of ways that it can punish Russia ...

Behind the scenes, Obama administration officials are preparing a series of possible battle plans for a potential economic assault on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine,

an administration source close to the issue told *The Daily Beast*. Among the possible targets for these financial attacks: everyone from high-ranking Russian military officials to government leaders to top businessmen to Russian-speaking separatists in Ukraine. It’s all part of the work to prepare an executive order now under consideration at the Obama administration’s highest levels.

Does the Obama administration really want to start an “economic war” with Russia and potentially against China as well?

Considering how much money we owe them, and considering the fact that we desperately need them to continue to use the petrodollar, we stand to lose far more than they do.

This is one of the reasons why I have always insisted that the national debt was a national security issue. By going into so much debt, we have given other nations such as Russia and China a tremendous amount of leverage over us.

Unfortunately, the debt mongers in Washington DC never have listened to common sense.

When it comes to Ukraine, there are other economic considerations as well.

For example, about 25 percent of the natural gas that Europe uses comes from Russia, and Ukraine only has about four months of natural gas supplies stockpiled.

If Russia cut off the natural gas, that would create some huge problems. Fortunately, winter is just about over or the Russians would have even more leverage.

In addition, Ukraine is one of the leading exporters of wheat and corn on the planet, and a disruption in the growing of those crops could make the emerging global food crisis even worse.

But of course the biggest concern is that the Ukraine crisis could ultimately spark a global war.

Unfortunately, there is a treaty that requires the United States to defend Ukraine if it is attacked ...

President Bill Clinton, along with the British, signed in 1994 a nearly forgotten agreement to protect Ukraine’s borders. Ukraine now is appealing to the countries that signed the agreement.

As the British *Daily Mail* points out, it means that, technically, if Russia were to invade Ukraine, it would be difficult for the US and Britain to avoid going to war.

Given that the late Russian president, Boris Yeltsin also signed it, it was apparent that it wasn’t expected that the Russians would take the action that Putin now is undertaking.

And top Ukrainian politicians are now asking western nations to come to the aid of Ukraine militarily ...

Ukraine’s former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko has appealed for the West to adopt “strongest means” to intervene in Russia’s occupation of Crimea if diplomacy fails.

In an interview with CNN’s Christiane Amanpour, Tymoshenko, freed after the riots throughout the nation, said if Russia is allowed to “take away” Crimea, life will



Russia's President Vladimir Putin with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping.

change “practically everywhere in the world”.

She added: “Then we have to accept ... an aggressor, can violate all the international agreements, take away territories, whenever she likes”.

On the other side, deposed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich has formally requested that Russia militarily intervene in his nation.

Russia’s UN envoy said that Yanukovich asked Russia to send troops to “establish legitimacy, peace, law and order, stability, and defending the people of Ukraine.” Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin read a letter from Yanukovich at the UN Security Council meeting.

“Ukraine is on the brink of civil war. In the country, there is chaos and anarchy. The life, the security and the rights of people, particularly in the southeast part in Crimea are being threatened. So under the influence of Western countries, there are open acts of terrorism and violence. People are being persecuted for language and political reasons,” the letter said. “So in this regard, I would call on the President of Russia, Mr Putin, asking him to use the armed forces of the Russian Federation to establish legitimacy, peace, law and order, stability, and defending the people of Ukraine.”

And it is very important to note that Yanukovich would have never issued this letter if the Russian government has not asked him to.

So the stage is set.

China is publicly backing Russia, and collectively they have a tremendous amount of economic leverage.

The Obama administration is barking loudly about what Russia has done, but the reality is that the US has very little economic leverage at this point.

What the US does have is the strongest military on the entire planet, but let us hope and pray that Obama does not decide to get the US military involved in Ukraine. That would be absolutely disastrous.

In the end, the US has no good options in Ukraine. The Obama administration helped aid and organise the violent overthrow of the Ukrainian government, and now we have a giant mess.

Nobody is quite sure what comes next, but one thing is certain ...

The relationship between the United States and Russia will never, ever be the same again.

prisonplanet ☪



Region Briefs

On March 12, the US 7th Fleet’s flagship *Blue Ridge* and nuclear powered submarine *Columbus* berthed at South Korea’s Pusan Port to join the US-South Korea’s joint military drills “Key Resolve” and “Foal Eagle”. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea stated that the US’s action was aimed to provoke a nuclear war in the Korean Peninsula and to destabilise the region.

