



Green light for racism

Bob Briton

“People do have a right to be bigots, you know.” The words burst like a bombshell in the ongoing public debate over the *Racial Discrimination Act*. They weren’t blurted out in the front bar of a pub by someone itching for an alcohol-fuelled argument; they were said in federal parliament by the most senior law-maker in the country. Attorney-General George Brandis’ defence of his draft exposure bill to weaken the Act sent his more socially aware Coalition colleagues ducking for cover and incensed those in the community who regularly confront racist abuse.

Media reports claim Brandis wanted to go further towards gutting the protections provided by sections 18C and 18D when the matter was discussed at a recent Federal Caucus meeting. “George has really drunk the right-wing Kool-Aid,” a minister reportedly said. The changes would remove the words “offend, insult and humiliate” on the basis of race or ethnicity from the section, retain the word “intimidate” (though this would be limited to perceived physical threat) and add the word “vilify”.

No big deal? It sure is. With the changes in place, right-wing News Corp columnist Andrew Bolt probably wouldn’t have had a case to answer over the comments he made in 2011 questioning the motivations of several prominent fair-skinned Aboriginal people. He was legally sanctioned over the piece, as he should have been. The test for current legislation is whether the person to whom comments are directed is reasonably likely to feel insulted or humiliated. Brandis’ proposed test for intimidation and vilification is how the majority of people in the wider community would feel.

“For example, members of a majority might regard calling someone a ‘nigger’ amusing whereas a black person might regard it as highly offensive,” Mary-Jane Ierodiaconou, partner at the Justicia law firm, said recently. “And one must apply these tests according to how the language affects the minority person.”

There is also a loophole at hand for “free



Image from the Australian Human Rights Commission “Racism. It stops with me.” campaign – itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au

speech” exemptions – “public discussion of any political, social, cultural, religious, artistic, academic or scientific matter.” Brandis is quick to defend his bill from the logical consequence that Holocaust deniers would take advantage of the more indulgent legal attitude. “We want to protect racial minorities from the core concept of racism, which is the incitement of racial hatred or the causing of fear because of a person’s race,” the Attorney-General said. “It all depends on the particular facts but might I remind you that racial vilification would always capture the concept of Holocaust denial.”

How is that enshrined in the draft bill? If British Holocaust-denying “historian” David Irving wants to come to Australia and lecture about the supposed lack of evidence for extermination camps without exhorting his audiences to attack Jews, what possible objection could there be? He has a right to be wrong and to express his opinions, surely? Not surprisingly, prominent members of the Jewish community, including Holocaust survivors, are not

buying it. They have been very vocal in their opposition to the “reforms” to the *Racial Discrimination Act*.

Warren Mundine, hand-picked head of Abbott’s Indigenous Advisory Council, is opposed to the changes to the Act. So is Labor Senator for the Northern Territory, Nova Peris, who spoke movingly of her experience of hate speech during her sporting career. A number of Liberal back-benchers have expressed their unease and one has said he would cross the floor to vote with Labor and the Greens. The bill looks doomed in the Senate even after July 1 when the brace of new, mostly right-wing Senators take their red leather seats.

But the damage is done. The message is put out that there will be greater official tolerance of the intolerant and the fanning of unfounded divisions among the people exploited by the current socio-economic system.

The Murdoch media empire has made its attitude clear with an editorial in *The Australian* of March 26:

“Adult governments understand they can’t legislate the world into good order. Bigotry must be confronted and defeated, not by laws but by reasoned debate, free speech and mature governance. Tony Abbott and Senator Brandis seem to understand where the state ends and community takes over,” the Murdoch flagship opined.

Opposition to this legislative green light to bigotry is, therefore, “childish”. Markets and debates fed by “news” and views of the Murdoch sort must shape the future. If the “debate” against bigotry is lost, people from racial and ethnic minorities will have to suffer the consequences. That is the current thinking of the Australian ruling class on racial discrimination. Contrast this with their thinking on trade unions, which must be hemmed in and frustrated in their work by layer after layer of legislation. To this agenda of division and attack, Australia’s multi-cultural working class must counter-pose its own of solidarity and action in its own interests. ✪

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“Death of Democracy Day”

Wednesday March 26 was the Abbott government's first red tape “repeal day”. The government presented Parliament with more than 9,500 regulations and 1,000 Acts of Parliament for repeal in one stroke of the pen. One day was set aside for the House of Representatives to read, analyse and debate the proposed repeals. Hidden amongst the 50,000 pages of paperwork are important laws and regulations that seek to protect workers, consumers, democratic rights, the environment, out cities, culture, multiculturalism and much more. What is referred to as “deregulation” is in fact the removal of important protections.

“They are rushing through the Parliament legislation that has so many components to it the real detail is hidden from the people. What we do know is there are bitter pills to swallow amongst it,” Greens Senator Christine Milne said. With Labor also opposing the legislation, it has no hope of getting through the Senate before July, if at all.

We are told they are being repealed to liberate people and business from bureaucracy and red tape. We are supposed to believe the so-called “red tape” is a “tax on prosperity”. Amongst the 9,500 regulations there are probably many that are dated or not relevant to a modern society. Of course those should be repealed. The government has been quick to ridicule a few of the more archaic pieces. Although they could hardly be more outdated than dames and knights!

But what about the rest of them? What is the government hiding from Parliament and the people. Bit by bit, some of the details are surfacing.

The major banks are very excited about the repeal of provisions that require financial advisers to be bound to act in a client's “best interest”. Restrictions on giving conflicted advice, such as recommending investment in their employer's products and gaining a commission from their employer would be lifted.

The government is using the “red tape” shield to cover up measures that will further reduce its accountability and undermine democratic rights. For example, it wants to abolish the independent monitor of Australia's terrorism laws. The appointment of the monitor was seen as necessary because of the draconian nature of these laws. They undermine democratic rights such as the right to a fair trial, to the presence of a lawyer, presumption of innocence and the right to remain silent. They gave ASIO the power to detain in secret for up to a week people who were not even suspected of a crime, but might have useful information. (See *Guardian*, “Terror laws: End them, don't amend them”, #1094, 05-06-2002)

Bret Walker SC, the current independent monitor, in his annual reports to Parliament, has pointed out that some of these laws play no useful role in preventing terrorism and undermine democratic values. His advice to repeal some of them has not been heeded. Instead, his position is being abolished!

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) will no longer be required to investigate all consumer complaints – another gift to right-wing media commentator Andrew Bolt and Murdoch media outlets. This is described as “lightening ACMA's workload”. The government is also legislating to liberate the likes of Bolt and the media from section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, so that bigots and the extreme right are free to foster hatred along racial and religious lines without fear of prosecution – a very useful tool for the ruling class to create divisions within the working class. But, just in case anyone still complained, ACMA will be able to ignore their complaints.

Developers, contractors and other companies will be freed from red and green tape. Regulations that attempt to set standards for aged and child care may be thrown out or considerably weakened to make it easier and cheaper for providers to expand their operations. The spin doctors have been very busy crafting Abbott's lines: “cutting paper work”, “streamlining requirements”, “exemptions from yearly reporting”, etc.

There are, however, a number of laws and regulations that should be repealed that are not on the hit list. For example, the unemployed, single parents, carers, disability pensioners, low income families, and other welfare recipients will still have to complete mountains of paperwork, turn up for endless and pointless interviews, chase non-existent jobs and so on. The many layers of government and private sector bureaucracy which only hurt the most disadvantaged are set to get worse. “Australia is open for business” as Abbott has declared. And this is for business, not for the people.

PRESS FUND

Last week Prime Minister Tony Abbott issued a stern warning to coalition MP's against releasing information to the media, but drew guffaws when he told them that someone in the party room had been leaking! His absurd reinstatement of knighthoods, which was also ridiculed, is making Australia a laughing stock. Whoever the next prime minister is, he or she will certainly cancel the arrangement, but meanwhile the issue will divert public attention away from other matters, like the government's intention to sell off public assets *en masse*. We want to reveal and frustrate the government's plans, but we need Press Fund contributions, so please send us something for the next issue if you possibly can! Many thanks to the following, for their support this week:

Mark Mannion \$5, Ahmed, Roshan \$50, “Round Figure” \$20.85

Proceeds from Sydney Central Branch
Cuban film fund-raiser \$404.15

This week's total: \$480 Progressive total: \$2,320

WA public sector workers stand firm

Richard Titelius*

On March 27 1,000 public servants rallied at the Perth Convention Centre to consider the government's response to their pay claim. The Liberal government of Premier Colin Barnett had originally responded to the claim of the Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association's claim of a 3 year deal of 4% each year by offering a 3 year deal of 2.5% each year.

On March 13, 150 workplace delegates had met to consider whether a counter offer should be made to the government to demonstrate bargaining in good faith.

Delegates were representing views in their workplaces that they considered more important, the retention of permanency and a rejection of the government's proposal of forced redundancy ahead of a pay rise that was barely ahead of inflation and contained almost no consideration of increased productivity.

The outcome which was to be taken to a meeting of all members was a reduction of the quantum from 4% to 3.5% over each of three years.

At the March 27 meeting branch secretary Toni Walkington advised members: “The quality of service to the community is considered important by most people ... a wealth of research shows that well paid workers provide a better service.”

Currently inflation is over 3.5%. WA is also one of the most expensive places to live in the country. The government also expects trade-offs in the form of a deletion of provisions in the General Agreement with public servants which relate to compliance reviews of labour hire and the Peak Consultative Forum with the CPSU/CSA and the Department of Commerce – used to respond to cross sector matters raised by the union.

Branch assistant secretary Rikki Hendon said that these trade-offs will help to facilitate their agenda of privatisation and contracting out in addition to Premier Barnett continuing to push through the Public Sector Reform Bill in State Parliament to bring about forced redundancies and give more power to public sector CEO's.

The meeting had three motions to consider with regard to further action and rejected accepting the

governments offer and the cuts to conditions which accompany the offer. They also rejected arbitration by the WA Industrial Relations Commission as there was also no guarantee of a preservation of conditions. Instead members voted unanimously to adopt a resolution whereby, “This meeting of CPSU/CSA members resolves to reject the Barnett government's current offer, continue to bargain and commits to a campaign of industrial action and community engagement including stoppages, bans or limitations, and other forms of protest.”

Other public sector unions will soon also be presenting their demands for wage justice and the maintenance and improvement of their conditions to the WA government. These include the State School Teachers Union which has called for a rally and March to Parliament House on April 1.

The Communist Party of Australia supports public sector workers and their union's call for salary justice and the maintenance of their hard fought for conditions.

*Richard Titelius is a CPSU/CSA delegate ☺



Public servants rallied at the Perth Convention Centre to consider the government's response to their pay claim.

