



No Australian forces to Iraq!

Peter Mac

Once again Australians have been dragged into armed conflict in the Middle East by the Abbott government's sycophantic subservience to the United States, which is now conducting air attacks against the fundamentalist "Islamic State" (IS – formerly ISIS) forces that have conquered much of Iraq and Syria. The Abbott government initially expressed caution about getting involved, but then without even waiting for an official request from the US volunteered Australia's services.

Instead of getting the pre-approval from or even consulting Parliament first, the government rushed in with the support of Labor's Opposition leader Bill Shorten. The Abbott government refused requests from the Australian Greens for the government to give an explanation to Parliament.

The Greens have deep misgivings about Australia's involvement in Iraq, as does independent Andrew Wilke, and will give notice of a bill requiring parliament to debate and approve Australia's participation in armed conflict overseas.

Australia, Britain and the US plan to use military aircraft in humanitarian rescue exercises and weapons supply, with the support of US allies Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

Referring to the persecution of religious minorities by IS, Tony Abbott hypocritically declared: "... no human being anywhere would wish to stand by and watch the preventable slaughter of innocent people". If he really meant that, why is he sitting by and watching the massacre in Syria or Gaza? It all comes down to supporting the pro-US forces even if they are terrorists.

IS has certainly committed terrible atrocities. However, Iraq could be saved without the commitment of Western troops, by providing material and financial support for an anti-IS united front of Iraq's national groups.

"In the difficult circumstances caused by this ordeal, our party calls upon all the political and social forces, parties, blocs and organisations, and in particular the forces that are in power at the level of the federal government, the Kurdistan Regional Government and the local authorities in the provinces, to unify their stance and efforts in the face of terrorism and the gangs of 'Isis' and their barbaric acts," the Iraqi Communist Party said in a statement from its Political Bureau.

"The recapturing of the areas seized by 'Isis' and eliminating it are urgent and

immediate objectives that require mobilising all national efforts. This necessitates accelerating the efforts to overcome the existing differences between the Federal [Iraqi] Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and to achieve the broadest possible cooperation and coordination at both the political and military levels to ward off the dangers threatening Iraq," the statement concluded.

To achieve this, the new Prime Minister needs to set about forming an all-encompassing national unity government that is able to address the daunting tasks facing the country at this historic juncture.

But religious divisions fostered by the US and others in Iraq and other Middle Eastern nations have been critical in defeating attempts by left and progressive forces to unite citizens of those countries in opposition to US interference in their affairs. Moreover, where it stood to benefit, the US has previously supported forces based on religious fanaticism (including the Taliban in Afghanistan).

The US claims to have persuaded the new government that all national groups should have parliamentary representation for IS to be defeated. But the West (including Australia) is now arming the Kurds as a separate heavily armed pro-US entity, which could invite resentment, division and conflict, not unity.

The war behind the wars

But the wars in Ukraine, Iraq and Syria are linked because they have all resulted from US plans to retain its position as number one superpower, to control global oil supplies (most of which lie within Russia and the Middle East), and continue as world banker for oil transactions, with the US dollar as the trading currency.

The US currently rakes in more than US\$1 billion each day as a result of the international agreement to denominate oil exclusively in US dollars, and to recycle surplus oil proceeds into US Treasuries. (See "My money's on Putin", *Guardian* #1653, 27-08-2014)

But the petrodollar arrangement is under threat. China and Russia have been trading oil in euros and more recently in their own currencies. If the other oil-producing nations follow their example and dump the US dollar as the international oil trading currency, the US would suffer a financial catastrophe. One of the main reasons for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the former Iraqi government's plan to abandon the petrodollar arrangement and set up a multi-currency oil trading scheme.



Syria and Iran have already discussed joining China and Russia in establishing multi-currency regimes. And that makes all of them potential targets for open US military intervention.

The US has refused to discuss with Syria joint action to defeat IS, even though Syria is under siege from the IS. The US plans to attack IS targets within Syria without the permission of the fiercely independent Assad government, and if the government resists the US may seize the opportunity to try to eliminate it.

Syria and Iran also plan to supply oil via a huge pipeline to Europe, as Russia currently does. That will lessen US influence in Europe, as well as promoting the development of the European Union (EU).

The US fears competition from superpower rivals, including the EU and Russia. The US is determined to destabilise the EU's relationship with Russia, which has ample gas and oil reserves to assist economic development.

The integration into the EU of Ukraine (formerly a Russian ally) would not only heighten tensions between the EU and Russia, but would provide a "jumping off" point for US forces on Ukraine's border with Russia. The EU package, that the previous Ukrainian President refused to sign, included a military section that would have permitted NATO forces along the border with Russia.

The US therefore promoted the overthrow

of the former pro-Russian Ukrainian government (with the assistance of neo-fascist organisations), installed a government heavily influenced by fascists in order to sign up Ukraine in the EU as an anti-Russian US ally.

This government has led an all-out offensive against the Russian speaking population of Donetsk as well as attacks on communists, trade unionists and progressive forces. The US and its allies, including Australia, have falsely accused the Russian government of orchestrating and assisting their demands for independence.

As a result, the world now faces the horrifying possibility of a military clash between two nuclear-armed nations.

Looming threat to civil rights

The Abbott government is attempting to overturn the long established legal principle of onus of proof, by introducing legislation to prevent people travelling to Middle East war zones unless they can prove they won't fight for terrorists.

ASIO has warned that involvement in another conflict in Iraq would increase the chance of terrorist attacks on Australian soil, but the government wants to become involved as soon as the US gives the word.

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Guardian

Issue 1654

September 3, 2014

Action to save women's refuges

Last Sunday, August 31, around 200 people, including representatives from a number of trade unions, gathered in the Sydney suburb of Glebe in the rain to protest at the closure of the Elsie's Women's Refuge. As of Sunday women's refuges and Aboriginal-run homelessness services are closed, and many other women's services will no longer operate as independent women-only services. Many of the refuges are fighting to keep their doors open to women and children fleeing domestic violence.

Elsie's, the first women's refuge (1974) has been taken over by St Vincent De Paul, as has Dolores in the Eastern Suburbs and Bega women's refuge: Delvena's on the North Shore was taken over by Mission Australia; Kempsey by the Samaritans; Allawah House – crisis accommodation for girls 24-18, by the Benevolent Society.

The loss of independent services has devastated and outraged communities across NSW. Specialist staff with expertise that keep women and children safe, and that also have culturally appropriate connections, have been made redundant. This a familiar story for women's refuges and Aboriginal crisis housing services across NSW. The large Christian organisations will oversee services very differently to small, secular community-run operation. This restructure is plainly incompatible with restorative, feminist and social justice perspectives.

Women's services that will no longer operate as independent feminist services include: Marcia's in Campbelltown, East Lakes, Moruya, Bourke, Taree, Tweed Heads, Wagga Wagga.

Several other refuges are waiting on the government's promise of possible 18-month extended funding. Lillian's and Jean's in Sydney's inner west, and St George Women's Housing are among these specialist services. Erin's Place in Marsfield and Killara in Randwick and Claffy House in Burwood are already shut. Women's domestic violence services in Grafton, Forbes, Queanbeyan and St Louise Lodge in Sydney will no longer be operating as domestic violence services.

These losses are part of major reforms across welfare that introduced competitive tendering in the welfare sector. This process privileges the big NGOs, almost all of which are Christian (75 percent of homelessness service contracts were awarded to these organisations in June this year). The competitive tendering process is set to role out across welfare services, beyond the homelessness sector: next to be hit will be the drug and alcohol sector.

There has been little transparency and workers, service users and the community have been kept in the dark.

In 85 percent of cases, domestic violence is used to keep women in the home. In NSW, women are at least 2.5 times more likely to be killed by someone with whom they are in a relationship. Women want to take refuge in safe places that understand the nature and complexity of this form of violence. With reduced services to turn to, women are forced to stay at home. Women who do leave are to be faced with an increased risk of homelessness.

"Go home, stay home" is the Baird government's message. These changes seek to keep people in situations that they would otherwise leave. Diverse communities need community-run, independent specialist women-only services.

Don't let these services be ripped away. Help build resistance to these closures and these outright attacks on women, Aboriginal people and young people.

noshelter.com.au

PRESS FUND

According to the BBC program *QI*, approximately one percent of United States citizens are in jail, and they make the uniforms and helmets for the US armed forces. What a system. It's virtually slave labour and it facilitates US imperialism's global demands. In complete contrast to the poor prisoners, the *Guardian* team is totally dedicated to its work. Freedom is the consciousness of necessity! However, we rely on Press Fund contributions to fund day-to-day production, so please send us something for the next edition if you possibly can. Talking about contributions, why not make regular contributions by way of automatic banking transactions? Even a small contribution each week would help us a lot. Many thanks to those who contributed this week as follows:

Dr Gianni Dittura \$10, Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15, John S \$30 (for winning the guessing competition)

This week's total: \$60 Progressive total: \$5,090

March Against Abbott, Perth



Richard Titelius

On a mild overcast day in Perth over 200 people gathered to protest the economic, fiscal and social policies of the conservative government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott and especially the austere Federal Budget of his Treasurer, Joe Hockey.

The rally was organised by March Australia Perth and the MC for the event was Alex Bainbridge who told the protesters of the growing income inequality occurring in Australia where 1.73 million households at the bottom of the ladder have the same income as the top 10 households.

It is a country where corporations have increased the share of income that is creamed off as profits from 24% to 37% today. Against this backdrop the Hockey wants the

poorest households in the country to take \$842 worth of cuts per annum while the richest households will only lose \$71.

The first speaker, was the Vice President of Sinn Fein, Mary Lou McDonald, visiting Australia from Ireland. She is no stranger to austerity which the working class has had to endure since their short economic bubble burst in September 2008. Many workers have been subjected to unemployment and severe economic hardship.

McDonald urged protesters to reject the sectarianism, racism and inequality of conservative governments in Australia and Ireland.

The budget that is being brought down here in Australia is similar to what is being sought by the conservative government in Ireland. The working people of Australia should demand the right to an

education, a roof over their heads and a decent health care system.

Adrian Glamorgan who runs an environment program Understory on a community radio station RTR FM out of Curtin University, said defence spending is set to increase until 2020.