On March 10, Vietnam’s deputy Defence Minister Lieutenant General Nguyen Chi Vinh led a defence ministry delegation visit to China’s Guangxi province for the 2014 Vietnam-China friendship border defence exchange program. The Vietnam delegation was warmly welcomed by the Chinese defence ministry delegation. Both sides praised this exchange program as it developed friendship and increased mutual trust between the two armies and the two parties. They expressed the need to finalise military zones, and to expand joint patrols and border posts between the two states.

On March 12, Thailand’s central bank lowered its interest rate to 2%, which reached the lowest level since 2011. The bank began to reduce interest rates last November to stimulate its downturned economy, as Thailand’s economic growth slowed in the last quarter of 2013, from 2.7% in the previous quarter, to just 0.6% year-on-year.

One week prior to the International Women’s Day, Japanese Communist Party (JCP) Diet (Parliament) Policy Commission Chair Kokuta Keiji openly criticised Japan Restoration Party’s (right-wing) attempt to “re-examine” Japan’s comfort women issue. The Restoration Party wants the Japanese government to abandon its formal stand, which is to admit and apologise for the imperial Japanese Army’s involvement in operating a sex slavery system during the Second World War. Kokuta stated that the JCP will make every effort to stop Japan’s war “revisionism”.

On March 14, the closing meeting of the second annual session of China’s 12th National People’s Congress (NPC) was held in Beijing at the Great Hall of the People. The NPC is the highest legislative body of China, with 2,987 members. It is constituted through democratic elections and is responsible to the people and subject to their oversight. The judicial, procuratorial and administrative state organs are created by the NPC. During this year’s annual session meeting, the deputies from all over China with different background, discussed various topics in depth, including reform, anti-corruption, pollution, housing prices, education and social welfare. Premier Li Keqiang vowed to make financial and fiscal reforms the country’s priority; he also promised to promote social fairness and people’s livelihoods to bridge the widening wealth gap when he delivered the government report to the Congress.

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On unions, lobbyists and corruption

Tony Abbott and his government have got what they've wanted for a long time – a royal commission into "union activities". It is officially underway as of this week and its findings are supposed to be presented at the end of December. When Mr Abbott declared after winning the elections that "Australia is open for business" he did not mention that part of the deal would be destroying working people's organisations that had been created to protect workers' wages, conditions and jobs.

Unions have been demonised for a long time and unfortunately very often could not organise an effective counter-offensive. It is a fact that many younger people are not aware of all the battles their fathers and mothers had been involved in for decent conditions and wages. Many

things are being taken for granted and only when they start disappearing do people start to appreciate them even more.

Mr Abbott is trying hard to present himself as wanting to protect "honest unions". It is hard to believe that that is his intention. They are keen to destroy or severely damage the strongest unions so that the rest follow along the line of "cooperating with bosses for better productivity" or such like.

While unions are under attack, Canberra lobbyists are having a great time – coalition "friends" are in great demand. Former Howard government ministers, retired Coalition MPs and Liberal Party apparatchiks are there to represent multinational companies and their interests.

For instance, Nick Minchin and Alexander Downer are working for Bespoke Approach. Bespoke Approach has a list of clients which includes Wesfarmers, Santos (yes, the one in the news for polluting, a notorious coal seam gas miner), Yan-cao, a Chinese-owned coal miner. Peter Costello and his one-time political advisor David Gazard are co-owners of ECG Advisory Solutions. They look after the interests of Westpac, Transurban and detention centre operators Serco.

Mr Minchin and Mr Costello are not officially listed on the official register of lobbyists. The explanation given in regards Mr Minchin was that he was not directly lobbying, he was

just advising. When you know the system and how it operates, you also know how to use it to your advantage and that's what all these people are doing.

They are paid hefty fees for their influence on political decision-makers. We recently witnessed this sort of cosy relationship when the deputy health minister had ordered the removal of health advice on food items because private interests were deemed to be superior to public interests. Corruption from a corrupt system.

It will be very educational for us all to see the interconnections and business deals, kick-backs and cosy relationships between those in power and those who want to use them to their advantage. A royal commission into those? Dream on!

Mati English
Sydney

China's sovereignty

I note that Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged the country's armed forces to assume their responsibility in safeguarding national sovereignty and interests.