Join Tom Costa & Comrades

70 years of struggle

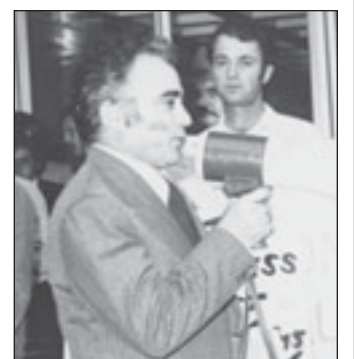
Sunday April 27 at 2pm

636 New Canterbury Rd Hurlstone Park (enter from rear)

Historical photos and oral history film

Cypriot food and drinks

Donations on the day will be accepted by the Inner West Branch of the CPA towards ongoing struggle of the working class and oppressed peoples in Australia and around the world.



Sydney

This is our city!

“This is our city and we will not be driven out of it!” declared Denis Doherty from Hands off Glebe to the cheers of about 150 people outside NSW Parliament House demonstrating in support of public housing on March 27.

Hands off Glebe, a small community group campaigning for public housing, had organised the March for Maintenance which was expanded to include the fight to save Millers Point, a historic Sydney suburb the NSW Liberal government wants to sell off to the private sector.

Defying constant rain, participants from public housing communities from Millers Point to Wollongong, including Balmain, Glebe, Camperdown, Auburn, Marrickville and other suburbs marched through streets chanting “Defend Public Housing! Save Millers Point!”

The marchers also demanded “No more demolition by neglect”, “No more eviction by neglect”, and “Stop social cleansing of public housing tenants”.

There was also a call for Housing NSW to sack Spotless, the maintenance providers which was described as another PPP (private public partnership) gone wrong.

Barney from the Millers Point

Community Defence Group spoke passionately about the devastating personal and social costs of forcibly evicting people from their homes, and called on the crowd to fight to defend public housing throughout New South Wales.

Public housing tenant Kelly told how the mould in her home was so bad that she and her daughter are constantly sick.

“It’s so bad, I just don’t want to go home,” she said. “I’d rather live on the streets than in that place.”

MP for Balmain, Jamie Parker from the Greens, was warmly welcomed by the demonstrators as he attacked the O’Farrell government for its greed and callousness in its planned evictions and sell off of heritage properties in Millers Point and The Rocks.

He pointed out that despite having a responsibility to assist the most vulnerable members of our community, the Liberal state government has continued the failure of the previous Labor government to adequately fund public housing.

The former Labor government left a maintenance backlog of \$330 million and this continues to grow. The Liberal government has given \$300 million to the poker machine



Greens MP for Balmain Jamie Parker speaking at the rally.

industry in tax benefits but says it can’t find any additional funds for public housing.

Jamie Parker delighted the crowd by ending with the story of the Glebe Youth Service where the youth workers were suddenly evicted and the NSW government said it was too expensive to upgrade fire precautions.

Glebe residents developed a big community campaign to stop it being sold off and the government

finally gave in. The GYS is functioning again, showing that determined community action can win.

ALP state leader John Robertson expressed his concern for the situation of many public housing tenants and said he wanted to hear their stories. However, there was disappointment when he said Labor would not have treated the Millers Point residents “in the same way” as the Liberals.

Many in the crowd thought this

was ambiguous and wanted a clear commitment from Labor that they would rescind the decision to sell off public housing at Millers Point. Closing the rally, Denis Doherty said: “We must unite to defend and extend public housing otherwise our city will be constructed to suit the needs of the rich and powerful and we will be excluded.”

“This is unacceptable. This is our city. We built it and we will keep on fighting to stay here!”

Australians speak out for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

What you want to know but are afraid to ask

A forum on the Boycott Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) offers the public an open and informative discussion on peaceful non-violent resistance in Israel/Palestine. As the Australian media and politicians debate the effectiveness and legitimacy of the recent Biennale boycott, a cross-section of speakers from all areas of civil society offer their support to the global Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement – the Palestinian-led campaign for justice, equality and peace for all in Israel/Palestine.

Professor Jake Lynch, who is one of the key speakers, is currently

defending a “lawfare” attack on him in the Federal Court by an Israeli based law firm, ShuratHaDin, for his support for the BDS.

“The case against me is a despicable attack on political freedom in Australia, and an attempt to stifle debate. When there is debate, and when people are properly informed, they are incredulous at what Israel gets away with. That is why the BDS movement is growing so rapidly around the world.”

Antony Loewenstein, independent journalist, says “BDS is a growing global movement in holding Israel to account for its daily crimes against the Palestinians. As

an Australian Jew, I support BDS because it is based in international law and justice for the occupied Palestinians.”

Palestinian playwright Samah Sabawi explains, “We have called on the people of the world to boycott Israel until it ends its oppression and discrimination against the Palestinian people. Those who oppose our call and our demands for equality justice and freedom are clearly in favour of protecting Israel’s racist and flagrant violations of human rights.”

Australian freelance journalist, Mary Kostakidis comments “Sanctions are a legitimate non-violent

protest against unacceptable government actions and policies. For years Israel has been violating international law with few repercussions because governments do not have the courage to stand up to powerful lobby groups.

“Recently Foreign Minister Julie Bishop read a statement in Parliament announcing Australian government sanctions against Russia. Governments impose sanctions when it suits their allies or their own national interest. More rarely, they do so on principle and after pressure mounting in their own community as we saw during the Apartheid era.

“We need to defend courageous, principled individuals and organisations that take the lead. The BDS is a growing international movement targeting Israeli government policy, a policy also unacceptable to many Israelis and Jewish people around the world.”

This BDS forum will raise public awareness of the effectiveness of the strategy and dispel the myths that have been spread about it, including the often heard claim that BDS is anti-Semitic.

The forum will include panel speakers, statements of support, and videos from Australian and international BDS supporters.

Pete’s Corner



Panel speakers:

French activist, Olivia Zamour (CAPJPO-EuroPalestine)

Palestinian playwright and policy analyst, Samah Sabawi

Professor Jake Lynch from the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Sydney University

Testimonies from:

Wendy Bacon, Antony Loewenstein, and Mary Kostakidis, journalists and writers

Warren Smith, MUA Assistant National Secretary

Omar Barghout, writer and founding member of the BDS movement (via video)

Phil Monsour, musician and activist (via video)

TUESDAY April 8
6.30-8pm (doors open at 6pm)
Footbridge Theatre,
Parramatta Road, Camperdown

ENTRY BY DONATION

All funds raised go to the Jake Lynch Fighting Fund

FURTHER INFO:

australiansforbds.wordpress.com

An alternative to indefinite detention of refugees

Julian Burnside

During the 2013 election campaign, both major parties engaged in a competition to outdo each other in their promises to mistreat boat people. The theory was that this would deter others from seeking protection here.

As it happens, the boats kept coming, even during the monsoon season in late 2013 and early 2014.

Promising to treat innocent people badly is not usually a vote winner. In most cases it would be seen as a mark of depravity. But in any event, the argument starts at the wrong place. It starts with the Coalition's oft-repeated statement that boat people are "illegals". It starts from the language of "border protection" and "queue jumping": language calculated to make the public think boat people are undesirables, people to be feared, people we need to be protected from.

The fact is that boat people do not break any law by coming here the way they do. Over the past 15 years, more than 90 percent of them have ultimately been assessed as refugees entitled to our protection. Their arrival rate in the 12 months to June 30, 2013 was much higher than the historic average, but even so, it represented only four weeks' ordinary population growth. While 25,000 boat people arrived in Australia in those 12 months, we received 200,000 new permanent migrants and 4 million visitors during the same time. Boat people do not present a demographic problem for Australia.

Spooked by tabloid scare-mongering, both major parties chose deterrent policies: treat them harshly; push them off to small, impoverished Pacific neighbours. The low point of this was the Coalition bringing in the military to deal with the "emergency". This, and the language of "war", was calculated to make the public at large feel that Australia is under



attack, which is so ludicrous as to be an insult.

The spectacular cost of these measures passes without complaint because it is seen as a kind of protection. While it is difficult to separate out the various components of the cost, on current estimates, we are spending about \$4 billion each year trying to evade our responsibilities under the Refugees Convention.

So, how better to deal with boat people?

First, it is essential for a political leader to show some actual leadership by explaining the facts: boat people are not "illegals"; they are practically certain to be refugees; we deliberately, consciously mistreat them for political purposes; it costs us a fortune to treat them this way. I do not advocate an open borders policy. Initial detention for people who arrive without papers is reasonable. But it should be limited to one month, for preliminary health and

security checks. After that, release them on interim visas with the following conditions:

- They must stay in contact with the Department until their refugee status has been decided.
- They are allowed to work or study.
- They have access to Centrelink and Medicare benefits.
- Until their refugee status is determined, they must live in specified rural or regional towns. There are plenty of country towns which are slowly shrinking as people leave. The National Farmers' Federation estimates that there are 96,000 unfilled jobs in country areas – the likelihood is that many asylum seekers would get jobs.

If this approach were adopted, and if every asylum seeker remained on benefits, it would cost about \$30,000 per person per year, making a generous allowance for administrative

overheads. Even assuming a continued arrival rate matching 2012-2013, the total cost would be about \$750,000,000 per year. That is to be compared with the current cost of about \$4,000,000,000 per year. More importantly, all that money would be spent in the local economy of country towns: on accommodation, food and clothing. There are plenty of country towns in Australia that would be enthusiastic to receive that sort of economic stimulus.

This new approach would save us more than \$3 billion a year. It would also avoid all the massive psychiatric harm which is caused by locking up innocent people indefinitely.

If an Australian government could be persuaded to adopt an approach like this, I would urge it to use part of the money saved to create benefits within the community. A billion dollars a year could be turned to creating more public housing for homeless Australians; another billion

dollars a year could be applied to building schools or hospitals or other infrastructure projects, or used to reduce the deficit or reverse tertiary education funding cuts.

We would still save at least a billion dollars a year. That is one thousand million dollars: quite a lot considering how much hand-wringing went into the decision not to give SPC Ardmora \$25 million to help it restructure.

There are many ways these ideas could be implemented. A few billion dollars a year can be used to damage asylum seekers profoundly, or it can be used for the benefit of the community in which asylum seekers live pending refugee status determination. But it won't happen until someone shows enough leadership that we are behaving badly because we have been misled about the character of the people who wash up on our shores.

The Beacon ☘

Hackles raised over draft Cape York plan

Christine Howes

Traditional owner (TO) groups on Cape York are up in arms about the draft Cape York Regional Plan, saying it lacks protection for cultural and environmental heritage and was written without sufficient consultation.

Pormpuraaw TOs have gone as far as to completely reject the draft plan.

The Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Council, Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) Trustees and TOs have demanded a veto against mining, exploration and dams.

A written statement accuses the Queensland government of being "one-eyed" in a 10-year battle to ban mining and promote conservation investment across the Pormpuraaw region. "Our people were ready to get on board with Wild Rivers," the statement says. "We are for protecting our untouched rivers so they keep flowing all year round.