Other speakers addressed the rally before setting off on a march around the Northbridge precinct of the city.

The Communist Party of Australia joins protesters in calling for an end to the austerity measures in the Abbott/Hockey Budget as these measures only increase hardship and inequality in our society. The CPA also calls for a double dissolution of the current parliament to help bring about an end to the planned austerity measures. Bust the system NOT just the budget! ☘

A protest in Sydney last week against the closure of women's refuges by the Baird Government – see Editorial. (Photo: Linda)



No Australian forces to Iraq!

Continued from page 1

Labor has raised no objections to the government's plans concerning Iraq. In 2003, Australia's participation in the war in Iraq had bipartisan support, as did Australia's involvement in the long and terrible war in Vietnam almost 35 years earlier.

Later Labor withdrew support and brought Australia's troops home. It should withdraw its support again. But the Abbott government now has little support from the public, and its plans to commit Australian troops to fight for US interests in Iraq could be defeated by mass protests.

It is crucial for the Australian people to defeat the government's plans for military involvement in support of US interests in Iraq and Syria and to support the Green's call for Parliament to debate and decide on any military involvement.

Within Iraq attempts are being made for a peaceful solution.

The Iraqi Communist Party held a successful meeting with President Dr Fuad Masum on August 17, emphasising the party's support for the sincere efforts exerted by the President to form a national unity government with broad representation. The

President welcomed the proposal put forward by the Communist Party for holding a National Conference, as a contribution to ideas and initiatives that help to launch and organise the process and mechanisms of dialogue and consultation among the various political forces and blocs, and to overcome the state of division and estrangement that prevailed during previous periods.

No Australian forces for Iraq! Even with Parliamentary support.

With Anna Pha and Bob Briton ☘

CLP wants in on the Act

Don't let NT take over Land Rights: Viner

Ian Viner AO QC, the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Fraser government who introduced the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act in 1976, is totally opposed to the idea that the Commonwealth should surrender the Act to the Northern Territory.

The idea was floated by the NT Chief Minister, Adam Giles, in an interview with the ABC's radio current affairs program, *Background Briefing*, on Sunday July 13.

Giles told the ABC: "I think at the end of the day patriation (of the Act to the Northern Territory) is the best model. I think there's probably an opportunity for us ... to be able to get the Land Rights Act here, which will allow us to work closer to the people on the ground, because fundamentally, Canberra is a long, long way away from the Territory."

Attorney General John Elferink was quick to push the same line on ABC radio the next day, couching his support for NT control of the Act in terms of economic development.

"After 40 years you would hope for much greater outcomes. Certainly the paperwork released from the then Minister Viner and the Fraser government, saying what the Land Rights Act was going to achieve, established expectations far beyond what has been achieved and we believe that part of the reason for that is the link between the governed and parliament that governs is tenuous. If the link was more direct, i.e. the Territory government took care of that legislation, we'd find a more responsive act," Elferink said.

Viner, who still practises as a barrister in Perth, spoke to *Land Rights News* and challenged the claim that the Land Rights Act was a vehicle to promote economic development.

"My statement should not be misused. The Act was an instrument, expressed in the second reading speech (see below) to recognise, in Australian law, ownership of Aboriginal land," he said.

"Woodward (Justice AE Woodward, who was appointed Aboriginal Land Rights Commissioner by the Whitlam government and whose report led

to the land rights legislation) said ownership would give Aboriginal people the opportunity to use their land for economic purposes; in those days it was really just pastoral use and mining. These days, there will be new agricultural uses as Northern Australia is seen as a new frontier of food production.

"But the purpose of the Land Rights Act was not primarily for economic development. That may have been a secondary outcome. Certainly, it was always foreseen that land ownership opens up economic opportunity, but the primary purpose was to grant title.

"It's wrong to say the Act was introduced for economic purposes. If you look at it only in economic terms, it's easy to say, change the law of ownership and open the land up to being bought and sold.

"That's what happened in New Zealand, and it destroyed Maori traditional ownership. Any economic development has to be on Aboriginal terms and under Aboriginal control."

Asked whether he would trust a Northern Territory government to own the Land Rights Act, Viner said:

"That's a rather loaded question. I would avoid public debate in those terms. Rather, I'd put it in terms that the Land Rights Act was a national responsibility and should stay a national responsibility, certainly at this stage of history when the NT is still only a territory of the Commonwealth.

"There are deeper issues than putting it in terms of trust or mistrust. So-called land reform can only mean two things: Seeking to destroy Aboriginal freehold title and, two, taking away from Aboriginal people control over their own lands, subverting what Woodward and the Land Rights Act was all about.

"It would be terribly wrong if the Land Rights Act was patriated (to the Northern Territory).

"A Territory government could smash the whole basis of land tenure and change provisions to deal with mining. They could drive a train through the Act."

Having said that, Viner said he was also fearful about what the Commonwealth government has done to the Act since its enactment.

From the archives: Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister Ian Viner presents land title documents to Yirrkala Council, represented by Roy Marika (left) and Gatjil Djerrkura (right), September 1978. (Photo: NTG Photographer Collection, Northern Territory Library)



"Ever since it was passed, Commonwealth governments have been eating away at it. I don't trust the Commonwealth Parliament too much, either," Viner said.

"The Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory have reason to distrust any government – either Northern Territory or the Commonwealth – and have to be extremely vigilant against all governments trying to weaken the Land Rights Act and take even greater control over the lives of Aboriginal people and governance of their communities."

Viner's original reading of the Act: Hansard

Excerpts from the Second Reading Speech on June 4, 1976 by Ian Viner, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, to the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Bill:

"This Bill will give traditional Aboriginal inalienable freehold title to land on reserves in the Northern Territory and provide machinery for them to obtain title to traditional land outside reserves. The coalition Parties' policy on Aboriginal affairs clearly acknowledges that affinity with the land is fundamental to Aborigines' sense of identity and recognises the right of Aborigines to obtain title to lands located within the reserves in the Northern

Territory. The Bill gives effect to that policy and, further, will provide Aborigines with the opportunity to claim and receive title to traditional Aboriginal land outside reserves. The Government believes that this Bill will allow and encourage Aborigines in the Northern Territory to give full expression to the affinity with land that characterised their traditional society and gave a unique quality to their life.

"... the creation of ... Land Trusts will achieve the primary objective of any Land Trust scheme which is the vesting, under Australian law, of rights corresponding with traditional Aboriginal rights, without risk that the rights conferred are not sufficient to cover traditional Aboriginal rights. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of this last mentioned aspect of land rights. It is a fundamental change in social thinking in Australia to recognise that within our community there are some people, the Aborigines, who live by a unique and distinct system of customary law.

"Some people have watched with interest – even suspicion – the statements which have been made by the Government on its intentions to legislate for land rights. Some have expressed surprise that a Liberal-Country Party government should have made the decision to grant land rights to Aborigines in the Northern Territory. Let there be no more suspicion. Let there be no more

surprise, because the Government's proposals to recognise Aboriginal land rights in legislation is one more expression of the Government's commitment to liberal and progressive reform. It is the objective ... of the government to secure conditions in which all Australians can realise their own goals in life – to find fulfilment in their own way – consistent with the interests of the whole Australian community.

"The Australia we, as a Government, look to is one in which there is diversity and choice, because it is in diversity that people can pursue the lives they want in ways that they determine. Securing land rights to Aborigines in the Northern Territory is a significant expression of this objective. It is an objective that will be pursued in a way consonant with the rights of other Australians. I am sure this progressive step will be studied with interest in the States with respect to their land. This bill is a major step forward for Aborigines in the Northern Territory not only for this generation but also for future generations who will benefit from it. They will have a land base that will be preserved in perpetuity. The introduction of legislation to grant land rights in the Northern Territory is an essential, progressive measure in the social and political history of Australia."

(Abridged)
Land Rights News ☺

Pete's Corner





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It's time to go Alan Joyce

After months and months of seeing long-serving loyal colleagues leave the Qantas Group because of the mismanagement of the CEO and the Qantas Board, the news of a record statutory \$2.8 billion loss at Qantas is still a shock.

Many USU/ASU (United Services Union/Australian Services Union) members have expressed their dismay at what has been going on at Qantas – day in and day out they try to do their jobs to the best of their ability and the announcement bears witness to what staff have been thinking and saying for a while – the management and Board have not been doing the job they should.

Through no fault of their own thousands of staff have left the company this year and many like the 500 staff in telephone sales in Brisbane and Melbourne have been told their jobs have been axed because of poor decisions and directions taken by the company's leadership. At the same time, in telephone sales for example they see 1,250 offshore call centre jobs in the Qantas Group untouched by decisions that ignore customer service and the value of Australian workers who have been part of building the once mighty brand.

Over recent months many USU/ASU delegates have been involved in discussions about restructuring – this is not new – change is part of life at Qantas – but in some areas we are seeing multiple changes of direction which make no sense, the shedding of years and years of experience and knowledge to look like someone is doing something – for what, a \$2.8 billion loss?

To date the CEO and the Board have been content to blame everyone other than themselves for the current situation at Qantas – it is fuel prices, it's the government, it's Virgin, it's foreign carriers, it's the wrong fleet – all of these pressures are not new, this is the environment that Qantas has long operated in and yet it was one of the most profitable airlines in the world. Over a few short years it is now written a massive loss.

The time for blaming everyone else must now be over – the buck must stop with Alan Joyce and the Board. Staff are right to ask how do they still hold their jobs when everyone else has had to either lose their jobs or shoulder the work of long gone colleagues.

In the announcements it is hard to see a plan for how the airline is going to grow – how more passengers are going to fly the airlines in the Qantas Group and more money is going to be made. Qantas surely needs a team with ideas and ways of restoring the airline, not people who embark on speculative ventures which have not paid off or who are intent on selling everything and announcing redundancies for a share price bounce.

The Qantas Group is the backbone of the Australian aviation industry – damage to Qantas is damage to that industry – it will be irreparable unless something is done at the top. ☘



Film Review by Blake Deppe

Guardians of the Galaxy

Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy*, the latest entry in their rapidly expanding universe of comic book adaptations, is a good-natured thrill ride full of fast-paced action and utterly ridiculous humour, and it may very well become the "Star Wars" of this generation. Certainly, it's as iconic as those original films were, and – with a talking raccoon and a compassionate alien tree as two of its main characters – quite eclectic.