"We expect peace, but we shall never give up efforts to maintain our legitimate rights, nor shall we compromise our core interests, no matter when or in what circumstances," Xi said while joining a plenary meeting of the People's Liberation Army

delegation at the ongoing legislative session.

Xi, also chairman of the Central Military Commission, called on the armed forces personnel to be firm in faith and loyal in mission.

To build a strong army, China should capitalise on strategic opportunities to deepen national defence and military reforms to resolve the institutional, structural and policy restraints, he said.

He also stated that "We should break our fixed mindset to foster a mode of thinking that is in line with our goal of building a strong army."

He also emphasised the state's leading role in the process and called for the function of the market to jointly create a highly effective development pattern that features army-civilian integration.

Sam Porter
Albury

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Culture & Life

by John Wojnowski

Dear Mary and Joe Catholic



Allow me to tell you my story:*

My name is John Wojnowski and I was a catholic – not only just any Catholic, but a Polish Catholic. It is common knowledge that Polish Catholics, in their holy Catholic naïveté, are possibly more fiercely Catholic than even the very Catholic Irish were only a few years ago.

I went to Catholic schools and for one year even attended the same elite Jesuit Institute where "His Excellency" Archbishop Viganò, the current Vatican Ambassador to US, went to school. My father was a librarian at the Catholic University.

My very devout younger brother proudly walked into a Catholic Seminary to become a priest, at the age of 11. I remember reading one of his letters where he begged our pious Polish Catholic mother to please write to him in Italian, because the Rector could not read Polish.

Being a smart kid, it took him only one year to realise that there was something profoundly wrong in the system.

Sex is one uniquely powerful drive. One may fool humanity for a while, but history, particularly recent history, is proof that the Catholic Church cannot fool Mother Nature. Can anyone imagine a greater contradiction to Mother Nature than the celibacy requested of Catholic clergy? Yet to this day, the official position of the Catholic hierarchy is that "priestly celibacy is a most precious gift to the Church."

There are no girls in a Catholic seminary.

Enter Mother Nature (in reality She was always there.) The pattern is a sadly familiar one. A young seminarian, perhaps with gentle or feminine features becomes the Rector's or some other priest's "special assistant" ... In the seminary, my brother witnessed, among other things, one of his classmates going into the bed of another boy. That was in 1956, well before the 1960s "sexual revolution" blamed by the Catholic hierarchy for the sexual abuse epidemic.

"Priestly celibacy is the most precious gift to the Church!" is the official claim of the Catholic hierarchy. Such a position helps ensnare ambitious careerists, the naive, the deluded, and the cowardly to the clergy, creating a web of hypocrisy to perpetuate a lie masquerading as a benevolent "Holy Church" (and supreme moral authority of the Universe) whose purported mission is to "save souls."

You might suspect that I am biased. You would be correct.

I was molested by a Catholic priest at the age of 15. This was a trauma so horrible that the memory of the event was repressed for 39 years but the tragic consequences plagued me since. The wreckage of my life is the evidence. In 1997, the news of a priestly sexual abuse scandal in Texas where a boy committed suicide was the spark that started the return of my memory.

When Humanity's progress and the evolution of culture made it possible for some courageous American sexual abuse survivors

to go public with their personal histories, the degeneration and mendacity of the Catholic hierarchy was exposed. The Vatican began with: "It is only an American problem!"; and this bald-faced lie has been part of an unending litany of lies and excuses as similar scandals emerged and received attention in other parts of the world.

Finally Cardinal Razinger responded to the steady revelation of sexual misdeeds with this defensive obfuscation: "There is a desire to discredit the church!" and "I am personally convinced that this is a planned campaign. It is intentional and manipulated." Isn't this exactly what those doing evil always claim when confronted? But, more importantly, the overall response of the Catholic hierarchy to the survivors of sexual abuse, the response of supposedly good people but actually veritable moral imbeciles, has been deeply, entirely un-Christian: cowardly, paranoid, shameless, vindictive, and ultimately inhumane.

And it cannot be allowed to continue – not by any faithful Catholic!

It is fairly obvious to many observers of the priesthood and the Catholic Church that centuries of so-called "celibacy" have produced, within the Catholic priesthood, a self-selected group of sexual predators who hide behind the cloak of religion. The shameless and self-important "Excellencies" and "Eminences" who comprise the Church leadership are unwilling to understand and take responsibility for the incalculable damage and suffering

that their leadership, their policies, and their wanton and aggressive ignorance have inflicted on humanity in all four corners of the earth.