"We do not want water to be taken from our rivers for mining,

exploration or dams. We worry for the top catchments of our big rivers as they are undisturbed by development with good clean water."

Pressure is building on the Queensland government to extend consultation on the regional plan beyond the March 25 deadline, after promises were made to TOs in Mareeba.

"On our homelands there can be no mining, no exploration, no dams," the Pormpuraaw statement says. "We reject the draft regional plan as it is today.

"The Queensland government must respect our community's wishes. It must not take preference over us.

"But the Queensland government has been listening to outside interests. It has listened to our community with only one ear. We want small-scale development only at our speed and under our control."

Western Kuku Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation chair Alwyn Lyall said the draft plan had no

references to cultural heritage or TOs' environmental concerns.

"It's the way that the State government has colour coded the map, there's a lot of the green areas are open for development; well, at this moment a lot of those green areas hold a lot of cultural and sacred sites amongst them that haven't been mapped so the government's not taking any notice of our cultural heritage," he said.

"Red area"

"We feel that some of these zones that they put in, they're not really strong enough because in a national park if they want to extract a resource they just change legislation and, boom, they've got a resource reserve in a red area.

"So, if they can continue to do that now in highly environmental places, what's it say for the rest of the areas?"

Laura TO and former Wujal Wujal mayor Desmond Tayley said the plan didn't have enough protection for cultural and sacred sites.

"Say, for example, the Quinkan Rock Art Galleries on east Quinkan area – that cultural heritage was one of our main priorities, as was trying to get more protection over that area, and we all know it's a world-renowned rock art area," he said.

LNP Cook MP David Kempton said if TOs had major concerns about the plan he would take them back to the government. "But the overriding issue is the protection of these cultural features, in particular rock art, and I'm not sure that the Cape York Regional Plan is the process by which they will be protected anyway," he said.

Mr Tayley said TOs were also concerned about the lack of consultation for the draft plan. "To date, we haven't had an audience with David Kempton other than the forum that we had to go to, uninvited, and make our presence known there so David could meet with myself and a few of the other TOs from the Laura area," he said. "There's people on country

outside of the urban footprint of local government in Cape York and those people haven't been consulted.

Queensland Deputy Premier Jeff Seeney said that while official consultation on the draft plan closed on March 25, that was not the end of the process.

"The Queensland government is prepared to take as long as is necessary to get this plan right, and I can reassure communities on the Cape that all their submissions and comments will be considered in finalisation of the plan," he said.

"We have always made clear that we are open to the community's views on the draft maps, the protections afforded to the areas mapped, and the possibility of making amendments to those areas."

Mr Kempton was due to meet with TOs in Laura and Lakeland after the *Koori Mail* had gone to press.

Koori Mail ☘

AWH inquiry

History of Labor and Liberal corruption

Peter Mac

The NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) inquiry into Australian Water Holdings (AWH) has revealed the involvement of senior members of both the Liberal and Labor parties in the company's allegedly corrupt activities.

In the 1990s, the former NSW Labor government signed an interim agreement to cover AWH's costs in managing water supply infrastructure works.

However, the company's directors wanted to enter into a far more lucrative public private partnership agreement (PPP) with the government to carry out new works in Sydney's north-western suburbs, and they expected a Labor faction led by Eddie Obeid to bring this about.

But the premier, Morris Iemma, was not on side. Therefore, according to one witness, in July 2008 Obeid and Joe Tripodi engineered the downfall of Iemma, and later of his successor Nathan Rees, who bitterly opposed Obeid. AWH then expected to be awarded the partnership if the government managed to force Sydney Water, the water supply authority, to drop its opposition to the deal.

Enter the middleman

In October 2008 the Obeid group sought Liberal Party support for the PPP by offering Arthur Sinodinos, then treasurer of the Liberal Party's NSW branch, a seat on the AWH board, for a fee of \$200,000 per annum. Under a "gentlemen's understanding" he would also receive a five percent holding in the company, with an extra 2.5 percent if the PPP was implemented.

In 2009 Dr Kerry Schott, director of Sydney Water, warned him about dishonest members of the AWH board, and told him the company was making exorbitant expense claims.

In May 2010 an AWH investor also warned Sinodinos the company was in serious debt, its directors were paying themselves exceptionally high salaries, it couldn't pay its tax or employees' superannuation and was in danger of insolvency.

The Obeid group then secretly bought a 30 percent stake in AWH, with part of the proceeds from the sale of the Hunter Valley mining lease, which has been the focus of another ICAC inquiry.

By then AWH was in dispute with Sydney Water over \$2 million in costs. In October 2010, referring to Dr Schott, an AWH director remarked "if only the bitch was gone".

ICAC was also investigating claims that "administration costs" for which the company had billed Sydney Water, included fees for chauffeur-driven limousines and more than \$75,000 in donations to the Liberal Party.

Former Labor Minister Michael Costa later testified that although the company had limited resources and scope of operation, three of its executives were paid at least \$650,000 per annum. Since the early 1990s the company's monthly bills had rocketed from \$200,000 to \$600,000.

In 2010 AWH contributed more than \$43,000 to the Liberal election campaign, and allegedly made payments totalling \$183,000 to "Eighty-five", an alleged slush fund company owned by Tim Koelma, formerly a staff member of former NSW Liberal Energy Minister Chris Hartcher's staff.

In November 2010 Sinodinos was appointed AWH board chairman and non-executive director. He was still honorary treasurer for the NSW Liberals, but after the November 2010 federal elections he was criticised for poor fund-raising efforts. However, the next month AWH contributed \$30,000 to Liberal funds.

Meanwhile, cabinet Minister Joe Tripodi sought the approval of new premier Kristina Kenneally for a cabinet minute that implied support for the PPP, and said she "didn't need to worry about the Liberals kicking up a fuss" about it, because Liberal members were involved in AWH.

However, she smelled a rat and wisely rejected the document. It is now said to have been doctored by Tripodi and fellow minister Tony Kelly (both Obeid allies), to express support for the partnership.

The Liberals take over

In 2011 Sinodinos became president of the NSW Liberals, and in March that year the Liberal/National coalition won the state election. A number of people with Liberal connections were subsequently retained as lobbyists by AWH, including Liberal powerbroker Michael Photios,

In July 2011 Nick di Girolamo, AWH Chief Executive, gave orders for Sinodinos to receive the extra 2.5 percent stake in the company that had been conditional on it receiving the PPP, the estimated value of which was then \$1.2 billion. Sinodinos' stake in the company was then estimated to be worth \$20 million.

However, Dr Schott and the NSW Finance Minister opposed the partnership deal. In August Di Girolamo sent an angry text message to

Premier Barry O'Farrell, and in September an AWH policy document outlined a strategy for a campaign against Sydney Water.

Di Girolamo suggested meeting shock jock radio host Allan Jones to "discuss AWH's difficulties", and Koelma is alleged to have drafted a letter making false allegations against Sydney Water management.

Di Girolamo claims that in October 2011 O'Farrell's chief of staff Peter McConnell said O'Farrell "wanted to move on a public private partnership" and that he (McConnell) would "fix" matters and sort out Sydney Water's "attitude".

O'Farrell later assured Di Girolamo he wanted to proceed with an assessment of the partnership, but "It seems to be disrupted by incapable bureaucrats".

In November 2011 Sinodinos relinquished his AWH holdings and entered federal parliament, filling a casual Senate vacancy. Costa took over as AWH chairman, allegedly for an annual fee of \$150,000.

In January 2012 the government awarded AWH a 25-year contract to carry out the Northwest Sydney water works. It was a much less lucrative deal than the partnership would have been but it has still drawn accusations of corruption.

Last April Di Girolamo sold his shares in AWH, and in September Sinodinos was appointed Assistant Federal Treasurer.

The growing stench

Hartcher resigned last December after ICAC raided his electoral office. Both Koelma and Hartcher have been accused of soliciting payments for political favours.

Last year, federal treasurer Joe Hockey paid back \$11,000 in electoral contributions he had received from AWH, and this year he repaid another \$22,000. Last week the Liberals repaid another \$75,000 in AWH electoral contributions.

Sinodinos denies he knew about the contributions. Abbott denies he was warned about Sinodinos' involvement with AWH, and has publicly defended him, but two weeks ago Sinodinos stepped aside as assistant federal treasurer.

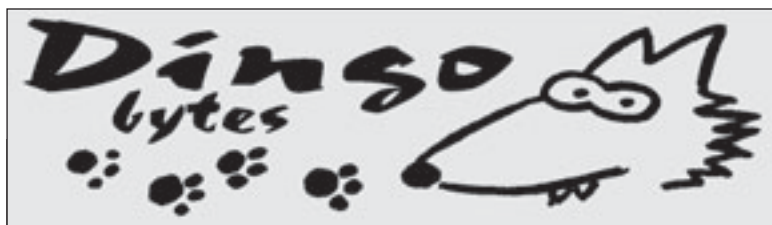
Sinodinos and others will front the AWH inquiry this week, and an inquiry into Eightyfive will commence in April. The AWH and Hunter Valley mining lease inquiries are revealing evidence of corruption on a staggering scale. And there's much more to come out.

As Sinodinos said last week after declaring he would be exonerated, "Watch this space"! ☺



Eddie Obeid.

In 2009 Dr Kerry Schott, director of Sydney Water, warned Arthur Sinodinos about dishonest members of the AWH board, and told him the company was making exorbitant expense claims.



Mr Abbott provided a comic relief with his "dames and knights" ideas. When the laughter stopped the question most often asked was: "what is it the government is trying to divert our attention from?" Is it disappearing jobs? Is it the cuts to all essential services? Is it the housing crisis? Is it corruption of its officials? A nationwide Fairfax-Nielsen poll has found that more than three-quarters of voters think the government's focus should be on creating jobs rather than returning the budget to surplus. A decisive 86 percent were for job creation, with 12 percent opting for returning the budget to surplus, and 2 percent not knowing what to prefer. Ungrateful plebs, in other words. Instead of rejoicing at the prospect of bowing to their just-created nobility they demand jobs!

Steve Purvinas, federal secretary of the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers' Association used parliamentary privilege to release the dossier detailing errors on Qantas planes after undergoing heavy maintenance in Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur. The facts are not very inspiring. Qantas aircraft sent for maintenance in Asia were found to have corrosion on the wings, multiple cracks, and faulty engine indicators. In the case of a 747 jumbo, three of four engines were found not held on properly. A cost-cutting program at Qantas means that not only 5,000 jobs will be lost but public safety will be compromised as well, because of contracting out maintenance work.