The plot follows a ragtag group of crooks, Peter Quill/Star-Lord (Chris Pratt), Gamora (Zoe Saldana), Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper), Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel), and Drax (Dave Bautista), who are drawn together in an effort to protect a precious item, an orb that contains an Infinity Stone, from a ruthless heretic/religious zealot named Ronan (Lee Pace). If you weren't already predicting it, they eventually evolve into the titular heroes while defending an entire planet from Ronan's powerful warship. It all adds up to a melting pot of space action, lighthearted fun, and swashbuckling adventure (think *Raiders of the Lost Ark* meets *John Carter of Mars* – and not the Disney version).

Guardians may very well be the first-ever "feel-good superhero film". Quite honestly, it's one of the most enjoyable films of its kind that I've seen. It unabashedly dispenses with the grittiness of *The Dark*

Knight or the self-deprecating snark of *Avengers*. And after the strained hyper-realism of recent films of this type, some of which have become buried beneath their own over-inflated senses of relevance, it's nice to see something like this, which is willingly whacky and straightforward. It brings back some classic tropes, leading one to realise that it's okay to resurrect them if you can make it fun.

It doesn't hurt to set it all to a '70s soundtrack, either. That literally comes in the form of a cassette tape called "Awesome Mixtape" and played by main character Star-Lord, who at the film's beginning cruises through galaxies on his pirate spaceship, flirting with female aliens and confusing galactic overlords with wisecracks and outdated cultural references.

In fact, he goes on to challenge an utterly bemused Ronan to a dance-off toward the film's climax, cutting through a crescendo of drama with the out-of-left-field comedy that really shapes the whole movie. And it works. *Guardians* knows it's based on a comic book, and it's one of the first adaptations that feels like it was purposely ripped right from the inked pages to the big screen.

I will say that it's noticeable, more so here than in some of Marvel's other films that the studio really tried to keep things as family friendly as possible.

It doesn't really hurt the film, save for one or two corny lines out of an otherwise slick script. Rocket, the aforementioned loud-mouthed raccoon, is harmlessly funny enough to please the junior astronauts in the audience, but with his Joe Pesci-like personality, it's a laugh riot for us older viewers and seasoned comic book readers, as well.

Marvel took a risk with this one, because unlike *Iron Man* or *Captain America*, this is not a comic title that many people are familiar with. It paid off, however, and from the box office to almost every major film critic's website, it's all good news. On the other hand, I have heard one or two reviewers say that *Guardians* is formulaic and predictable. I would counter that with a suggestion: that some viewers have gotten so used to seeing comic book films struggle to push the envelope (often becoming increasingly convoluted), that they are rather caught off guard when a film comes along that pulls that envelope back instead. Director James Gunn exhibits an honest enthusiasm for simplicity, it's true, but I think the audience appreciated that. It shows that you don't have to reinvent the wheel to make a good popcorn movie, which is exactly what *Guardians* is.

People's World ☘

CSG: policy makers "in the dark"

The Lock the Gate Alliance has welcomed the refusal by Minister Anthony Roberts of Petroleum Exploration applications in Central New South Wales and called on the gas industry to come clean over gas prices and contracts. This follows revelations in the New South Wales parliament that no policy maker in Australia knows whether or not the east coast gas market will experience domestic shortfalls as a result of LNG export contracts in Queensland.

Under questioning in Budget Estimates, Energy Minister Anthony Roberts revealed that the gas industry is leaving Australian policy makers "in the dark" over unsubstantiated claims that export gas contracts have created a supply shortfall, requiring hasty development of unsafe, unconventional gasfields in regional NSW.

Lock the Gate NSW coordinator Georgina Woods said, "The public has been bombarded with threats of a looming gas shortage thanks to LNG export contracts vacuuming up the east coast supply and driving up wholesale prices. Yesterday's bombshell reveals that, in fact, the gas industry has refused to give the government, let alone the public, the information it needs to assess the hysterical claims made by gas companies and their boosters, in

their urging to hasten the development of vast invasive gasfields in bushland and farmland in northern NSW.

"The Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association has treated regional communities that dare to stand up to the gas giants and fight to protect their water supplies with contempt, and it seems they've done the same to the government."

Ms Woods said they welcomed Minister Roberts' rejection of the petroleum exploration applications affecting Dubbo and the Blue Mountains, and his insistence that industry claims over gas shortfalls be transparently tested.

"If the gas giants have overcommitted their export contracts and cannot meet their commitments, that is not the fault of farming communities in northern New South Wales, and there's no way that communities will allow the groundwater they depend upon for their livelihoods to be compromised because gas companies can't count how many gigajoules they've got to sell in Queensland.

"The unfinished business in unconventional gas policy is proper protection for water resources – our rivers, aquifers and drinking water catchments – from any kind of drilling." ☘

Division runs deep in battle for The Block

The Aboriginal Housing Company's proposed redevelopment of The Block in Sydney has sections of the community up in arms. **Amy McQuire** investigates the history of the dispute and why many Aboriginal people have such a strong connection to Redfern.

It was raining the day the *Koori Mail* visited the Redfern Tent Embassy. The sacred fire, its embers transported and reignited from the Canberra Tent Embassy, was hidden under a tin sheet. There are only four people manning the site currently, but the tented fortresses that span the grassy space between the iconic Aboriginal flag mural and the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC), are a visible reminder that this protest still burns, even if its flames flicker in and out.

The embassy was built earlier this year following community concern over the Pemulwuy Project, the Aboriginal Housing Company's plan to redevelop The Block. Named after the legendary freedom fighter, the development is being spearheaded by AHC chief executive Mick Mundine, and is split into stages.

Stage one is the development of a commercial precinct, which includes student accommodation, retail and commercial space and a childcare centre. Stage two will build 62 affordable houses for Aboriginal people as well as a new Tony Mundine gym. At the time of press, the *Koori Mail* was unable to confirm whether the AHC had secured funding. The NSW government granted approval to the application in 2012.

There have been long-running tensions between the AHC and some members of the Redfern community, but the Pemulwuy Project has heightened the division, with protestors outraged that the organisation is giving commercial development precedence over urgently needed social housing, particularly against the backdrop of a gentrifying Redfern.

Wiradjuri Elder Jenny Munro

says the AHC's development plans do not honour the organisation's original aims, and especially not the legendary Pemulwuy.

"It's insulting to people like Pemulwuy, and to name it after him is a double insult. He defended country. He didn't sell it out," she tells the *Koori Mail* from the embassy.

The AHC emerged in the midst of a vibrant political arena in the 1970s, when the fights won by Redfern activists spread to other parts of Aboriginal Australia. It was the first Aboriginal housing company set up in the country, and was the first time an Aboriginal organisation bought and owned freehold land – The Block is widely referred to as the first Aboriginal land won back by blackfellas.

Its historical significance and cultural resonance is strong, even sacred.

A profile of the AHC's beginnings is on the organisation's website. Written by founder Bob Bellar, the first Aboriginal judge, it tells of how the AHC began as a way to provide housing to destitute and homeless Aboriginal people caught trespassing in abandoned houses, largely because they had nowhere else to go.

The homeless of the time were forced into the local Archdiocese and were vulnerable to police. The AHC was formed to house the homeless and also for the other Aboriginal people who converged on Redfern, many of them political refugees from Queensland, escaping the harsh conditions imposed under Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

Bellar's brother, Sol Bellar, currently the chair of the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service and instrumental in the early days of the AHC, said the company had retreated from the original purpose of its founders.

He's concerned that The Block will be lost to white developers and that the hard-earned fight will have been in vain.

"We keep protesting the theft of Aboriginal land all the time," Mr Bellar says.

"Well, this is what's going to happen here in this situation. This is



Redfern Tent Embassy

Aboriginal land that was very, very hard to get back.

"It wasn't just given to us. We had to protest. I had shots fired at me. When the developers first started in the place, they had security guards coming in there, beating Aboriginal people up, slamming doors in our faces, being chased down the road.

"It was a very hard-won battle for land."

The AHC did not respond to calls from the *Koori Mail*. But Mick Mundine has previously told media the commercial aspect of the project has to come first in order to fund Aboriginal housing. That's not accepted by Ms Munro. She doesn't believe the AHC has tried hard enough to get funding.

"The original concept was about housing. There was no mention of commercial development or student accommodation. It was about housing," she says.

The AHC has been unable to secure funding for affordable housing from the federal or state governments, and an approach to the NSW Aboriginal Land Council was also rejected over concerns about the ability to repay it.

Mr Mundine has told media it is hard to get anyone, particularly government, to fund social housing.

But the decision to build the commercial arm first has made many in Redfern wary that the 62 houses slated for Aboriginal people will never be built.

And as the gentrification of Redfern continues, and rents skyrocket to \$1,200 a week, there are concerns that the AHC's plans will only speed up the process.

"What will happen is you're going to get some white developers or some white businessman who will bankroll the business side, or they'll go to the bank and get a loan and they won't pay it back and then the banks will own The Block," Sol Bellar says.

"Divisive"

"And that's why it's so divisive. One of the things I'm scared of is we'll gradually lose The Block to the white man."

Last month, Mr Mundine told the *Saturday Paper* the developer DeiCorp was working for the AHC, not the other way around. The AHC signed a contract with DeiCorp, reported by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as "the biggest developer in Redfern" in 2011.

"DeiCorp are working for us. They have a contract with us to design and construct – that's all," Mr Mundine told the *Saturday Paper*. "They don't get a piece of the cake. When this is built, the Aboriginal Housing Company will own everything 100 percent. We will pay the builders with money from a bank loan for the commercial development."

But Mr Bellar says the board of the AHC also has to be more transparent with community. And there's another concern about the changing face of Redfern – that the influx of students into Pemulwuy will disadvantage Aboriginal students who want to enter higher education.

Kyol Blakeney is a Gamilaroi student at the University of Sydney and a key supporter of the Redfern embassy. He's concerned that it will only disadvantage Aboriginal students and discourage them from further study if they can't find affordable accommodation.