Supreme Court Justices Scalia and Alito and other allegedly educated, prominent and proud Catholics may not fully appreciate the imagery of the "Holy See" as a den of willfully blind and parasitic bureaucrats – 731 Monsignors, bishops, archbishops and cardinals who have trapped themselves in a golden cage of falsehoods.

And so, Dear Mary and Joe Catholic, ask yourself this – how can silence on this issue be viewed as anything other than cowardice? By remaining on the "sidelines," are you not an accomplice to these sanctimonious fraudsters? I have long ceased to fear being sued for defamation or slander by accurately defining the Catholic Hierarchy as an aberrant parasitic species, an ignorant, cowardly, and pathogenic "Mafia of Frauds."

Yours sincerely in truth and justice,

John Wojnowski

*Survivor of 15 years of insults during non-stop daily protests in front of the US Vatican Embassy, 3339 Massachusetts Avenue, Washington, DC. (Now I am 70, I travel by bus and Metro, and at the best of times it takes me one hour to get from home to the Embassy where I display my banner from about 4:20pm to dark) ☺



Sunday March 23 –
Saturday March 29

There can be no doubt: computer-generated imagery has come a long way since even the ground-breaking *Walking With Dinosaurs*. Thanks to improved cgi we have in recent weeks been able to accompany David Attenborough as he flies in a glider alongside giant pterosaurs with 40-foot wingspans and frolic with him as he is visited by assorted extinct creatures in the halls of London's Natural History Museum.

One of those creatures was a giant ground sloth, who also features in this week's cgi showcase: *Ice Age Giants* (ABC1 Sundays from March 23 at 7.30pm). Having seemingly exhausted dinosaurs for the moment, the makers of programs about extinct wildlife have followed Attenborough's lead in his Natural History Museum program and turned their attention (and their computer graphics) to the mega fauna of the last great Ice Age.

The last Ice Age, just 20,000 years ago, was one of the most challenging times on Earth. Vast swathes of the northern hemisphere were

covered by deep ice sheets and glaciers carved great valleys through the landscape. With so much water locked up in ice sheets, sea levels fell by as much as a hundred metres. Vast tracts of sea floor now became open savannah, sustaining herds of grazers and browsers – such as the woolly mammoth (bigger than today's elephants) and the North American horse, which after spreading across the numerous land bridges to Asia died out in America, to eventually return with the Conquistadors in the 15th century.

Also making use of the savannah were the giant predators that preyed on the horse and the other mega-fauna. Formidable predators like the huge sabre-toothed cat (not tiger – it actually looked more like a giant bob-cat, with a stumpy tail and relatively short body).

The three-part series is introduced by Professor Alice Roberts, whose penchant for hands-on experience takes her (and us) to caves metres deep in preserved dung, to giant rocks polished glassy-smooth by generations of mammoths using them as scratching posts, and to close-up examinations of the fearsome weaponry of the sabre-toothed cat. Because of their elongated canines, these cats could not tear out the muscle and sinew of their prey owing to the danger of breaking their teeth. Instead, scientists have concluded after long study, they used their "sabres" as stabbing weapons, letting their prey bleed to death while they held it down with their powerful forelimbs.

Next week's episode goes to Europe and the even bigger Mastodons. Frankly, I can't wait!

Captain Ian Hamilton, a paratrooper and one of the most highly decorated officers in



Ice Age Giants (ABC1 Sundays from March 23 at 7.30pm).

the British Army, at 42 announced he was going to become a woman – and was surprised that his macho army mates did not rally behind him. Nevertheless, he persevered. He had to leave the army, of course and his rigid Scottish parents cut him dead. So his decision cost him his career, his parents, his friends.

After the extensive surgery (not just gender realignment but major facial reconstruction as well) Hamilton, now Jan, tearfully tells the camera, "I'm 43 and I am having to start life all over again."

Hamilton's story is told in *Sex Change Soldier* (ABC2 Friday March 28 at 9.30pm) He was a Captain of the Parachute Regiment, and had served British imperialism faithfully and well (and had the decorations to prove it) in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

But, in 2007, his decision to finally acknowledge his preference and become a woman saw him tossed out of the army (not even a desk job – no sentiment there!)

Jane Preston's film of Hamilton's journey to become Jan is ultimately moving as we contemplate the hostility and lack of tolerance that she endures.