Once again Australia is being urged to "have a mature debate" about providing a waste hub for the world's nuclear energy industry. Deloitte Economics analyst Chris Richardson said nuclear power was among several ideas business should be considering as a way of dealing with the end of the resources boom. Don't know how old Mr Richardson is but some of us remember only too well the discussions that had been had on the issue of turning Australia into a nuclear waste dump. At the time the resounding answer was "no". Fukushima is still heavily polluting the environment three years after the accident. With all the new technology available the authorities in Japan cannot deal with the problem. They are good at cover-up but not the solution. Nuclear technology is not cutting-edge technology – there are other and better means of producing energy. To turn Australia into a nuclear dump is the dumbest proposal ever.

Clara Zetkin: Selected Writings

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

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

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

The interesting and important collection of writings are still as relevant and of interest as when they were written.

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**CLARA
ZETKIN**
Selected Writings



Edited by
PHILIP S. FONER
Foreword by
ANGELA Y. DAVIS

Notes from a Brigadista in Cuba

Maria Hilario was one of 22 participants on the Australian Brigade that visited Cuba last December. This is the second part of her outline of the many and interesting experiences the Brigadistas had during their visit. (See last week's *Guardian* for part 1.)

Next morning we went to Cardenas, another big city and we stopped at the Museum of the Battle of Ideas. It is a relatively new museum opened in 2001 as it was founded during the Elián González case (the then seven-year-old Cuban boy at the centre of a custody and immigration status case in 2000 between Cuba and the US when he was held by US authorities. He was returned to Cuba later that year). It is an old Fire Brigade station near Elián's Marcelo Salado primary school and it explains and shows what the Cuban people did for his return to Cuba with his father. He is now studying at University.

There is an area dedicated to the Cuban 5 with personal letters and poems. It also explains the law against Cuba, "Ley de Ajuste Cubano", in 1966 when United States deliberately encouraged illegal acts of escape putting people at risk and many dying in their attempts.

On the way from Cardenas to Playa Giron we stopped at the Mariana Grajales Coello primary school near the Australia sugar mill. The school was repaired with Australia Cuba Friendship Society funds after hurricane Michelle in 2001. The children gave us a warm welcome and they performed the beautiful "Comandante" song. We went to some classes and an Aboriginal Brigadista told them about her culture and Australian animals and showed them how to throw the boomerang.

We stayed one night at Playa Girón and visited the museum where the imperialist Yankees suffered their first defeat in Latin America.

Around 100,000 Cubans volunteered to fight the USA invaders at the Bay of Pigs. Cubans only had hours to defeat the invaders before they could send for reinforcements, and they won.

Literacy campaign

The museum in Bay of Pigs touched me in a personal way: some of the displays referred to the Brigadistas, the first literacy campaign brigade, and you could see the gas light books and a photo of a very young teacher teaching an old farmer and he looked a bit like my grandfather.

He never knew how to read or write and he always admired the revolution and Fidel. Now I understood why he was so eager when I was in primary school and I taught him to write his name rather than make a cross or a mark with his inked finger. Back in the camp we met Mario, a 72-year-old man helping around the camp. He told us he was one of the first Brigadistas who volunteered for the literacy campaign.

He had heard about it from the radio and straight away went to register. He was 17 years old studying in a group of a few hundred with classes lasting for a couple of weeks near Varadero. He was later sent to a village in the Sierra Maestra. He told us he had never lived so high up seeing the clouds moving below him. He lived with a family and the farmer did not want to learn to read and write but his wife and children did. He moved to share with a second

family where he stayed, happy to teach. But the locals decided to play a trick on him.

In the middle of the night two men came looking for the teacher and asked him if he believed in what he was doing. He said yes and they told him they were going to kill him. He told them he was ready but he heard a little giggle and the "intruders" revealed themselves to be the farmer and his wife; it turned out the locals were testing him about his beliefs and his commitment.

In Havana we visited a polyclinic or local hospital; doctors do home visits and patients are referred to the polyclinics for treatments ranging from therapies to mental health. The only thing that they do not perform is operations but they have 24 hours emergency services with doctors around the clock and they keep patients up to six hours for observation.

If their condition worsens they send the patient to a larger hospital. We were told all types of specialists have weekly consultations at the local clinics and everything is free, including the medication. While at the camp we had a 24-hour nurse and doctor and Brigadistas regularly used their services.

If a country like Cuba, with much less resources than Australia, can afford free medical services and education it is because they prioritise where they spend their revenue when they collect taxes: not pouring money into criminal wars but rather helping their own population. That surely is common sense, to help humans rather than making their lives a misery in wars.

Unions

We met a representative from the Department of International Relations from CTC, the Centre of Cuban Workers – Fabián Céspedes. The trade union centre has its origins in the National Confederation of Cuban Workers which in 1935 was under attack by the Batista dictatorship. Caffrey was a regiment that was made illegal and its members were jailed or assassinated. In 1939 in its Congress in Havana, Lázaro Peña was elected the general secretary and from early on it was on the radar of the government and the United States until the Revolution in 1959.

There are 15 different trade unions and they have a membership of 3.4 million workers. The membership of a trade union is voluntary in Cuba and is financially independent from the state. There is no state funding of trade unions and they have their own rules.

Industrial action is not prohibited in Cuba. Since 1959 there have been only a few disputes and it is because most conflicts are resolved through negotiation and the CTC is involved in the legislative process and the policy making. Every law that affects the workers or in relation to employment is always discussed and amended where necessary and must be approved by the unions.

Every month the assembly of workers review their production and discuss any problems related to administration, directors or workplace issues. The local union leaders are present and participate in the discussions.

The CTC congress meets every five years. Last year was the consultation and this year (February 20) was the 20th National Congress.



Students from the Mariana Grajales primary school performing. The school is near the Australia sugar cane mill and the Australia Cuba Friendship Societies.

It is the highest authority for each national trade union. The Congress is responsible for setting the union policies and elects the National Committee and the general secretary.

Women

We met Dalia from the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women). The FMC is a grass roots women's organisation with programs and policies aimed at achieving equal rights and full emancipation in all the aspects and levels of the Cuban society. It was founded in 1960 and is represented at national, regional and council levels.

The national direction comes from the Congress which takes place every five years. The IXth congress will be held in March 2014. They will elect the National Committee with women representing all social sectors. Currently they have four million women in the organisation over the age of 14. An important program is the Coordination of Employment to improve female participation in the workforce and to prevent discrimination in contracts.

There are centres for women – Casas de Orientación – where social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and educational experts provide help with different problems like domestic or inter-family violence or alcohol issues. They also offer help to the people affected by divorce like counselling.

They have a weekly publication "Mujéres" with its aim of providing information and documentation. They coordinate a program, "educa a tu hijo", directed at children from two to five years whose parents don't work and look after their children at home. The social workers work with the mothers or family members in activities to prepare the child for school.

(Cuba is fourth in the world for women

represented in parliament, 43.2 percent ahead of countries like Norway and Finland).

Casas de Orientación coordinates the work of 81,000 social workers and 78,000 health professionals who work in the barrios to prevent diseases like dengue fever, influenza and HIV. Also they coordinate and support and have 8,000 legal people dealing with the family courts.

Youth

We met Jesús Mora from the Young Communist League (UJC – Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas). Membership is voluntary. They have more than 400,000 members between 16 and 32 years old; they have 101 representatives in the national parliament who are all members younger than 31 years. The first Congress was in April 1962 when they adopted the name UJC and commitment to build socialism.

The aspirations of the youth today are very different from the struggling youth league of the 1930s when they joined the national strike that stopped the country for 24 hours, or the period during 1936 where half of their members were tortured, murdered or put in jail.

Today's aspirations of the Cuban youth, according to a survey of 60,000 youth, all want to graduate; to get jobs with good pay; have a house; to be able to travel; and to have computers. Because of the blockade the access to Internet is slow as the United States does not allow Cubans to use the cables that pass by near the coast and so they have to access it by satellite.

We enjoyed a cultural activity provided by the local primary school at Caimito "Alma dance parade" using only recyclables like colourful plastic bags and paper accompanied by poses and very fluid movement with dancing. It was very refreshing and entertaining; and the



Brigadistas at the Bay of Pigs.



Recycling materials made fashion at the local school in Caimito.



Corrected caption from last week's Assembly in Matanzas province: the Presidenta Juanita Ortiz.

... (Part 2)



...hill which was repaired with funds from

design of the dresses worn by the children in the parade was highly creative.

Nature

On Sunday morning, the last day before our departure, we spent a few hours around the National Botanical Gardens, which covers around 600 hectares and has more than 4,000 identified species. The Cuban zone has a rich variety of soils and terrains, creating an environment for the many types of vegetation found on the island.

There are more than 3,000 plants native to Cuba. There are 87 different types of palms and it is the most common tree in Cuba. These trees can live up to 200 years. Indeed, we were told that if some of the trees are to become extinct in some parts of Cuba they can reintroduce the trees from stocks in the garden.

The National Botanical Gardens has an indoor area with three big pavilions. In the first one there are plants from tropical and arid areas, many succulent plants and cacti. In the second pavilion there are plants from the tropics which need a high humidity environment. The third houses lush vegetation.

We saw unfamiliar trees like the sausage tree, coffee tree and the cocoa tree.

Trees from areas in Central America were represented as well from Asia, Africa and Australia with eucalyptus gums and wattle brushes. There is also a Japanese Garden with its rocks and sand paths around a lake.

On our last night we were lucky to attend a concert in the Havana Vieja main square with Silvio Rodríguez and Ivette Cepeda on the 15th anniversary of Radio Havana and 55 Years of the Cuban Revolution. A friendly crowd and great music.

Viva Cuba! 🇨🇺



...week's issue: Representatives from People's Popular ...nce. Left is the Vice Presidenta Mileidy Denis Perez, next is ...and the Matanzas ICAP delegate Teresita Rubio.

Open Shuhada Street Campaign



Steven Katsineris

Hebron (al Khalil) is a Palestinian town located in the southern part of the Israeli occupied West Bank of Palestine. Shuhada Street used to be Hebron's major thoroughfare and was the bustling, principal commercial centre of the old city of Hebron. Today, this main street is an all but deserted and empty place of boarded up houses and shuttered shops.

Twenty years ago on 25 February, 1994 a Zionist settler from Kiryat Arba, Baruch Goldstein, shot dead 29 and injured over 125 more Palestinian civilians during the Morning Prayer in Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque.

Following this brutal massacre the Israeli occupation authorities reacted by embarking on a campaign to punish the victims by closing Shuhada Street to Palestinians and imposing growing restrictions on commerce, freedom of worship and movement in Hebron's city centre. The Israeli occupation forces closed Shuhada Street to Palestinian vehicles after the massacre in 1994 and then later, in 2000 prevented Palestinian residents and other pedestrians walking there.

Israel said this was in order to provide security for the then 600 Israeli settlers that occupied a section of the centre of Hebron. The oppressive activities of the occupation and its settlers in the city of Hebron have turned the lives of 200,000 Palestinians in Hebron into a nightmare that has seen thousands expelled from their homes. The Jewish settlement is considered to be illegal by the international community and according to international law, but the Israeli government disputes this.