"I believe that an area should be set aside for them, and what better place than here," he says. "This Block should prioritise Elders and upcoming students and all Aboriginal people, rather than non-Aboriginal people. Just because of the ratio in numbers. We need more Aboriginal representation in universities and we're not going to get it if we don't have a place to stay. It's going to deter students from wanting to come in from rural and remote areas.

"... This land has become a central hub for blackfellas around the country. I've grown up knowing Redfern is a place to go when I need to feel comfortable and when I need community.

"You can tell the type of history Redfern has had: You can walk down to The Block and you can see the mural, and the big community centre and you can walk to Redfern station and see the paintings on the walls.

"You know there is a strong black presence and that's something that needs to be maintained, and that people need to know about.

"All of Australia is our land, but Redfern is where we had full control over this area, and it's where the government pushed us into, and now we are making something positive out of it, it's being taken away."

Ms Munro says the fight is about a bigger issue – about the preservation of Aboriginal culture and ideals over the white man's view of success.

"The basic element that assimilationists don't really grasp is that to assimilate into another culture is to commit your own cultural genocide – to turn your back on thousands, if not millions of years of history and heritage.

"I'm too black to acknowledge that sort of rubbish. Our people have a right to be Aboriginal."

It's clear this issue will not go away. It will continue to burn just like the fire of the embassy. Ms Munro says the development application will take two years to progress. There is still no confirmation on funding.

As the rain falls on The Block, she tells the *Koori Mail* she has a warm bed at home, but that this is about principle, and fighting for Aboriginal people who do not have a roof over their heads.

"We've come through the worst of it now. Now that winter is over, summer will be a breeze," she says with a smile.

Koori Mail ☘

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Long live Cuba Socialista!

A talk at Politics in the Pub, Sydney

Maria Hilario

Acknowledgment of the traditional custodians of the land where we gather today and I pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

I am not Cuban or a public speaker, neither a qualified university scholar but I do support the Cuban socialist revolution and my talk tonight is based on personal observations and experiences.

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak tonight, also grateful to Australia for allowing me to study Civil Engineering for free at TAFE many years ago.

Why do I support Cuba *socialista*? The main reasons are my poor peasant background, my experiences working and helping homeless people in Sydney for around nine years and the great experience of visiting Cuba with the brigade in January this year.

My interest in Cuba and its revolution began when I was very young working in the dry fields of Castilla along side my granddad listening to his stories of the Spanish Civil War and how he never surrendered his ideas.

My grandfather admired Fidel and heard on the Spanish radio daily news of the Cuban revolution and Fidel's men with their long beards teaching poor Cuban peasants to read and write in conservative fascist Spain where beards were a sign of demons. It used to make my grand father happy and he often wished he was one of those peasants learning and that Fidel's men would soon reach his poor village.

In Spain before the 2nd Republic in 1931 in the rural areas the illiteracy rate would have been more than 90 percent in my village. Between 1932 and 1933, in just one year with the new left-wing government opened more than 3,000 public libraries in the rural areas. Also they created the pedagogy missions with a group of university students teaching everyone in remote villages about culture in general and to read and write. They put a lot of emphasis on the culture of theatre because they recognised the link between education and entertainment. They thought that the representation of their culture and traditions would help the poor learn and they took on board the classical idea of educating, having fun or being entertained and learning (*instruir deleitando*).

Garcia Lorca was one of the university student initiators of the program La Barraca. But the program was short lived; the fascists killed him in August 1936 and his body has not been recovered like those of 140,000 other victims of fascism lying today in big common burial graves or on the Spanish roadsides.

This year the work of the United Nations made recommendations (Spain is binder under International Law) Spain should investigate the human rights and crimes during the Franco years and it should give priority to implement 42 of their recommendations in regards to the victims.

It has been nearly 80 years and family members are still looking for justice, dignity and reparation.

Minister for education Chris Pyne in July this year speaking on the *Dateline* program was talking about the cost of education and some one asked him why it could not be free and health care too. His answer was: do you think this is a paradise?

And I thought of Cuba.

I always dreamed of visiting Cuba and seeing the work of the revolution. I did the same with Palestine as I wanted to see the situation on the ground and support the victims of abuse, denigration and against criminal actions by Israel.

We went to Cuba for the first time when our son was 12 and it was just after September 11 when no one wanted to fly and the prices were very low and so we could afford the trip. When I came back from that trip I joined the Australia Cuba Friendship Society in 2002 and I have been supporting their activities since.

My second visit was the one on the Brigade in January this year.

Last year in the community sector where I work the conditions were deteriorating, and now we have lost our jobs. The managers were testing the Work Place Act and they started to force on us holidays as they wished. No longer could we accumulate holidays or choose when we wanted to take them. When I came back they had threatened to sack me and thanks to the union there had been a mutual understanding regarding my leave.

Arriving in Havana from the airport this big billboard hit me: "The Cuban blockade the longest genocide". The Cubans have been living for 56 years behind this illegal, inhumane blockade imposed by the USA. The UN General Assembly at its meeting in September 2013 adopted for the 22nd year in a row a resolution calling for an end to the United States' decades-long economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba. The resulting economic damages accumulated after half a century amount to more than \$1 trillion. The vote in 2013 was 188 in favour to two against (United States and Israel) with three abstentions (Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau).

This has to be the longest and most brutal blockade in history; they are trying to break a country by famine or illness. But what has happened? Yes, Cuba is suffering as a result of the economic blockade. It is not a rich country.

But also the millions of poor USA citizens. There are lots unemployed or with poor working conditions and they don't trust the judicial systems: we saw daily demonstrations in Ferguson.

Some people cannot afford to live and with no access to health services their capitalistic system is not interested in them, the poor.

Every year in the USA, the number of people wanting to lift the blockade is growing, and not only among the poorer citizens but now US businesses want the blockade to be lifted because they are missing out on millions of dollars in contracts. The majority of the US population wants a change in Washington's policies towards Cuba.

But the USA is under the influence of a reactionary, sectarian and powerful minority that defends aggression and wars and their markets. It does not represent the interests of their own people only the markets and the big energy corporations. They have lost their credibility and influence in the world because of the double standards. Also they are very good at dividing the poor, creating fears and racism to send the poor to wars so they can control the resources for the big captains of industry and their markets.

How can socialist Cuba make advances in the face of 56 years of bullying and isolation from the big powerful nation 90 miles to the north? It is because of the system of working together hand in hand in solidarity in adversity they find solutions. On my trip I was able to compare how the two systems work – by looking at the plight of the most vulnerable in our society and in Cuba because I believe the way we treat the most vulnerable is a reflection of our very humanity.

During the brigade I asked many questions about their socialist system and what happened to their homeless, mentally unwell people or women with domestic violence, child abuse – these are the areas of my interest. In my work you only have to pay a visit to areas where the most disadvantaged and the unemployed live and you can see they have no services or very limited access to the services they need. Community programs, women's refuges, and many other services are being closed down due to funding cuts by our conservative government.

Cuba statistics

In Cuba in 1959, 57% of the population was illiterate.

They had 844 schools, 2,832 teachers and 19,075 students.

In one year, 1960-61, they created 15,000 new schools in the rural areas they reduced the illiteracy rate to 3.9% educating young and old and disabled people including 25,000 Haitians who didn't speak Spanish.

The Cuban method *Yo si Puedo* "Yes I can" has taught reading and writing to more than six million persons in 29 countries including Spain and Australia. There was a nice history in the *Good Weekend* recently by Chris Ray about the literacy program in Bourke and Wilcannia.

In Spain the Fundacion Sevilla took on board the program but the main stream media TVE did not want to run a program after one of the smaller TV channels did. In Spain they are ashamed that a rich country from Europe has to access a program created in a developing country.

Cuba for me was emotional at times, remembering what my grandfather believed and his ideas of a fairer system for a peasant like him, especially when we visited an organic farm cooperative in Havana with 170 members living in the community nearby. They had 230 different types of vegetables and legumes; everything is organic including pest control by microorganisms and soil diversity. They have not used chemicals since the year 2000. Their message was "united we multiply our results" and their motto was "to live with the land not off the land".

We also visited a cooperative of agricultural production near Julio Antonio Mella camp. We were told why these cooperatives are so important for their economy and efficiency as a way creating local employment and utilising the land for the production of food. Their food production is either consumed by members or is sold in the markets around the local area and the excess exported.

Every one gets the basic salary and food plus extra if a worker has worked overtime. All the workers are members of the cooperative and the decisions are made in the assembly, they mediate if problems arise before they escalate. They don't use transgenic seeds and they always promote the local product rather than imports. It is a key to the survival of local economies and since 2000 they are trying harder for their agricultural products to be organic.

We learnt about Cuba's work with renewable energies since 1994 and today there are



Maria Hilario (on the left) in Cuba earlier this year.

more than 500 Medical centres in remote areas powered by solar systems and 2,364 schools and 1,864 community television rooms.

Cuba is now part of the [economic groups] ALBA, CELAC and the TCP (*Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos*). Their aim is to end poverty and social exclusion, end illiteracy and support human rights, to improve the working conditions of women, to care for the environment, economic integration and the formation of grand-national enterprises to create a front to the transnationals.

I would now like to turn to the Cuban 5 [see also Cuban 5 background facing page]. Two weeks ago the daughter of one of the Cuban 5 Aili Labañino was in Sydney. I assume most of you have heard of the Cuban 5. They were on a mission in Miami to monitor the actions of Miami-based terrorist groups, in order to prevent those groups from carrying out attacks on their country of Cuba. Every one should know about the hypocrisy of the US system and why this is a political case.

I met with some of the family of the Cuban 5: the mothers of Rene and Antonio, Ramon's wife (Elizabeth Palmiero) and Gerardo's niece.

Cuban women

I met Dalia from the Federation of Cuban Women while on the brigade. It is a grass roots women's organisation with programs and policies that their aim is to achieve equal rights and full emancipation in all the aspects and levels of the Cuban society.

Cuba is fourth in the world for women represented in parliament – 43.2%. Ahead of countries like Norway and Finland.

- 65% of university graduated are women
- 46% of the workforce
- 66% personal technique and professional
- 48% scientific researchers are women
- 52% international missions of cooperation

I was able to learn about over 54 years of grass roots work in the Federation of Cuban Women and their national structure. Their last congress was in March this year. They elected the National Committee with women representing all social sectors. Currently they have four million women in the organisation. Girls over 14 years old can join in.