Ben Miller, an actor of some skill but an unlikely choice for the hero of a series, is finally written out of *Death In Paradise* (ABC1 Saturdays from March 29 at 7.30pm) by the simple expedient of turning him from DI Poole the detective into Poole the victim.

His British replacement is seemingly already on the island (the fictitious Caribbean island of Saint-Marie) for he appears before the other cops have even got over the shock. Miller's replacement is an even more unlikely actor, Kris Marshall, playing DI Humphrey Goodman. Marshall was the gormless sandwich delivery chap in *Love, Actually* who goes to America to get a girlfriend because "American chicks will dig my cute British accent". To his friend's amazement he comes back with a gorgeous babe on his arm and she brings her sister for his friend!

In this series he is disorganised and gawky, bumbling and accident-prone but with "a razor-sharp insight

into crime solving". Will he be able to overcome his team's initial doubts and solve every murder that comes his way? What do you think? Yeah, so do I.


While on the subject of murders, apparently *Midsomer Murders* has run into criticism in Britain for undermining official efforts to reduce the incidence of crime. It seems incredible. How could anyone think that the middle class setting and characters of *Midsomer Murders* could have any bearing on the real world? It's like blaming juvenile crime on the popularity of Batman.

This week's episode, *The Flying Club* (ABC1 Saturday March 29 at 8.20pm) is set in a private airfield, a former RAF base during the war, now owned by the son of the former CO. A murder in which the victim is dropped from an aeroplane is a stunt I think I also saw recently in an American crime show, but the attack by aeroplane in a field of grain is definitely pinched straight out of Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. Also on the scene are veteran actors Bernard Cribbins as mechanic Duggie Wingate and June Whitfield who I remember from the old radio show *Take It From Here* (she played Ethel to Dick Bentley's Ron) as the CO's widow Molly. Duggie believes Molly murdered his sister during the war. ☹

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Rod Tiffin, Professor, Dept of Government, Sydney University, author of *Murdoch – a Reassessment*;

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Neil Young, cancel Tel Aviv show

Robert Lovelace and Suzanne Weiss

Dear Neil,

Your "Honour the Treaties" concert tour across Canada struck a blow for fair treatment of the Indigenous peoples of Alberta in defence of their land. It was not easy to challenge establishment politics or hear the criticism of your craft and personal commitments.

I think we understand that well: one of us is an Algonquin, once imprisoned for protecting his homeland; the other a Holocaust survivor. Now we learn you are to give a concert in July in Tel Aviv. We ask you to reconsider these plans and, if you go to the region, to utilise your trip to express solidarity with the Palestinians, the Indigenous people under Israeli rule.

Suzanne: I was born in the Nazi Holocaust. After Hitler, the Indigenous Palestinians were forcefully removed from their homeland in the Nakba – the catastrophe that led to Israel's establishment.

There is similarity between this action, the dispossession of the Indigenous in Canada, and the fate of my own people under Hitler.

Robert: I am as old as Israel. In the 1950s, movie theatres ran newsreels, still vivid in my mind, of endless lines of Palestinian refugees.

In shades of grey across the screen, are the "trail of tears;" the Cree and Blackfoot driven by guns and starvation from the Cypress Hills. Throughout my life they have never stopped.

Suzanne: In Palestine, the land is occupied by military force in defiance of international law. The Israeli military bulldozes Palestinian forests, olive groves and their homes.

All of historic Palestine is under Israeli control. The majority of Palestinians have been forced abroad. A minority of the Palestinian people endures second-class status in Israel just as Aboriginal and Metis people in Canada. The rest are confined in barricaded pieces of land in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Israeli government has refined and expanded the Canadian model of herding the Indigenous into reserves.

Robert: Neil, you were shocked by the mining of the tar sands. It's the "ugliest thing," you said, comparing the mining region to atomic-devastated Hiroshima.

Almost every ecosystem in Canada has been affected by colonial development. The diversity of Indigenous cultures and economies has been devastated.

Alberta's Long Lake "cogeneration" project that mines tar sands was developed in Israel's Naqab (Negev) desert, whose Palestinian population has either been expelled or consigned to "unrecognised" villages that are denied public services.

Suzanne: During his recent visit to Jerusalem, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper said he refuses to "single out Israel for criticism on the international stage."