The Israeli state also imposed on the Palestinian residents of Shuhada Street and the centre of the city a regime of forced evictions, curfews, market and street closures, military checkpoints, roadblocks and subjected the population to military law, including frequent random stop and searches, detention without charge and no protection from rampant settler violence.

More than 500 Palestinian stores were closed by military order and a further 1,000 shop owners were forced to close their stores due to the relentless imposition of military checkpoints and enforced closures. The result of this harsh pressure compelled over 15,000 Palestinian civilians to flee their homes in the city centre, turning it into a virtual ghost town. So today, Shuhada Street, the once lively, thriving centre of the ancient city of Hebron is dead, its shops and most of its houses abandoned.

The situation in Hebron is totally unjust; it is a city with nearly 200,000 Palestinian residents, who are banned from access to their main street, except for a small part. While the now 800 illegal Israeli settlers, protected by Israeli occupation soldiers, are exclusively allowed

full access and enjoy freedom of movement in the closed street. And these Israeli settlers, with the full backing of the Israeli army, are systematically making life more unbearable for the Palestinians left in Shuhada Street and the rest of the city of Hebron.

Most of the Palestinians that once lived here have reluctantly left their shops and homes. In 2001, the Israeli army closed all the entrances to the residents' houses along Shuhada Street and forbade Palestinians to use their front doors. The remaining Palestinians who live in the area have to enter and exit by climbing over roofs or through their back doors. Those Palestinian residents who remain suffer constant harassment and attacks by Israeli settlers. And Israeli soldiers guarding the street frequently ignore this violent behaviour by settlers and don't intervene to protect Palestinians from this settler violence.

Israel says it pushed out thousands of Palestinian families and shop owners from the heart of their city for security reasons. But the repression, intolerable living conditions and increasing illegal colonisation by the violent Israeli settlers in the area is in fact increasing tensions and the risk of conflict.

Shuhada Street is an iconic symbol of the crushing suppression of Palestinians under the brutal Israeli occupation. What used to be a busy shopping street has now become a ghost road with massive concrete barriers and heavily armed young soldiers at numerous checkpoints. Palestinians who need to pass through to go to work or home can be held for hours for no reason and endure harassment and humiliation.

During the annual February Open Shuhada Street in Hebron protest this year five Palestinians were arrested. Three were later released and two were kept confined in prison. More than 13 were injured by Israeli forces. The demonstration started at the Ali-Bakka Mosque from the eastern entrance to Shuhada Street. According to Youth Against Settlements, over 2,000 people participated from all Palestinian political parties, with many other Israeli and international organisations joining in marching in this year's demonstration. The protest was attended by popular resistance activists, participants from all around the country, the governor of Hebron, Kamel Hmeid, a member of the legislative council, Mustafa Barghuthi and representatives of the Islamic and National parties in the city of Hebron.

When the demonstrators reached the entrance to Shuhada Street Israeli military forces attacked the peaceful protesters. Israeli soldiers at the army checkpoint fired stun grenades, rubber bullets and teargas towards the protesters. Other protesters were also physically beaten by soldiers and police. Some demonstrators responded with stone throwing. A cameraman for the Israeli human rights group BT'selem was injured with a rubber bullet in

the head, and a Palmedia journalist with a plastic coated steel bullets also in the head.

This year's protest also marked the 20 year anniversary of the Ibrahimi Mosque Massacre in Hebron. The protest was organised by Youth Against Settlements, the Hebron Defence Committee, in coordination with the Palestinian national political parties and the Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign. They called on activists and organisations to participate in the demonstration and unite to demand the opening of Shuhada Street to Palestinians and an end to the Israeli occupation.

Open Shuhada Street Campaign (OSC) is a Palestinian initiative, aiming to organise an International day of Solidarity with the Palestinian Residents of Hebron. It was started in 2010 in Hebron and international solidarity actions took place in numerous cities around the world.

The Open Shuhada Street Campaign, now in its fifth year, was an initiative of Youth Against Settlements, with support from many other Palestinian, Israeli and international groups, aimed at focusing attention on the plight of the Palestinian residents of Hebron. And more broadly the campaign hopes to raise awareness about the Israeli occupation. As the organisers state, "We are focusing on Shuhada Street as a symbol of the settlement issue, the policy of separation in Hebron/al Khaleel and the entire West Bank, the lack of freedom of movement and the occupation at large."

On February, 25 many civil, religious and political groups and activists from Palestine and Israel and elsewhere launched a world-wide campaign to open Shuhada Street, to protect the civil rights of all people and to end the Israeli occupation. The brave people of Hebron are peacefully standing up to the daily violence of living under Israeli occupation. They are calling on us to support their just cause. Let's answer their appeal and help get them their rightful access to the heart of their city. Despite a court case and an admission by the Israeli government that their actions in Shuhada Street are illegal, the street is still closed to Palestinians 14 years later.

Please act to help expose the repressive segregation in Hebron and to show solidarity with the residents of Hebron and the struggling people of Palestine. The Palestinians are continuing to suffer and struggle against the cruel Israeli occupation and need our help. Demand the reopening of Shuhada Street to Palestinians and an end to the Israeli occupation.

To get involved in supporting the campaign or to obtain more information contact: Open Shuhada Street Campaign- info@youthagainstsettlements.org or www.hyas.ps

Sign the Shuhada Street petition at Avaaz: www.avaaz.org/en/open_shuhada_street_c/?fpla 🇨🇺

Cuban doctors attend to Brazil's needy

WT Whitney

Cuban family doctor Teresa Rosales has been working in Brejo da Madre de Deus (Swamp of the Mother of God) in impoverished, drought-stricken Pernambuco state in Brazil since September 2013. Patients, she reports, are grateful. They are “on their knees on the floor thanking God. They give kisses.

“What we Cuban doctors see primarily is humanity,” says compatriot Angela Zunila; “I want to help the Brazilian people improve their health.” Now working in Canarana in Bahia, she and her physician husband served as doctors previously in South Africa and Venezuela. Their 3-year-old son remains in Cuba under his grandmother's care.

Rosales, Zunila, and 400 other Cuban doctors arrived in Brazil in September 2013 under a bi-national agreement mediated by the Pan-American Health Organisation. Some 5,000 were on hand at the end of November and 2,000 more arrived in mid January 2014.

They are part of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff's “More Doctors” program joined too by several hundred physicians from Uruguay, Argentina, Spain, and Portugal and 1,096 from Brazil itself. According to Health Minister Fernando Menezes, they are serving in “areas with a low index of human development, most of whose people live in extreme poverty.” Eventually 15,000 doctors will be caring for 100 million Brazilians living in 4,070 municipalities in 26 states. Opinion surveys estimate that from 74 to 85 percent of Brazilians are enthusiastic about the program.

Rousseff introduced “More Doctors” in July 2013 following nationwide protests over health care and public transportation deficiencies. Brazil's Constitution guarantees health care for all, yet Brazil has only 1.8 doctors per 1,000 persons. The US rate is 2.4/1,000, Argentina's is 3.2/1,000, Spain's rate is 4.0/1,000, and Cuba claims 6.7 physicians for



Eventually 15,000 doctors will be caring for 100 million Brazilians living in 4,070 municipalities in 26 states.

1,000 people. Brazilian healthcare is marred by disparities in health services between rich and poor, between cities and the countryside. Almost half of Brazilians lack ready access to primary care.

Cuba was ready to respond to the Brazilian request. Medical schools there regularly graduate 10 percent more physicians than are needed at home. Beginning with Algeria in 1963, Cuba has sent no less than 134,849 doctors to 107 countries. Presently 40,000 Cuban health care providers are serving in 58 countries.

Cubans cite purposes of human solidarity, humanitarianism, and “South-South cooperation.” Now new demands emerge related to Cuba's efforts to steer its economy toward sustainability. Cuba is counting on resource-rich countries like Venezuela, Qatar, South Africa, and Brazil to pay for health care collaboration. The aim is partial self-sufficiency for health care at home and international medical missions.

Brazilian funds transferred to

Cuba cover the \$4,200 monthly payment due on behalf of Cuban doctors slated to work in Brazil for three years. Doctors similarly involved from other countries receive the same pay. Cuba's new sustainability ethos dictates that the government retains two thirds of that amount. Originally, Cuban doctors in Brazil were receiving room and board, plus \$1,000 per month, divided between \$400 available at once and \$600 deposited into an account in Cuba. While doctors are abroad, their families are receiving payments equivalent to their former salaries in Cuba. But these arrangements changed.

Brazilian doctors' organisations claimed that Cuban doctors represented “slave labour” and were poorly trained. That Brazilian medical students educated in Cuba scored higher on qualifying exams helped dispel the latter notion. And as of February, 2014, the amount Cuban doctors received increased to \$1,245 per month, with \$1,000 of that delivered to them in Brazil. Relatively

high living expenses in Brazil and the early departure of a few Cuban doctors may have prompted the pay hike.

In fact, Brazil's use of Cuban doctors re-opened wounds left over from the US Cuban Medical Professional Parole program (CMPP). The US State Department and the Department of Homeland Security had jointly launched the program in 2006, assigning administrative tasks to the Cuban American National Foundation, a well-known sponsor of anti-Cuban terror attacks. The goal was to induce Cuban health workers on international missions to defect and, further, to score propaganda points and “undermine Cuban medical diplomacy.” Provisions of the 1965 Cuban Adjustment Act enabled defectors to gain permanent US residence and expect citizenship.

During the first eight months of the “More Doctors” program, at least 25 Cuban doctors dropped out. Most returned to Cuba, but at least two migrated to the United States under

CMPP auspices. Cuban journalist José Manzaneda highlights the irony of worldwide media silence on the program itself and unrestrained news coverage of Cuban doctor Ramona Matos Rodríguez, who ended up in Miami by way of the US embassy in Brasilia.

President Rousseff's affection for the Cuban doctors is no secret. Offering Facebook commentary on an article in the Porto Alegre newspaper *Zero Hora*, she observed that, “They are few but are profoundly changing in Brazil the way professionals act in the area of health care and doctor-patient relations. They are here to change the profile of preventative medicine in Brazil. They dress simply, keep their house clean, and carry their own snacks for lunch. They are systematic, dedicated to the treatment of patients, and furthermore are partygoers, like Brazilians. They are breaking the barrier of prejudices and the corporation-derived style of Brazilian professionals.”

People's World ☪

Qatar's bloody disgrace

At the football world body FIFA's executive committee meeting football's assembled bigwigs will decide if they should do anything about the scandalous situation of migrant workers in Qatar. Conservative estimates suggest at least 4,000 workers could die before a ball is even kicked in the 2022 World Cup – based on 1,200 deaths reported by the Indian and Nepalese embassies, only accounting for about half the migrant workforce.