There are programs like the Coordination of Employment to improve female participation in the workforce and to prevent discrimination in contracts.

Women's Advocacy Centres – *Casas de orientation* – provide a range of services including access to social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and educational experts to

Sydney

SUPPORT THE CUBAN 5



Support event outside US Consulate

5pm Friday September 5 Martin Place Sydney

Organised by Sydney Central Branch, CPA

Further info Maria 0431 275 434

The Cuban Five



help with different problems like domestic or inter-family violence or alcohol issues.

They provide help to the people affected by divorce, like counselling for children or older people. They have a weekly publication "Mujeres" with its aim not to provide a sexist image of women but more to do with information and documentation. They coordinate educational programs directed at children for parents who don't work and look after their children at home. The social workers work with the mums or family members in activities to prepare the child for school.

It was interesting to compare their programs and progress with my experience in Australia. I work with abused homeless women and children in Sydney. I often complain about the lack of services, like refuges for women and children experiencing domestic violence and more affordable houses for low income people to rent.

Women's advocacy centre's Casas de Orientación coordinate and provide support for 82,000 social workers and 78,000 health professionals who work in the barrios to prevent diseases like dengue fever, influenza or HIV-AIDS. They also provide advice and support to thousands of people going through legal services, dealing with Family Courts.

Cuba is poor, the blockade has taken a huge toll on the country, but the people have the essentials in life.

To conclude:

There are many things we can learn from Cuba socialista, the free health and education, the way towards food efficiency and organic product not transgenic, food gardens in city parks, the practical use of renewable energy for public buildings and the solidarity with the peoples of the world rather than war, and the work of the Women's Federation.

It is very important to keep the pressure on to lift the economic blockade on Cuba and to demand the removal of Cuba from the US list of terrorist nations. Also to apply pressure on President Obama to release the Cuban 5 – the last three left in jail Antonio, Gerardo and Ramon. And that Guantanamo Bay be returned to Cuba and that the prisoners held there be given a proper trial or be released.

I will end with a few words from the Cuban national hero, Jose Marti: "to be educated is the only way to be free". This I hold very close to my life – without my little education I wouldn't be here today.

Viva Cuba! Long live Cuba Socialista! ✪



Fayeza Khan

"But I have only one life to give for my country". These were the words spoken by Gerardo Hernández when he heard his conviction of two life sentences plus 15 years handed down by a biased and influenced jury in a Miami court on June 8, 2001.

After being arrested on false charges, and enduring imprisonment in isolation for 17 months (while the maximum legal time allowed in isolation is three months), Gerardo and four other Cuban nationals were convicted that day over charges of conspiracy to commit espionage and Gerardo of conspiracy to commit murder. Their sentences ranged from 15 years to two life sentences plus 15 years by a Miami Court. Since then it has been revealed the jury was heavily influenced by covert government funding of anti-Cuba propaganda.

Background

For more than 50 years, anti-Cuba terrorist organisations based in Miami have engaged in hundreds of terrorist activities against Cuba, and against anyone who advocates a normalisation of relations between the US and Cuba. A total of 3,478 Cubans have died as a result of terrorist violence, and 2,099 have been injured.

Violent organisations like Alpha 66, Brothers to the Rescue, Cuban American National Foundation's armed wing, and individuals like Luis Posada Carriles, have operated with complete impunity from within the United States to attack Cuba – with the knowledge and support of the FBI and CIA.

The US government refused to act to arrest or prosecute well-known, notorious terrorists in Miami, despite overwhelming evidence of their crimes.

The Cuban Five infiltrated the terrorist organisations in Miami to inform Cuba of imminent attack and to thwart the terrorists' plots. Cuba handed over the information of these groups to the FBI. But instead of arresting the terrorists, the FBI arrested the Cuban Five anti-terrorists on September 12, 1998.¹

These five men of integrity and bravery have become well known as the Cuban Five. Within days of their unjust conviction, the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five was formed in the United States. Now over 350 committees exist worldwide that demand the freedom of the Cuban Five.

Recently, I had the privilege of hearing Aili Labañino speak about the Cuban Five and the ordeal of their families in the Trades Hall building of Perth. Aili is the daughter of Ramón Labañino, one of the Cuban Five. She was 11 when her father was arrested. Aili continued her speaking tour of Australia, which was arranged by two large workers' unions of Australia (CFMEU and MUA) and supported by the Australia Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS).

Aili spoke of the injustice towards her father, her family, the rest of the Cuban Five and their families, and of injustice towards her country. She told us how her younger sister couldn't imagine their father in any other way except in prison clothes. She told us how the wife of one of the Cuban Five has never been granted a visa by the US, and thus has not seen her husband in 16 years.

She told us how the man, Posada Carriles, who actually planned many terrorist attacks on Cuba walks free in the US. And yet, she spoke with warmth, with calmness and with love. She informed the roughly 70 people in her audience of the background of the Cuban Five and the events surrounding their trial. She shared heart-warming anecdotes of her visits to her father in prison. We learnt that it was the brave smiles and optimism of the Cuban Five that gave strength to their families when they felt weak. She said that the white hair of one of the Cuban Five's mother, who waits to see her son, adds urgency to their campaigning efforts.

She pointed to a remarkable art piece hanging on the wall in a room of the Trades Hall building. She told us it was one of the many pieces made by the Antonio Guerrero during his incarceration, the son of the white haired mother she referred to. Antonio's family gifted it to CFMEU WA on May Day 2009.

Closing the evening, Jorge Trujillo, who acted as the interpreter for Aili, read a letter by Ramon on behalf of the Cuban Five that was written on July 31, 2014. The letter expressed deep gratitude and love for the people of Australia who support their cause. It also expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people and called for an independent and peaceful Palestinian state. Representatives of the CFMEU, MUA and ACFS expressed their solidarity with the Cuban Five, and were greeted with cheers and clapping for their work in international solidarity.

An independent two day-inquiry into the case of the Cuban Five was held in March 2014, at the Law Society in London. It had a panel of distinguished judges from various countries, including India, France and South Africa. After reviewing the entire trial, reading related documents, and hearing testimonies, they found the entire case unjust: starting from the unwarranted arrest, the absence of convicting evidence, unusually harsh convictions, to the selection of jury and revelations of large sums of monies paid to journalists in Miami to influence the jury. They concluded it was a political case, motivated by the policy of the U.S. towards Cuba.²

It is a political case and one, as Aili pointed out, which will not receive a fair coverage in the mainstream media. Hence, it becomes even more important to spread the word, especially amongst US citizens, to make them aware of this injustice. Barack Obama, as president of the US, holds the power to pardon the Cuban Five. This has given birth to the slogan, "Hey Obama, give me five!". And this is the focal point of all demonstrations and petitions for their cause. If enough pressure can be generated, this travesty of justice can come to an end, albeit late.

For more information on the case visit: www.freethet Cuban5.org

References:

- <http://www.freethet Cuban5.org/whoarethefive.htm>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgi3VdWKZjs> ✪

On the other side of Ferguson, a different kind of protest

Teresa Albano

FERGUSON, Montana: Two and a half miles separate two worlds here, one on South Florissant Road and the other on West Florissant Avenue, also known as Ground Zero. Mass protests and police violence, in the wake of what many call the murder of an unarmed Black teenager, Michael Brown, by a white police officer, Darren Wilson on August 9, have taken place on West Florissant. But protests of a different kind have and are taking place on South Florissant as well – right across the street from the Ferguson Police Department headquarters.

West Florissant has all the markings of a working-class main street with its all-night Chinese restaurant, fast-food chains Taco Bell and McDonald's, an Auto Zone, and locally owned meat market, liquor and grocery stores. While South Florissant boasts its own share of fast food and auto parts, it also has a public library, banks, a wine bar and a micro-brewery – all the hallmarks of so-called upscale America.

Yet even the manicured hedges along South Florissant could not block the community's response to the outrageous killing, and the police department's attempts to cover-up and other manipulations. Every day since the killing, residents have held a vigil across the street from the police department. Holding signs and sitting in lawn chairs, these protesters – mostly African American, many older – carry on away from TV cameras, and ironically, the heavily armed robo-cops. Even when there was a midnight curfew, it was reported that these protesters stood their ground without interference from law enforcement.

A tent – the kind you would take camping to eat in and avoid the mosquitoes – stands in the far corner of a local business, Andy Wurm Tire and Wheel. People sit in there to take a break from the relentless sun, and to store bottles of water.

One woman said the owner (presumably Andy Wurm) had given permission for the protesters to use the property and is well known among African American residents. "He's



Protestors put their hands up as a symbol of honouring Michael Brown.

got a relationship with the black community," she said.

As the afternoon sun began to lengthen the shadows, another woman comes to join the vigil. Pushing a baby stroller with her rescue dog in it and a sign that reads "Paws up, don't shoot," she places her chair on the sidewalk among the "I [heart] Ferguson" signs. She told us about the obstacles she had to overcome in helping her dog overcome the trauma in his pre-rescue life. At the same time three men come up with Little Caesars Pizza slices, offering them to protesters and journalists alike. They had come from Los Angeles and Cleveland, Ohio, to show support for the Ferguson community, Mike Brown's family, and the fight for justice. Wearing a "Random acts of kindness" shirt, the pizza-giver said he wrote comedy scripts in LA and proceeded to show why he was a comedy professional.

This crowd holding vigil may not have been as big as those that march

at night on West Florissant that have captured so much media attention, but they are just as concerned and passionate and organised. The two different scenes – West Florissant and South Florissant – could be compared to two different kinds of athleticism: sprint and long distance.

The West Florissant protests exploded the fight for justice for Mike Brown and all victims of police crimes and racism into the national consciousness. The South Florissant protests proceed at a pace sustainable for longer periods of time. Both types are necessary for any track or swim team.

To add one more dimension to the community response, up the road on South Florissant, stood Amanda Pope, grandmother of a student at the Ferguson-Florissant school district, holding another sign, "Teachers here to teach." Along this stretch, black and white volunteers hold the signs outside the library and a church, both sites for "vacation school" for public

school students whose first day of school, August 14, was postponed in the wake of the killing. Banding together, teachers, parents, grandparents, and local volunteers set up art, music, and computer classes to keep the children "motivated" and "involved" during the day, Pope said.