But his government has not a breath of criticism for Israel's crimes against the Palestinians. This is rogue diplomacy, contrary to United Nations decisions and concerns expressed by every other major world government.

Harper's support of Israel does not reflect the views of Canada's people.

Robert: You are a citizen of the world and it is right of you to offer your artistry to all people. Your music, its heartbeat and soul, has been an enduring inspiration throughout my life.



Athabasca Chipewyan Chief Allan Adam, left, speaks alongside singer Neil Young at a press conference for the "Honour the Treaties" tour, a series of benefit concerts in support of the First Nation's fight against Alberta oilsands development.

But consider the context of your visit to Israel. Many people will view your visit as a confirmation of Israel's anti-Palestinian policies. Those who respect your work will think that you don't care, and, Israel's apologists will claim you as their own.

A Tel Aviv concert will provide aid to the Israeli regime in pursuing its oppressive policies against the colonised indigenous peoples.

Your place is with the Indigenous people of Palestine, whose dispossession echoes that of the First Nations you defend in Canada.

Suzanne: Many prominent artists have rejected concerts in Israel to demonstrate their solidarity with Palestinians. If you decide to support the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement and cancel the Tel Aviv gig then you will be in good company.

Please check out my friend John Greyson's YouTube video, *Vivuzela*, which enumerates a growing number of artists who stand for Palestinian freedom.

BDS is a global effort to pressure the Israeli government to stop its ethnic cleansing; withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967; grant Palestinians in Israel equal rights, and allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland.

The late Pete Seeger, to whom principles mattered more than anything else, declared his support for the BDS movement in 2011.

Robert: You have the freedom to choose your own path. If you choose to perform in Tel Aviv then go there by way of the port of Gaza.

Thousands on the quayside will welcome you because you would be the first visitor by sea since 2006. I have tried twice to visit our Indigenous brothers and sisters in Gaza: the first time arrested at sea by the Greek Navy assisting Israel and the second time helping my friends but they were arrested

at sea, beaten, and imprisoned by the Israeli military.

Suzanne: Stephen Harper calls opposition to Israeli policies "the face of a new anti-Semitism." I have lifelong knowledge of the real anti-Semitism but see nothing anti-Jewish about opposing Israeli government policies.

A significant proportion of Jews in Canada and the world are supporting BDS.

The true lesson of Jewish suffering under Hitler is that we must stand on behalf of all those who are dispossessed, expelled, confined, jailed and under military attack, especially the Palestinians.

Robert: Stephen Harper makes much of the notion that Israel is a democratic nation.

As an Aboriginal Canadian, I say, democracy and colonialism cannot walk hand in hand.

Indigenous peoples have to make their struggles international because colonialism is international. Gaza is the largest Indian reserve in the world.

That is why Desmond Tutu, Alice Walker, Rigoberta Menchu, Dr Aleida Guevara and Professor Stephen Hawking have supported the boycott against Israel.

It's time to recognise that the Palestinian people have the right to self-determination. As long as someone else is suffering from colonialism, it simply prolongs our own suffering.

Suzanne: As one who stands against oppression everywhere, why not visit the occupied West Bank or Gaza? You may well come to agree with Nelson Mandela when he said, "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians."

Robert: Each of us has had a role to play and a price to pay in a world that went wrong long before we had a hand in it.

We are not asking you to blame anyone. We ask you to think and do what you can.

Like Suzanne and me, you have lived most of the allotted time given to our generation. Don't be silent now.

Continue to stand up for our people here on Turtle Island (North America) and against colonialism – and all of the human and environmental suffering that goes along with it. It will end only when we want it to.

If you perform in Tel Aviv, bring attention to the suffering of Palestinian people who after 65 years are still stateless refugees in their own homeland.

Dedicate the concert to the innocent children everywhere whose lives have been lost to war and injustice.

I'll be on the frontline of the tar sands fight and perhaps take another run to Gaza from the sea.

Suzanne: We count on you, Neil, to be true to yourself in finding an appropriate way to express solidarity with Aboriginal rights in Palestine. This commitment is part of the great cause about which you have been singing all your life.

Thank you for listening to us.

Robert and Suzanne

Robert Lovelace, a retired chief of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, went on the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza to deliver food and medical supplies. In 2008, he spent three and half months as a political prisoner for defending the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation homeland from uranium exploration and mining.

Suzanne Weiss is a Jewish Holocaust survivor and a long-time campaigner for social and environmental justice.

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