As part of the International Trade Union Confederation's protracted attempt to improve the conditions for workers in the World Cup host nation it has published a damning exposé of the country's employment system.

Under the kafala immigration system, bosses enjoy near total control over the workers they employ, including the ability to

stop them changing jobs or return to their home countries.

As the ITUC's gathered testimony shows, kafala workers are often afraid to report the commonplace abuses – from lousy accommodation, withheld wages and even physical beatings – for fear of retaliation, especially when their bosses hold positions of influence within Qatar's ruling dynasty.

Even when they do pluck up the courage to complain to the labour department the dragged-out court proceedings or mediations are carried out in a language they don't understand. Some are even arrested on dubious grounds and end up in prison.

Trade unions in Qatar were only made legal in 2004, but there are still no collective bargaining agreements in existence in the country. The laws exclude not only migrant workers – 1.4 million

people in a population of just over two million with an estimated 500,000 more needed before 2022 – but public-sector workers, “casual” workers, the police, seafarers, agricultural workers and others, such that more than 90 percent of the workforce are banned from combining.

On top of that, Qatari labour law on joining unions doesn't apply to those in workplaces employing fewer than 100 people, excluding even more workers. The ITUC warns that Qatar is failing to fulfil its obligations under the few International Labour Organisation conventions it has signed.

FIFA's willingness to respond robustly when abuse is uncovered has also been thrown into doubt by its reaction to ITUC allegations. A union delegation visited the Al Wakrah Stadium site, finding 38 workers from India, Nepal and

Thailand living “in squalor with mattresses on the floor in makeshift rooms underneath the bleachers or stadium seats” – this despite much-vaunted “charters” supposedly guaranteeing workers' rights and conditions.

FIFA reacted to the ITUC's photographic evidence by describing the situation as “complex.”

The so-called Supreme Committee responsible for the tournament and enforcing labour standards carried out a “successful inspection” of the site in January that managed to miss the plight of the workers there, but has since pledged to rehouse the workers after the ITUC complained to FIFA.

The case clearly backs ILO and union warnings that the mechanisms Qatar has put in place won't be able to fulfil their functions. Not only are they limited in

scope – failing to end the illegal but near-ubiquitous practice of confiscating passports for instance – but they lack the enforcement mechanism to actually solve them.

The report outlines even more shocking evidence of abuse, saying over 2,500 Indonesian maids a year are forced to flee from abusive sponsors and uncovering huge disparities in pay based on race.

“Qatar must change,” said ILO general secretary Sharan Burrow.

“FIFA can make a difference by making the abolition of kafala and respect for international labour rights a condition of Qatar hosting the World Cup in 2022.

“If FIFA demands that Qatar abolish kafala and respect fundamental international rights, it will happen.”

Morning Star ☪

WikiLeaks shows NATO's role in Ukraine

Conn Hallinan

Is the Russian occupation of the Crimea a case of aggressive expansionism by Moscow or aimed at blocking a scheme by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to roll right up to Russia's western border? WikiLeaks has revealed a secret cable describing a meeting between French and American diplomats that suggests the latter, a plan that has been in the works since at least 2009.

Titled "A/S Gordon's meeting with policy makers in Paris," the cable summarises a September 16, 2009 get-together between Philip Gordon, then assistant US Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, and French diplomats Jean-David Levitte, Damien Loras, and Francois Richier. Gordon is currently a special assistant to President Obama on the Middle East.

While the bulk of the cable covers an exchange of views concerning Iran, the second to last item is entitled "NATO's enlargement and strategic concept." At this point Levitte, former French ambassador to the US from 2002 to 2007, interjects that "[French] President [Nicholas] Sarkozy was 'convinced' that Ukraine would one day be a member of NATO, but that there was no point in rushing the process and antagonising Russia, particularly if the Ukrainian public was largely against membership." Gordon goes on to paraphrase Levitte's opinion that, "the Bucharest summit declaration was very clear that NATO had an open door and Ukraine and Georgia have a vocation in NATO."

Levitte is currently a fellow at the conservative Brookings Institute.

At the April 2008 NATO summit in Romania, Croatia and Albania were asked to join – they did so in 2009 – and postponed a decision

concerning Georgia and Ukraine until December 2008. But in August, Georgian forces attacked the break-away province of South Ossetia – possibly under the delusion that NATO would come to their aid – setting off a short and disastrous war with Russia. The vote on Georgia and Ukraine was shelved both by that war and a Gallup Poll indicating that 40 percent of Ukrainians considered NATO a threat, while only 17 percent had a favourable view of the alliance.

The move by NATO to extend the alliance to the Russian border is a controversial one that violates the spirit, if not the letter, of a February 1990 agreement between then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, US Secretary of State James Baker, and Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany.

The issue at the time was Germany and NATO. Under the treaty ending World War II, the Soviets had a right to keep troops in Eastern Germany. The US and the Germans were trying to negotiate a reunion of the two Germanys that would remove the 380,000 Soviet troops in the East, while maintaining US and NATO forces in the West.

The Russians were willing to exit their troops, but only if US and NATO forces did not fill the vacuum. On February 9, Gorbachev told Baker "any extension of the zone of NATO would be unacceptable." Baker assured him that "NATO's jurisdiction would not shift one inch eastward."

The Baker-Gorbachev meeting was followed the next day by a meeting between Gorbachev and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who assured him that "naturally NATO could not expand its territory" into East Germany. And, in a parallel meeting between West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Soviet Foreign Minister



A 2008 Gallup Poll indicated that 40 percent of Ukrainians considered NATO a threat, while only 17 percent had a favourable view of the alliance.

Eduard Shevardnadze, Genscher told Shevardnadze "for us, it stands firm: NATO will not expand to the East."

But none of the assurances were put in writing and, as the Soviet Union began to implode, the agreement was ignored and NATO forces moved into the old East Germany.

As former New Republic editor Peter Beinart notes in *The Atlantic*, the decision to expand NATO was considered to be "recklessly provocative" by a number of foreign policy experts. "As eminent Cold War historian John Lewis wrote, 'Historians – normally so contentious – are in uncharacteristic agreement: with remarkably few exceptions, they see NATO enlargement as ill-considered,

ill-timed, and above all ill-suited to the realities of the post-Cold War world.'

But with Russia severely weakened, Cold War triumphalism took over: President Bill Clinton took NATO to war in Yugoslavia in 1995, and put troops into Bosnia. By 1997 Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO, followed in 2004 by seven Soviet bloc countries, including former Soviet republics Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. NATO's "Partnership for Peace" was expanded to include the former Soviet Republics of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The recent "bailout" offer to Ukraine by the European Union contained a clause that would have tied Kiev to the EU's military organisation.

In short, Russians feel like they are surrounded by hostile forces, a fact critics of Moscow's moves in the Crimea should keep in mind.

The danger of pushing a military alliance up to the borders of a potential adversary was made clear this

week when NATO began deploying forces in the Baltics and Poland, and the US sent a guided missile destroyer into the Black Sea.

The Pentagon announced it was sending F-16 fighter-bombers and F-15 fighters to Poland and the Baltic States, as well as C-130 transport planes and RC-135 aerial tankers. In the case of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, this will result in an increase in NATO forces on Russia's northern border.

The USS Truxtun is an Arleigh Burke class destroyer armed with cruise missiles and anti-ship Harpoon missiles. Cruise missiles can carry a nuclear warhead. According to the US Navy, the Truxtun's mission has nothing to do with the crisis in the Ukraine but is simply carrying out joint manoeuvres with the tiny Romanian and Bulgarian navies.

It is unlikely that the USS Truxtun will go looking for trouble or that the F-15s and F-16s will play chicken with Russian MIGs and Sukhois, but mistakes happen, particularly when tensions are high.

People's World ☘

South Africa Parties split over corruption claims

South African politicians split down party lines in their reaction to Public Protector Thuli Madonsela's report on public expenditure on President Jacob Zuma's private residence at Nkandla. Opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazibuko said Ms Madonsela's findings were damning.

She demanded that Speaker Max Sisulu recall the national assembly and that Mr Zuma be impeached "for this flagrant abuse of public money."

African National Congress (ANC) secretary-general Gwede Mantashe took issue with the timing of the report's release, noting that it had "provided some ammunition to many of these parties that have nothing to offer to the electorate."

He condemned "mischievous and downright false assertions by some political pundits and

opposition politicians that the ANC intends to either ignore the Public Protector's report or undermine the validity of her findings."

Mr Mantashe said that the report confirmed the essential findings of a government report released in December. These were that no state money had been spent on the president's private dwellings, that Mr Zuma had told the truth when he told parliament that he had built his own home with a private mortgage, that there had been no political interference in the building project and that the personal security of presidents and deputy presidents is the responsibility of the state.

"Therefore the call by some for an impeachment of the president is a premeditated position that has nothing to do with the report presented by the Public Protector," he said.

South African Communist Party spokesman Alex Mashilo also drew attention to the timing of the report so close to the general election. He said that Ms Madonsela's public pronouncements since August 2012, when she addressed a DA Women's Day rally, had increasingly chimed with that party's positions.

The Public Protector's report concluded that the security work carried out by the state at Nkandla had benefited the president's private property and that he should repay 246 million rand.

ANC Youth League national convener Mzwandile Masina went further than Mr Mashilo, accusing Ms. Madonsela of having "compromised herself to the bone."

She ought to "finalise the outstanding urgent tasks and do an honourable act of resigning."

Morning Star ☘

MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS IN SOLIDARITY WITH CUBA, 2014



Third Week of Denounce and Solidarity "5 days for the Cuban5"

Date: June 4-11, 2014

Place: Washington DC, USA

More information in: www.thecuban5.org

III World Meeting of Solidarity with Cuba, "Cuba Solidarity 2014"

Date: October 27 - 31, 2014

Place: Havana, Cuba

More information in:

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

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Thirty-one years of solidarity

In early February I was among a small group of Australians making their way back home from Cuba via London. We had been part of the Southern Cross Brigade which, for 31 years, has been sending groups of volunteers from Australia and NZ to express solidarity with socialist Cuba as part of a world-wide effort.

We were wearing our colourful Southern Cross caps, which are a conversation prompter in any company and some London railway workers asked us what they meant.

When we explained that they were about solidarity with Cuban socialism we were met with handshakes and a sharing of the wisdom that great powers who think they can erect a fence around an ideology whose time has come are making a

big mistake. Of course they were referring to the US blockade of Cuba.

There needs to be a lot more solidarity shown to Cuba if the blockade is to be broken.

Bruce Toms
Sydney

Massive coal mine for ancient forest

Right now, coal corporations are flattening an ancient forest teeming with threatened species in northern NSW to build a monster open-cut coal mine. The new Maules Creek Coal Mine would dwarf all others under construction in Australia. Once built, it would spew almost the same amount of carbon pollution as New Zealand's entire energy sector each year.