The school cancellation – opposed by some in the community as an over-reaction by the school board – created numerous problems for working parents and disappointed students. "My grandchild is a student and they asked me if I could volunteer, and I said 'What do you want me to do?'" Pope said. "Kids were so disappointed that they couldn't get to school the first day of school. Kids were devastated that 'I can't go to school.'"

Pope said the first day there were 40 students at the public library, and "today there are hundreds." So many that they set up another location at the church. One teacher – a music educator – walked down from the library

with a school aide and the aide's grandchild, a fourth grader, to set up class for the overflow. The teachers in the local district are members of the National Education Association.

The fourth grader said the postponement was a letdown for her. "The night before [the first day] I couldn't really go to sleep so I'd wake up in the middle of night saying I can't go to bed waiting for school. I woke up at nine and I was like 'Am I late for school?' But grandma said we wouldn't have school for another week. So that's really sad that I can't go to school and learn. But now I can," she said, referring to the volunteer-run school.

This type of community effort – pulling together, volunteering and pitching in when city leaders seemed unable or unwilling to – just added to the unity building, across race, socio-economic and residential lines, during a time of profound crisis.

People's World ☺

Get NATO out of our city

John Haylett

BRITAIN: It's time to "close down NATO and invest in peace, in jobs and in hope," Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn told marchers who rallied against the military alliance's summit in Newport last weekend.

He told thousands of people in the Welsh city's historic Westgate Square that the cold-war era organisation should have "shut up shop, given up and gone away" when the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact dissolved in 1991.

Mr Corbyn pointed out that NATO has never been a defensive organisation, as it was set up six

years before the Warsaw Pact. And he derided the "spatchcock of a history" being fed to people in Britain about NATO, arguing that the 28-state alliance constantly reinvents itself to manufacture "new reasons for going to war."

Plaid Cymru AM Bethan Jenkins said she took no pride in this week's siting of the NATO summit in south Wales, calling it the "armed wing of the neo-liberal economic consensus."

She took issue with Welsh suggestions that economic benefits would flow to Wales because of the summit, citing "the massive disruption it will cause as well as its cost."

Many local companies have already complained about the effect on their businesses, especially in central Cardiff where steel and concrete obstructions, together with closed roads, are playing havoc with normal life and confusing visitors.

Cardiff Council Deputy Lord Mayor Ali Ahmed told the rally: "We all know what is happening in Iraq, Gaza, Palestine, Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan. Who created all this? It's us and America."

While Mr Ahmed was not officially representing the council, it has associated itself with an alternative summit taking place this week. Irish Senator David Cullinane of

Sinn Fein said that Ireland was officially NATO-free, but, to the shame of successive Dublin governments, Shannon airport had been used as a staging post for US military forces flying to Afghanistan and Iraq, despite opposition from the majority of Irish people.

NATO had "no strategies to deal with hunger, poverty and injustice and as long as we have occupation and imperialism there will be resistance," he declared. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament vice-president Bruce Kent said NATO was "stupid" to come to Wales.

"Wales has a long history of non-violence and peacemaking," he

said. That spirit was evident from the welcome given by Newport residents to the 3,000 marchers.

Thumbs up, clenched fists and peace signs were offered to welcome the protesters for peace. Some minority communities had clearly been intimidated from marching by the militarisation of policing, with steel fencing, concrete blocks, police at every roundabout and crossroad and constant helicopter surveillance.

Newport held an alternative summit at Pill Mill in the city's most economically deprived parish, Pillgwenlly.

Morning Star ☺

NATO playing with fire

Presidents, prime ministers and top brass mustering in Newport for the NATO summit (see page 8) can be expected to warn of dire threats to world peace.

From Bashar al-Assad in Damascus to Vladimir Putin in Moscow, they will identify malign forces bent on violence and war.

They are somewhat less likely to point the finger of blame at themselves. Yet the reality is obvious to anyone not duped by the relentless misinformation pumped out by Western politicians and a relentlessly jingoist mass media.

It is NATO which poses the greatest danger to peace.

NATO whose 28 members account for over 70 percent of global military spending. NATO whose leading states have a track record of starting unprovoked wars – against Yugoslavia in 1999, against Afghanistan in 2001, against Iraq in 2003, against Libya in 2011.

In some cases the United States and its allies bombed their enemies into submission and left, in others they maintained vast occupying armies for years.

But their victims have one thing in common. NATO's "interventions" leave a legacy of failed states, endless internecine warfare and grinding poverty in addition to the tens of thousands they kill directly. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, founded in 1949, claims to be a mutual defence pact.

But only once has Article 5 – the clause committing members to come to the aid of a fellow member under attack – been invoked before its luckless soldiers are sent abroad to kill and be killed.

Even on that occasion – after the terror attack on New York that brought down the World Trade Centre towers – NATO's action was far from defensive.

The brutal war on Afghanistan which followed, and which is still not concluded 13 years on, did nothing to bring the terrorists responsible for the September 11 attacks to justice.

The crises NATO leaders will flag up in Wales are crises of their own making. The "war on terror," which has seen the US make liberal use of kidnap, torture and assassination by drone, has only swelled the ranks of Islamist extremism.

The Islamic State fanatics (formerly known as ISIS or ISIL) spreading murder and mayhem in Iraq and Syria are the product of the sectarian bloodshed unleashed by the US invasion of the former and backing for "regime change" in the latter.

Armchair generals in the mainstream media say that if the US had invaded Syria, or "properly" supported "moderate" opposition to Assad, Islamic State would never have got as far as it has.

This is rubbish. The Islamic State has flourished in Iraq as a result of the violent dislocation caused by the US invasion. Arms ploughed to "moderates" in Syria, mostly by decidedly non-moderate US allies such as the fundamentalist dictatorship in Saudi Arabia, were never lacking – this is why the civil war drags on – and have ended up in Islamic State hands.

In any case it was the "moderate" Free Syrian Army that handed US journalist James Foley to Islamic State, which later murdered him. Some moderates.

NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen's reiteration that the alliance would welcome membership for war-torn Ukraine emphasises its reckless drive to war. NATO welcomed the news when gun-toting fascists overthrew the elected Ukrainian government in February.

It has not lifted a finger in response to the massacres of trade unionists and socialists carried out



A protest in Newport against NATO prior to the summit.

on Kiev's behalf by Nazi thugs. Rather than advise its new ally to negotiate with regions unwilling to acknowledge the coup d'état, it has encouraged it to launch an all-out war against eastern Ukraine.

In Newport, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko will go cap in hand to ask for more help from the world's top warmongers.

Only pressure from the millions in the US, Britain, France and other countries who are sick of the endless fighting will stop him getting it. *Morning Star* ✪



Region Briefs

On August 21, thousands of tea garden workers from 300 tea gardens and 22 unions in Darjeeling, Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri marched in Siliguri town, West Bengal, demanding a minimum wage for tea garden workers. A leader of the march, Chitta Dey, said that other demands included the reopening of five closed tea gardens. Abhijit Mazumdar, a leader of All India Central Council of Trade Unions, added that the workers' situation would be worse by October as many tea gardens would close after the plucking season finished. The average daily wage for a tea garden worker is A\$1.70.

On August 25, China's state legislature began a review of an amendment to the 20-year-old Advertisement Law. The amendment suggests that direct and indirect tobacco advertisements be banned in any form and in public areas. Scholars, legal and health professionals sent a joint letter to the national legislature in June, asking for tobacco advertising to be banned.

On August 27, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo sent a supporting message to a ceremony, in which he expressed his admiration of World War II Japanese war criminals, calling them the "foundation of the new Japan". The ceremony was held at a temple in the country's west. In front of the inscribed cenotaphs, 220 people attended and prayed for Japan's 1,180 convicted World War II war criminals, including 14 Class-A war criminals. Abe sent his letter under the name of the President of the Liberal Democratic Party. This letter, which was read at the ceremony, said, "I express my grief at the death of martyrs who sacrificed their lives to form the foundation of peace and prosperity in Japan today". Abe is the only Prime Minister who has sent such a message to this ceremony in the past 20 years.

On August 27, former Politburo member, Le Hong Anh, acting as special envoy of the Communist Party of Vietnam's General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, visited Beijing for formal talks with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping and Politburo Standing Committee member, Liu Yunshan. Le Hong Anh suggested that the top leadership of the two states and two Parties should give direct instructions to ministries to develop bilateral relations and resolve disagreements. He also invited General Secretary Xi to visit Vietnam. General Secretary Xi agreed with Le Hong Anh's suggestion and said China and Vietnam both shared socialist ideology under the leadership of their communist parties. He said China valued the traditional friendship and cooperation with Vietnam, and would continue to develop a healthy comprehensive strategic partnership with Vietnam. Both countries agreed to developing bilateral ties, promote exchange visits and resolve disagreements for long-term mutual benefit.

Israel's "unjustifiable" actions

Hundreds of Holocaust survivors and descendants of survivors have signed a letter, published as an advertisement in the *New York Times*, condemning "the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza" and calling for a complete boycott of Israel.

According to the letter, the condemnation was prompted by an advertisement written by Elie Wiesel and published in major news outlets worldwide, accusing Hamas of "child sacrifice" and comparing the group to the Nazis.

The letter, signed by 327 Jewish Holocaust survivors and descendants of survivors and sponsored by the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, accuses Wiesel of "abuse of history" in order to justify Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip:

"...we are disgusted and outraged by Elie Wiesel's abuse of our history in these pages to justify the unjustifiable: Israel's wholesale effort to destroy Gaza and the murder of more than 2,000 Palestinians, including many hundreds of children. Nothing can justify bombing UN shelters, homes, hospitals and universities. Nothing can justify depriving people of electricity and water."

The letter also blames the United States of aiding Israel in its Gaza operation, and the West in general of protecting Israel from condemnation.

"Genocide begins with the silence of the world," the letter reads.

The letter ends with a call to bring the blockade of Gaza to an immediate end, and for a full boycott of Israel. "Never again" must mean NEVER AGAIN FOR ANYONE!, the letter concludes.