The coal industry is making big efforts to stifle community resistance to this mega mine. So we've put together an action plan that could permanently stop this mine and protect our climate, as well as nearby farmers' livelihoods and the Leard State Forest.

The risks and damages linked to this mine are simply staggering. Clearing of Leard State Forest has already begun, bulldozing nationally-significant and endangered

biodiversity in some of Australia's rarest bushland. And while farmers face the aftermath of a severe drought, four million litres of water would be guzzled up every day from the nearby Namoi River to build the mine.

This isn't something any of us can take on alone. But together, we can amass a huge fund to take on the forces letting this destructive project go ahead. Your donation can:

Fund forest investigations and helicopter fly-overs to gather new evidence and expose the misinformation mining companies are feeding to politicians and the media.

Hire an elite team of lawyers to mount a legal challenge off the back of evidence we gather.

Help grassroots activists continue taking peaceful action on-the-ground to delay mine construction.

Launch striking, high-visibility public campaigns to expose what's being done to this forest and the climate.

Expand our Action Support Camp adjacent to the mining site, allowing more locals to stand their ground for longer.

When we visited the Maules Creek Coal Mine recently, one heartbroken farmer explained the direct threat to his livelihood. Cliff Wallace, whose family has been working the land for decades, said: "The dust

created by the mine is really going to hurt our lungs and our crops. But water is the biggest issue for us as farmers. This mine will take a huge amount of water from nearby rivers and our water aquifers. We won't be able to irrigate."

Environment Minister Greg Hunt has the power to issue a "stop work order" until pressing concerns are addressed, but it will take our concerted campaign to drive action.

It won't be easy, but we can win. We're already making huge progress, with construction corporations like Lend Lease and Anglo Coal recently pulling out of a damaging coal port project in the Great Barrier Reef. Now, let's stop damaging new coal supplies at the source, starting with the Maules Creek Coal Mine.

Nic Clyde
Greenpeace Australia Pacific

Unacknowledged Australians

It seems that there are Australian citizens being held in detention on Nauru. How could this be, you might wonder? Well, those women transferees (they're no longer officially designated detainees apparently) who find themselves to have arrived on the island pregnant are, when their time is

approaching, flown to Australia in order to give birth.

Whether this is an attempt to show Australia's compassion in the face of the evidence to the contrary behind the razor wire, an acknowledgement of Australia's moral responsibility and duty of care or a reflection on the inadequacies of Nauru's own health care system, the reality is that the newborn transferee then comes into this world on Australian soil (unless the government has found a way to legally "excise" the maternity wing of the relevant hospitals from Australia's territorial overlordship for the period of the confinement and birth!) and is therefore technically Australian.

That literally "new" Australian, totally unacknowledged as such of course, is then shipped back to Nauru to join their fellow transferees. Here then is yet another example of the government's flagrant abuse of and indifference to the human rights of these poor people, caught in the limbo between a chance of a life of freedom in Australia and the likelihood of retribution, potential death or imprisonment and certain Persona Non Grata status in the land from which they fled because they had the audacity to do so in the face of repression and worse.

Michael George Smith
Katoomba, NSW

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Royals, aristocrats and unearned income

Those assorted right-wing pooh-bahs who like to sound off in the media about left-wing bias at the ABC had better investigate the journalist who did the report on Venezuela in a recent *Foreign Correspondent*. It was a startlingly honest appraisal of the situation in that country, where carefully orchestrated right-wing groups have been staging "popular" demonstrations in an attempt to bring down the government of Nicolás Maduro and end the Bolivarian Revolution. The ABC's reporter, however, pointed out that the overwhelming mass of the people did not support the "protesters". Instead, they saw them as trying to "wreck the country".

Journalists who honestly report what is going on in a country are becoming fewer and fewer. Most are expected to do no more these days than rehash press releases from those news sources approved by their employers, so that is what they in fact do. To do otherwise can cost you your job. Or at least get your story binned.

Speaking of the ABC, did you see where that embattled organisation's Board gave itself a six-course lunch at a hideously expensive harbour-side restaurant at The Rocks, in Sydney. Over the very pricey nosh, they decided to offer the Abbott government a voluntary ten percent reduction in the ABC's budget. That's a big reduction. It means dropping entire programs, such as bothersome items like *Q&A*, *7.30 Report* and the previously mentioned *Foreign Correspondent*.

Clearly the ABC Board has no intention

of fighting to preserve the ABC's integrity and future. It's hard to mount a "Hands Off The ABC" campaign if the ABC won't join in itself. However, despite the Board's grovelling attitude, only a determined public campaign will help the national public broadcaster stand up to a hostile Abbott government.

No doubt you saw the report in the newspapers earlier this year that British MPs had been told the shocking news that the Queen was "down to her last £1 million"? It shook me. I can tell you. I'm not sure what we should do about it, though. Send round the hat, perhaps?

Not that Liz is actually on the rocks, you understand. It's her reserves that are down, not her income. So we are unlikely to see a sign saying "Rooms To Let" hanging on the gate of Buck House any time soon.

The pro-Tory British newspaper *The Telegraph* became lachrymose in telling its readers of the Queen's humiliating situation: "Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle are reported to be in urgent need of repair. Staff must catch rain in buckets to protect art and antiquities," it wailed. It seems that the Royals, not content with living in palaces from which the ordinary British people are barred, now want those same British people to pay for the maintenance of the aforesaid palaces.

In Russia after the Revolution, most of the owners of the country's many palaces fled abroad, with their family jewels sewn into the lining of their coats. Now, some of those

jewels, that were meant to become "property of the people" under socialism, instead appear on *Antiques Roadshow*, to extravagant praise from their very wet (and very snobbish) jewelry expert who I suspect would never be comfortable with the concept "property of the people".

In some cases, however, the owners of the palaces and mansions did not flee the country but stayed and endeavoured to fit in with the revolutionary concepts of the new regime. This meant, in some cases at least, that the former owners were allowed to stay on as guides and caretakers. I wonder if that might not be a possible future for the younger British royals, those that don't want to play soldiers, at least?

The Queen, incidentally, is not the only wealthy aristocrat in Britain. The Duke of Westminster is the wealthiest man in Britain. He owns a great swathe of property in the heart of London, including the whole of fashionable Mayfair and Belgravia. Nothing like inheriting property to make a man feel he's achieved something with his life, eh?

Aristocrats persist in other parts of the world too (although not in Russia). According to Robert Lacey's book *Aristocrats*, published by the BBC in 1983, the most titled woman in the world is (or was at that time) Dona Victoria Eugenia, Duchess of Medinaceli. She was the fortunate owner of over 90 castles in Spain (and certain people claimed the election of the Popular Front government there in the early 1930s had to be the result of a "Communist plot"!).



Buckingham Palace.

But if its castles you want, the German prince Johannes von Thurn und Taxis can (and does) boast that his home in Bavaria contains more rooms than Buckingham Palace. Then there is Prince Franz Josef II of Liechtenstein (the tiny country sandwiched between Austria and Switzerland): he lost no less than 22 castles to the Red Army in 1945 (what could anyone do with 22 castles?). He also gave sanctuary to about 500 Nazi collaborators from the USSR, followers of the turncoat General Vlasov who hitched their wagon to the wrong side. Calling themselves "The First Russian National Army", these traitors fled Russia with the Nazis but then found themselves homeless.

Besides harbouring anti-Communists, Liechtenstein built its post-war economy on tourism and especially on being a tax haven, much frequented by companies seeking to avoid taxes.

There are even aristocrats in France, where apparently they *didn't* cut all their heads off. The Marquis de Ganay, for example, who found France's wealth tax to be so onerous that he had to open his chateau to the public (at set times and for a price of course). Poor chap. Don't you feel sorry for him?

Capitalism finds the lifestyle of these parasites a useful distraction for the masses and so tolerates, even aids and abets them, so they can go on living in luxury while the bulk of the population worries about the high cost of health care, funeral expenses, mortgage repayments, and in many cases, food. No wonder the ruling class looks for a distraction. ★



Sunday April 6 –
Saturday April 12

Despite everything one has read or been taught, there is still a natural tendency to think of the ending of the Ice Age as somehow abrupt: the Ice Age ended and the ice retreated. The reality, of course, was very different. The ending of the Ice Age was a process, like everything else. As the world began to warm, the Ice Sheet began to retreat, yes, but for many, many years it returned every winter, to retreat again in the spring. Over time it came less far South each year, but this was a disaster for the animals that had adapted and evolved to live on the edge of the Ice Sheet.

The Mammoth Plain, the great cold but dry grasslands that extended across southern Central Asia from Alaska to Europe, had nourished the mammoth and the woolly rhinoceros as well as the bison and the elk. But as temperatures rose, the ice melted – to be replaced by snow, which carpeted the ground and prevented some of the grass-eating mega fauna, especially the woolly rhinoceros and the mammoth, from getting enough to eat.

Predation by man played a small part in the disappearance of the mega fauna, but changing climatic conditions played a much bigger part. Mammoths, in fact, only became finally extinct in comparatively modern times.

In the final fascinating episode of *Ice Age Giants* (ABC1 Sunday

April 6 at 7.30pm), Professor Alice Roberts pursues evidence of the end of the era of the giant fauna. It was also the end of the era of Neanderthal Man, who had also evolved to live on the edge of the Ice Sheet, but now found himself unsuccessfully competing with Cro-Magnon humans adapted for hunting in warmer climes.

There are estimated to be around 6,000 transsexuals in the UK. Many are married and have children. Yet there are no self-help manuals for wives and children when the man of the house starts wearing dresses, make-up and high heels.

And the changes go far beyond the cosmetic: there's speech therapy to feminise the voice, hormones to encourage breast growth, electrolysis to remove unwanted body hair, and ultimately, the irreversible surgery that will change their sex forever.

My Dad is a Woman (ABC2 Sunday April 6 at 8.30pm) gains intimate access to the lives of two families in which a man – whether father, husband, or son – becomes the woman he's always wanted to be. In the case of the son who becomes a daughter, one feels the transition is wholly successful. Certainly her mother is accepting (in fact she wishes it could have happened years ago – she would have been able to do "lots of mother-daughter things with her"). The father who becomes a woman at age 50 is a bit more dubious. It is clearly what he wants, which is probably all that really matters, but as she says herself, it's a bit late in life to be starting over.

If the domestic problems of transgender people are not your thing you might prefer the documentary series on SBS, *Tales Of The Unexpected* (SBS ONE Sundays at 8.30pm from April 6). The first is this deliberately provocative series of science documentaries deals with the human breast. Breasts, it seems, are getting bigger, and appearing in girls at an earlier age. In fact, in the USA, some girls are getting them as young as seven!



Kelton Pell as Odin Freeburn – *The Gods Of Wheat Street* (ABC1 Saturdays from April 12 at 8.30pm).

Alarmed researchers are investigating whether this is the result of environmental pollution or some other cause, but they are also finding that breast milk is increasingly being found to contain traces of chemicals associated with modern farming. Most alarming of all is the discovery in the breast milk of young mothers of traces of DDT, which was banned ten years before they were even born.

It seems that breast growth and development is triggered by hormones that can be mimicked by other chemical agents and these may be what is causing the early appearance of breasts in young girls and possibly breasts in men.

The series' obvious desire to be provocative renders its science a little suspect, since one cannot be sure if it is not being exaggerated for sensationalist effect or not. Nevertheless, if its claims about the appearance of substances like DDT in breast milk are true, that should be the trigger for urgent government funding of research into the causes and how

to remedy such a situation. For as the program says, breast milk is the super food for babies. It needs to be protected.

Local government in the LUK has always been more involved with the life of the local population than its equivalent in Australia. *Kicked Out Kids* (ABC2, Wednesday, April 9 at 8.30pm) follows four sets of mediators in different parts of the UK who are employed by the local authority as they try to get parents and kids talking together about their problems before the kids' relationships with their parents become so bad that they risk being kicked out for good.

Like all fly-on-the-wall documentaries it is as interesting as the varied people in it, from the sullen teenage girl to the young man whose mum worries too much.

The new drama series *The Gods Of Wheat Street* (ABC1 Saturdays from April 12 at 8.30pm) is very well acted and surprisingly well written. Unlike some programs that focus on Indigenous

people, it avoids the pitfall of being worthy.

The series charts the ups and downs in the lives of the Freeburns – a fictional modern Aboriginal family in Casino in northern NSW. Their mother was killed in a car crash 20 years ago. As she was dying, the eldest son, Odin, promised her he would keep the family together. That is not proving to be easy. To add to his troubles, Odin's employer has just died, leaving him with no job and no house; his sister-in-law Libby is in love with him; and the spirit of his mother Eden has come back on a mission to protect the destiny of the Freeburn line – and incidentally point out where Odin's going wrong!

The appearances of his mother's ghost – which only Odin can see – is the weakest element in the series. It is also unnecessary. The story could have been told more effectively without these "occult" intrusions. Even as it is, however, the series is entertaining and uniquely Australian, and that makes a welcome change. ☺



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POLITICS

IN THE PUB

April 3

THE MURDOCH PRESS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON AUSTRALIAN, BRITISH & AMERICAN POLITICS

Paul Barry, presenter, ABC MediaWatch, author of new book *Sex, Lies & the Murdoch Succession*;

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

April 10

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR THE WORKPLACE UNDER ABBOTT AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO FIGHT BACK?

Sally McManus, Secretary Australian Services Union (NSW & ACT);
Tim Ayres, State Secretary, AMWU;

April 17

NO MEETING: EASTER

Public holiday;

April 24

NO MEETING: ANZAC DAY

Public holiday ;

May 1

REPEALING THE CARBON TAX – WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES?

Ben Pearson, Head of Programs, Greenpeace Australia-Pacific;
John Connor, Director Climate Change Institute;

Every Thursday 6:30pm 'til 8:15pm

Harold Park Hotel

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Defend public housing

Hannah Middleton & Denis Doherty

On March 19 the NSW Liberal government announced the sell-off of 293 public housing properties at Millers Point and The Rocks and the eviction of their tenants. The heritage value of Millers Point is not just in its buildings, but in its historic use as public housing, and in the long family and community ties of many of the people living there. The strong community spirit, cohesion and long history linked to the working harbour of the Millers Point community are major reasons why the area was included on the State Heritage register.

Major fight back

Millers Point public housing tenants have launched a campaign against the NSW government's plans for forced evictions. Three separate community organisations have combined to form the Millers Point Community Defence Group. A community meeting to plan the fight-back, organised by the Millers Point Defence Committee with the support of the Maritime Union of Australia and the City of Sydney, drew a crowd of 500 on March 22.

A lifetime resident of the area, Barney Gardner, said he and his neighbours would fight to stay, defying efforts to evict them.

"It will be a fight because we will have many, many supporters; we don't want violence, but we are prepared to go to jail," he declared.

"They will not take away your homes," Paul McAleer, Maritime Union Sydney secretary, told the public meeting. "The MUA will bring the shock troops; we will bring other unions along with us to defend your homes. We will be arrested if we have to."

Jack Munday told *The Sun-Herald* that the fight to save The Rocks and Millers Point and Dawes Point is continuing and he called for support for the residents.

Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore has pointed out that the Millers Point community survived the plague, the Depression and war. "It is shameful that it is government that will destroy this proud and strong neighbourhood," she stated.

Many residents have yellow ribbons tied to their front doors to highlight their fear of eviction.

Housing crisis

Housing affordability has fallen to its lowest level ever, yet over the past decade more than \$3 billion was taken out of public housing. This has created a crisis, especially for low-income families.

About 500,000 lower-income households are already in housing stress and this will rise to one million by 2020. About 170,000 pay more than half their income in rent. Anglicare's report, *Rental Affordability Snapshot: April 2013*, found that 600,000 families live in "serious rental stress", paying more than 30 percent of the family income on rent.

The report also analysed the properties available for rental over a given weekend. It found that of 1,015 Sydney inner west rental properties available, only one was affordable for families on income support and only 11 were available for families on the minimum wage.

The wider social costs of homelessness; increased emergency accommodation demands, hospitalisation, family breakdown, depression and mental illnesses, are generally ignored.

Over the past decade Labor and Liberal governments in NSW have cut repair and maintenance budgets and privatised 7,000 public housing properties. The O'Farrell government



cut \$37 million from the housing budget in 2013.

It is criminal to privatise the dwindling stock of public housing when there is a housing affordability crisis. A home is a human right, not just another way for the rich to make even more money.

Why is this happening?

Engels, in *The Housing Question*, wrote:

"In reality the bourgeoisie has only one method of solving the housing question after its fashion – that is to say, of solving it in such a way that the solution continually reproduces the question anew. This method is ... the practice which has now become general of making breaches in the working class quarters of our big towns, and particularly in those which are centrally situated, quite apart from whether this is done from considerations of public health and for beautifying the town, or owing to the demand for big centrally situated business premises ..."

"No matter how different the reasons may be, the result is everywhere the same: the scandalous alleys and lanes disappear to the accompaniment of lavish self-praise from the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success, but they appear again immediately somewhere else and often in the immediate neighbourhood ..."

"The growth of the big modern cities gives the land in certain areas, particularly in those which are centrally situated, an artificial and often colossally increasing value; the buildings erected on these areas depress this value, instead of increasing it, because they no longer correspond to the changed circumstances. They are pulled down and replaced by others. This takes place above all with workers' houses which are situated centrally ..."

Labor and Liberal governments have been committed to an intensive program of privatisation. At federal, state and local government levels, government responsibilities are being gradually handed over to the private sector.

Neo-liberal policies being inflicted everywhere by capitalism include privatisation of public services and areas of governance itself as well as the withdrawal of the state from taking responsibility for the well-being of the people and society at large.

Public housing has taken a hammering over recent years, with public housing stock gradually being neglected and/or privatised.

Privatisation results in a fundamental change in the objective of service provision from one of providing government or the public with a service based on needs to one where the service becomes a vehicle for making private profits. The NSW Liberal government's plans

for Millers Point are yet another case of private profit winning out over community needs and wishes.

The O'Farrell government will not only not have to spend money maintaining the heritage properties but it will also gain windfall profits by selling properties which have been in public hands for over 100 years to private buyers.

It is no secret that there is a push to gentrify the area, with a six-star hotel and high-rollers-only casino planned for Barangaroo, just streets away. Millers Point residents point out that NSW Minister Pru Goward has said they all have to be gone in two years which is just when Barangaroo will be up and running.

The link to Glebe

A cruel and greedy plot linking the Millers Point evictions to earlier evictions and privatisation of public land in Glebe is gradually being exposed. The government claims the 99-year leases it is selling at Millers Point will fund the new development in Cowper Street in Glebe, but that site was already promised to its former residents who have now been waiting almost four years.

Public housing on the Glebe site was demolished in 2011 under the former Labor government and 130 tenants were evicted, breaking its promise to provide more public housing and to rehouse its former residents.

The O'Farrell cabinet approved construction plans for 153 public housing units, 95 affordable housing units and 247 private apartments. Glebe residents fought hard to keep all the land for public and affordable housing.

Now we learn (*The Sun-Herald*, 23/3/2014) that "Treasurer Mike Baird will sign over the title to a large parcel of vacant public housing land in Glebe to community housing groups within weeks ..."

"Non-profit community housing groups City West and Bridge Housing will construct and manage the new properties ..."

"If construction starts this year, the project is expected to be completed in December 2016, which coincides with the timeline for moving elderly Millers Point tenants."

The work of Communists

Communists have a proud record of fighting for public housing and for a better deal for public housing tenants. Communists were in the front line of battles to stop evictions in Redfern and other areas of the inner city during the Depression in the 1930s.

They were in the front line when The Rocks were saved from the developers by residents and Green Bans imposed by the NSW Builders Labourers Federation in the 1970s.

But their record goes back further than that.

Patrick Troy says the role of Communist-led unions was crucial in the drive to increase home ownership in the 1960s and writes: "CPA pamphlets, especially during election campaigns, recording the party's policy on housing referred repeatedly throughout the mid-1940s and 1950s to the need to control house rents and called for a major increase in house construction."

"In its submission to the Commonwealth Housing Commission in 1944 the CPA argued for a massive public housing program. It also proposed that housing be built for private ownership and sold on terms that restricted its sale for a period in order to dampen speculation and to prevent the reappearance of large property owners." (*Accommodating Australians* by Patrick Troy, Federation Press 2012, p 135)

Our alternative

The development of a large public sector, where enterprises and services are run on the basis of public need, not private greed, is a fundamental pillar of CPA policy.

The CPA also fights for a number of important principles including:

- A decent home should be a basic human right, not an opportunity for more profit making.
- The state must take responsibility for the provision of basic infrastructure and services to meet the needs of the community and business.
- There must be universal access to services – education, health, public housing, public transport and so on.
- The state must provide support for those unable to provide for themselves on an ongoing basis or during specific times such as during unemployment, old age, disability, sickness, homelessness, poverty.

It is all a question of social priorities. The government should re-direct massive, wasteful funding for environmentally unsustainable road infrastructure like WestConnex, and invest the money into positive, socially progressive and sustainable projects like more public housing.

The basic demands for public housing are:

- Public housing which is accessible, good quality, affordable, well-maintained and safe.
- Increased government funding for more public housing and proper maintenance of existing public housing stock.
- Government planned development in response to social needs, not the wishes of greedy developers.

Join the campaign to defend public housing! Fight the sell-off of public assets! ✚



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