Full text of letter:

Jewish survivors and descendants of survivors and victims of Nazi genocide unequivocally condemn the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza.

As Jewish survivors and descendants of survivors and victims of the Nazi genocide we unequivocally condemn the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza and the ongoing occupation and colonisation of historic Palestine. We further condemn the United States for providing Israel with the funding to carry out the attack, and Western states more generally for using their diplomatic muscle to protect Israel from condemnation. Genocide begins with the silence of the world.

We are alarmed by the extreme,

racist dehumanisation of Palestinians in Israeli society, which has reached a fever-pitch. In Israel, politicians and pundits in *The Times of Israel* and *The Jerusalem Post* have called openly for genocide of Palestinians and right-wing Israelis are adopting Neo-Nazi insignia.

Furthermore, we are disgusted and outraged by Elie Wiesel's abuse of our history in these pages to justify the unjustifiable: Israel's wholesale effort to destroy Gaza and the murder of more than 2,000 Palestinians, including many hundreds of children. Nothing can justify bombing UN shelters, homes, hospitals and universities. Nothing can justify depriving people of electricity and water.

We must raise our collective voices and use our collective power to bring about an end to all forms of racism, including the ongoing genocide of Palestinian people. We call for an immediate end to the siege against and blockade of Gaza. We call for the full economic, cultural and academic boycott of Israel. "Never again" must mean NEVER AGAIN FOR ANYONE!

Haaretz ✪

Letters to the Editor
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Surry Hills NSW 2010



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How to save \$88 billion

Treasurer Joe Hockey is threatening "emergency action" and inflicting Queensland-style cuts across the country if "structural budget reforms" aren't made.

Why is Joe Hockey ready to "Campbell Newman" the whole of Australia, before he's willing to end the free-ride for Big End of Town?

Luckily for Mr Hockey, we've found over \$88 billion dollars in revenue.

Why should Big Business, the

Big Banks and Big Mining continue getting off scot free, while Mr Hockey continues threatening everyday Australians with even more of his cruel budget cuts, and making life even harder for our community's most vulnerable people?

If we:

- Abolish tax breaks for Big Mining, raising \$12.8 billion
- Retain the price on pollution, raising \$18 billion
- Implement the original super profits tax on Big Mining, raising \$35.5 billion
- Impose a \$2 per tonne levy on thermal coal exports, raising \$1.7 billion
- Reduce tax avoidance by taxing discretionary trusts (excepting farmers) the same as corporations, raising \$3.6 billion
- Implement a Millionaires Tax on incomes over \$1 million, raising \$637 million
- Apply a public insurance levy on the Big Four Banks that are "too big to fail", raising \$16.8 billion

- We can raise over \$88 billion dollars.

Instead, Joe Hockey has chosen to make the lives of everyday Australians even harder by enforcing a \$7 fee to visit the doctor, increasing university fees, punishing people who are trying to find jobs and making cruel and brutal cuts.

Christine Milne
The Greens

Wind power proving critics wrong

Wind farms in South Australia produced in July a record breaking 43 percent of the state's power needs setting a new benchmark. All states can learn a lesson that we do not have to rely on dirty fossil fuels or uranium to have clean energy which adds huge amounts of greenhouse gases from dirty coal and gas or dealing with toxic waste and potential disasters from nuclear reactors.

Concentrated solar power (CSP), a proven technology which allows thermal storage for up to 24 hours, needs to be built in support of wind generation as the technology allows.

World capacity is expected to reach about 11GW by 2017, with the US, India, China and Middle East and North Africa countries overtaking Spain as market drivers. The International Energy Agency estimates that installed CSP capacity would need to reach 800GW by 2050 in order to contribute to a decarbonised energy system likely to limit the average global temperature increase to 2°C.

Len Lean
SA

Who pays?

Selling Medibank Private - one of the most profitable and bigger money makers for government - will eventually result in calls for more austerity i.e. more cuts to hospitals, increase the proposed

GP co-payment to \$20 (and introduction of a fee, say \$50, to be seen in the Emergency Department as nothing should be free or without price signal according to this government), another hike in tertiary education fees, more cuts for pensioners and setting the bar even higher for youth unemployment benefits etc.

How does the sell-off of such a profitable revenue stream sit with the federal government's narrative of "emerging fiscal catastrophe", "spending beyond our means" and alleged desire to "balance the budget"? Surely the more pertinent question for Mr Hockey and Mr Cormann, would be not what they will do with the one-off windfall, but how they intend to fill the resultant annual (i.e. forever) \$500 million budget black hole of their making - i.e. who will pay for it?

Dr C Costa
President Doctors
Reform Society, Australia

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

MH17, "fundamental British values" and fascism



Malaysian Airlines flight MH17.

The evidence that Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was shot down by an aircraft, presumed to be Ukrainian, rather than brought down by a Russian missile as claimed by the Kiev junta has been allowed to quietly slip away into silence and obscurity. Even Tony Abbott seems to have stopped strutting the world stage demanding that Russia be brought to book for it.

Embarrassing, or what?

Now *The New Straits Times*, Malaysia's flagship English-language newspaper, with close connections to the Malaysian government, has come out and openly accused Kiev of shooting the plane down. Citing "US analysts", the paper laid out evidence that Ukrainian fighter aircraft attacked the airliner with first an air-to-air missile followed by bursts of 30-millimetre cannon fire.

It cited "experts who had said that the photographs of the blast fragmentation patterns on the fuselage of the airliner showed two distinct shapes - the shredding pattern associated with a warhead packed with flechettes and the more uniform, round-type penetration holes consistent with that of cannon rounds."

Meanwhile, the trade sanctions that the US and their major EU partners rushed to impose on Russia as "retaliation" are causing angst in a number of European capitals. Russia's response, as could only be expected, was to impose sanctions on imports from the US and Europe. These will not seriously impact on the US, but they will have serious consequences for the EU, whose trade is heavily dependent on Russian food imports.

Last year Russia bought approximately ten percent of the EU's total exports. The

Russian import bans will have most impact on Germany, Poland, Finland, Lithuania and Latvia. However, Ireland will also be hit and Norway will see fish sales to Russia disappear.

If we take into account Tony Abbott's professed dislike of home-grown jihadists, and also bear in mind the eagerness with which the Australian government copies reactionary policies from Britain, we can presumably expect before long to see Abbott's ministers getting into a lather about the supposed need to protect kindergarten children from "extremist views". Because that is what the Tories are doing in Britain.

Nicky Morgan, only recently appointed to the post of Education Secretary, has gone so far as to threaten to withhold state funding from kindergartens that fail to promote what she calls "fundamental British values". Now, I wonder what they could be? Exiling agricultural labourers to Botany Bay for trying to form a trade union, perhaps. Or joining in the invasion of Iraq on the excuse of finding "weapons of mass destruction" that were in fact non-existent.

On a television news report from Ukraine the other day about Kiev's forces launching an attack on the "separatists" in the east of the country, the reporter made a point of assuring viewers that the attacking troops were "all volunteers". That's probably true, but the reasons for it are not as noble as the reporter tried to imply.

Contrary to the report, the Kiev junta has introduced conscription, but is having trouble

getting its conscripts to agree to fight for its divisive nationalism and its all-too-obvious fascism. Across [Western] Ukraine, writes US journalist Greg Butterfield in *Workers World*, "women gather in dozens to block major highways, carrying signs and banners reading 'Save Our Boys' and 'Stop the Slaughter'."

"Protesters shout down politicians spouting pro-war rhetoric, telling them to 'go fight your own war'. Young men burn their draft cards amidst reports of hundreds of soldiers surrendering or deserting to a neighbouring country."

The volunteers who are so eager to fight the Communists and the Russians fall into two groups. One is made up of a new, young generation of Ukrainian fascists, heirs and followers of the Nazis' war-time protégé Stepan Bandera. Encouraged, financed and protected by Ukraine's oligarchs - in the same way German capitalists encouraged, financed and protected Hitler and his oh-so-useful Storm Troopers - these extreme right-wing thugs have been given free rein to run riot across the country (except in those areas controlled by anti-Fascist militias).

The other group of "volunteers" are in fact anti-Communist and anti-Russian mercenaries from Saudi Arabia and its clients Kuwait and Yemen, and from its proxy army in Iraq and Syria, the ISIS or Islamic State as it now pretentiously calls itself. These are augmented by volunteers from Israel's armed forces together with Special Forces elements from NATO countries.

The stakes are high: if the government of Russia can be overthrown, the country broken up into smaller units, vast quantities of raw materials would become available to

imperialism, which would also have a free hand then to deal with the emerging threat to its global hegemony: China.

So while the Ukrainian junta pose as the champions of democracy in the region, their reaction to the popular up-swelling of anti-war sentiment is what you would expect from fascists and their backers: repression. Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that it would begin arresting people who agitate against the war using social media.

Resistance in the primarily Russian-speaking south-east has been driven underground by repression from Kiev's official political police, the SBU, and from the country's US-funded National Guard. Butterfield again: "As Congress and Obama well know, the National Guard ... is composed of neo-Nazis in uniform, culled from the likes of the Right Sector, Maidan Self-Defence and other fascist gangs by Interior Minister [and outspoken fascist] Arsen Avakov."

And if you still don't think the threat to the people of Donbas and other eastern regions is real, listen to pro-Kiev journalist Bogdan Boutkevitch: "The biggest problem [in Donbas] is that it is severely overpopulated with people nobody has any use for. ... Donbas must be exploited as a resource [but] the most important thing that must be done is that there is a certain category of people that must be exterminated."

Already Kiev is using ballistic missiles against targets in Donetsk and Lugansk, seeking to knock out water treatment facilities and factories, to unleash toxic chemicals on the population. The resultant mass deaths would then be blamed on the "rebels", as the downing of MH17 was.

Fascism, anyone? ☛



Sunday September 7 –
Saturday September 13

Set in the early 'fifties, *The Bletchley Circle* is a series of dramas involving women who worked in the top-secret Bletchley Park code-breaking centre in WW2 and who now put their analytical skills, intuition and detective sense to work to solve new puzzles. Starring Hattie Morahan, Anna Maxwell Martin, Rachael Stirling, Sophie Rundle and Julie Graham, this second series (ABC1 from Sunday August 31 at 9.30pm) comprises two self-contained stories – played out over two episodes each. Both are written by series creator Guy Burt.

The resourceful ladies are reunited for their second case when former Bletchley Park colleague, Alice Merren (Hattie Morahan) is accused of murder. Jean (Julie Graham) methodically sets to work examining the evidence and is intent on helping Alice after a distinguished scientist is discovered shot through the heart in the study of his home with Alice, gun in hand standing over him.

The evidence is stacked against her, but Jean's instincts tell her differently and she pays a visit to Alice in Holloway Prison. Alice is quietly resigned to the fact that she will hang and there are disturbing scenes recreating the methodology of carrying out a hanging (weighing the prisoner, testing the drop with weights, measuring her neck, etc).

That Cold War paranoia lies at the heart of the plot is not accidental, and only that rare beast, an upright

military type, can ensure a successful outcome. It is superior, if quiet, drama and is very well acted and written.

Blue Zoo (ABC3 from Monday September 8 at 5.25pm) is a 13-part observational documentary for children that follows eight young marine animal enthusiasts as they embark on an intense six-week training mission working with dolphins, seals, penguins and turtles.

There are those who think that training captured marine mammals to do tricks and stunts in a "Sea World" type aquarium is more exploitation than conservation, but using rescued animals rather than wild-caught ones seems to overcome most of the objections. At any rate, more than 500 hopefuls in Australia and Ireland vied to become Rookies for the six-week course at Blue Zoo at Coffs Harbour.

The chosen eight Blue Zoo Rookies (it's a co-production with Irish TV so half the rookies are Irish) are thrown in the deep end to learn how to care for and train rescued marine animals. Their hard work culminates in the creation of a brand new dolphin and seal performance that showcases the Rookies' own conservation messages.

The Rookies experience the highs and lows of working with marine animals: from assisting with emergency seal, turtle and dolphin rescues and releases, to witnessing the birth of a baby dolphin, and redesigning and building better animal homes. They also get stuck into the not so glamorous jobs like fish prep and cleaning up stinky seal poop each morning!

A new four-part documentary series on SBS, *The Real History Of Science Fiction* (SBS ONE Mondays from September 8 at 8.35pm) examines four enduring themes of science fiction: time travel; the exploration of space; robots and artificial intelligence; and aliens.

Narrated by Mark Gatiss, *Doctor Who* writer, the series examines sci-fi's impact on cinema, television and literature. Some contributors include William Shatner (*Star Trek*), Nathan Fillion (*Firefly*), Zoe Saldana (*Avatar*, *Star Trek*), Steven Moffat



Kitty Flanagan as Rhonda – *Utopia* (ABC1 Wednesdays at 8.30pm). (Photo: Hwa Goh)

(*Doctor Who*), Richard Dreyfuss (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) and many more.

Personally, although I am a long-time fan of the genre, it seems to me that the series credits science-fiction with more significance than is strictly warranted. Most sci-fi is after all pretty forgettable.

Crisis Stage, the third and final episode of the BBC series *Life And Death Row* (ABC1 Monday September 8 at 9.30pm) deals with attempts by students from the University of Texas Law School to win appeals or at least a stay of execution for prisoners on death row. It's a heavy responsibility for a student, knowing that failure means his or her client will be executed by lethal injection. And most of the last ditch appeals do fail.

It's good to see that even in such a red-neck stronghold as Texas there are people who get out in front of the jail and defy the prevailing attitudes

to protest against the death penalty.

The futility of the death penalty as a deterrent, and its essential nature as an admission of defeat by society, are painfully evident here. One of the killers at the centre of the program comes from one of the most dismal "trailer parks" I have ever seen. One is left to ponder just how long can the US government (state and federal) go on locking up – and killing – the poor?

Some observational documentaries are inherently watchable simply because their subjects are real people being themselves. Such should have been the case with *Crash Test Mummies & Daddies* (ABC2 from Wednesday September 10 at 9.30pm) the six-part series that follows five Australian couples as they experience the first four months at home with a new baby.

As the parents' needs are put on hold to cope with the demands of their newborn, the series explores

the stresses and strains this in turn puts on relationships. Priorities and values shift and compromises are negotiated as the couples share their unique and intimate experiences of life after birth within the context of broader issues such as breastfeeding, financial pressures, changing roles, familial obligations, self-esteem, body image and the elusive work-life balance.

I just found it dull. Perhaps if you had a new-born it would strike a cord, but it just seemed tedious to me.

The whole-hearted way Rhonda (the character in *Utopia* (ABC1 Wednesdays at 8.30pm) played by Kitty Flanagan has embraced jargon to replace common sense and even actual ideas is so spot-on that it puts your teeth on edge. Forever adjuring people meaninglessly to "get the conversation going", she is a priceless concoction, and one clearly drawn from life (or a nightmare). ☘

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POLITICS IN THE PUB

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Ahmed Shboul, Prof, Dept of Arabic & Semitic Studies, Sydney Uni;

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The \$500-a-day service charge to kill solar



Giles Parkinson

Queensland businesses are being hit with service charges of more than \$500 a day on their electricity bills, in a move the solar industry says is designed to kill the roll-out of commercial-scale rooftop solar across the state.

The charges were quietly unveiled by the Queensland Competition Authority (QCA) and the state government in July. But their implications are only now being absorbed as business operators do the numbers on proposed solar installations.

The new tariffs affect a range of businesses, but the worst hit are those that use more than 100MWh of electricity a year, and are deemed to be "large energy" users.

In tariff 46, for instance, those daily charges for "service" – originally a charge for reading the meter – have jumped to \$488 a day from \$42 a day. The "energy" price on consumption is dropped to 10.4c/kWh from 11.6c/kWh.

The fixed service charge replaces a "demand charge", which could vary according to consumption. There is still a demand charge, but only if a customer uses more than a 400kW threshold in any 30 minute interval.

This is how Ergon Energy has structured its tariff 46. With GST, the service charge rises to \$537 a day.

The changes have horrified members of the solar industry, businesses looking to install solar, and those who have invested tens of thousands of dollars in energy efficiency measures such as LEDs or upgraded machinery.

That's because, according to Steve Madson, director of Country Solar, one of the country's largest installers of commercial-scale solar, the new tariffs reduce any incentive for businesses to lower consumption from the grid, either by installing solar panels for their own use, or by investing in more efficiency machinery and lighting.

Madson says the charges appear designed to stop the rollout of commercial-scale solar in Queensland.

"The changes are clever in their design," Madson told RenewEconomy. "They do not actually result in an increase in total electricity costs, and in some cases they actually cause a fall. But they kill the possibility of reducing the bills by installing solar."

"How can they charge \$500 a day to read the meter, that is what the daily service charge is after all."

The QCA and the state government have long been accused of acting only to protect the interests of the network operators and retailers, and to boost the dividends paid to the government.

Last year, QCA came out in favour of special tariffs on residential solar customers, even though it admitted that they would be more costly, ineffective, unfair and possibly illegal. But they favoured the move because it would protect network revenues.

The raising of fixed charges has been a common response among utilities fearing the impact of rooftop solar and a "death spiral" of falling revenues on a fixed asset base.

Analysts such as Morgan Stanley have ridiculed the practice of imposing high fixed charges, saying it was ultimately self-defeating and could simply accelerate that death spiral, and encourage people to go off-grid, particularly when battery storage became commercially viable.

"There may be a 'tipping point' that causes customers to seek an off-grid approach – higher fixed charges to distributed generation customers are likely to drive more battery purchases and exits from the grid," the Morgan Stanley researchers wrote.

Madson agrees: "In three years' time (when battery storage improves), this will also be enough for a mass exodus from the grid altogether."

It is not the first move by Queensland authorities against rooftop solar. In June, new rules were imposed that allow the network operators to stop businesses and homes from exporting excess electricity from rooftop solar systems back into the grid.

Ergon Energy, which operates in the regional areas that cover 97 percent of the grid, has admitted that the move could encourage more battery storage – and ultimately consumers to leave the grid, which would not be the most efficient social outcome.

John Grimes, from the Australian Solar Council, says the QCA ruling is discriminatory, and aimed squarely at shutting down solar PV in Queensland.

"It is also really dumb," Grimes told RenewEconomy. "Commercial and industrial solar is exactly where we should be supporting solar, not locking it out."

"That is because when the sun shines, business is hard at work. Solar is feeding electricity into businesses at exactly the right time, when the machines spin and the computers run. There is a direct correlation between the production and demand curves for electricity in this sector."

"In turn, this reduces peak demand, bringing wholesale prices down, and delaying or eliminating the need for expensive infrastructure upgrades. Queenslanders are already playing a heavy price for past unneeded infrastructure spending. Now a shortsighted government wants to double up and compound the problem further."

Madson has crunched the numbers for a number of clients in Queensland on various tariff structures, and how they will be impacted by the changes.

For those transitioning from tariff 20, and using 300kWh a day, the new structure and fixed service fee means the benefits of cutting consumption by one third will narrow from a

30 percent reduction in the annual electricity bill to just a 10 per cent reduction. To those using more energy, the benefits of reducing consumption by one third will fall to just a 4 percent reduction in the bill.

These will affect businesses such as motel owners, and any other business with large amounts of air conditioning or refrigeration needs.

"This is a blatant cash grab by the Newman government," Madson said.

"The Queensland government is in such a financial mess because of coal, and the forecast royalties from coal in particular that never eventuated."

"Small and medium businesses employ the majority of people in our state and yet small and medium businesses are the ones constantly being slammed to provide for the short falls in coal revenue. Electricity prices have doubled in five years, gas prices are set to triple."

"With battery storage coming online in multiple forms we have the opportunity to level our demand which means that no capital will need to be spent on upgrading our network until our population doubles in 140 years! This is evident by the huge surge in profits by the networks."

"By preventing businesses investing in renewables and energy efficiency, this government are killing Queensland."

"These businesses are spending their money in improving the state-owned assets, creating jobs, improving the environment and upgrading in efficient infrastructure."

"We see that renewables are the push to teach these people that there are better ways and these are measurable, once a business sees the results of going solar they soon reinvest their savings into extra measures to get further reductions which creates more jobs."

RenewEconomy ✪



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