



G20 Summit

Abbott govt – climate pariah

Bob Briton

Abbott's attempt to steer the agenda of the G20 Summit around the issue of climate change was undone in spectacular fashion by US President Barack Obama's address to an enthusiastic audience at the University of Queensland. Commitments about post-2020 domestic climate targets and energy efficiency appear in the communiqué coming from the two-day meeting of leaders of the world's biggest economies. Pressure is mounting on the Abbott government to stop being a "leaner" and to join the "lifters" in the still stumbling international effort to head off a climate catastrophe.

Australia's negligible effort in the area of emissions reduction was underscored before the Brisbane mega-meeting even began. An agreement between the US and the People's Republic of China on the eve of the G-20 commits the US to an emissions reduction of between 26 and 28 percent of 2005 levels by 2025. China has pledged to stop emissions growth by 2030, if not sooner, to get an ambitious 20 percent of its energy from renewable sources and to use higher grade, cleaner fuels in general – that is equivalent to the closure of all its coal-fired power plants.

Together, the US and China account for just over 40 percent of global carbon emissions, so any cut in their output has got to be good news. It is not, however, a cue for a world-wide sigh of relief that the battle for a liveable climate in future has been won. China will continue to use more fossil fuels for the next decade and a half. This is in line with the principles of the Kyoto Protocol ratified at the Rio World Climate Change Summit in 1990. It was always recognised that developing countries needing to lift living standards to an adequate level would have to increase emissions for some time.

The US government's decision to use yet another base year for measuring emissions reductions is deliberately confusing. The original Kyoto commitment by the governments of 37 wealthier, industrialised countries was for a reduction of 5.2 percent from 1990 levels by 2012. The base year for calculating reductions was subsequently shifted to 2000 – a move that significantly lowered the agreement's ambitions.

Whatever the base year, a commitment from Australia equivalent to that just made by the US would be for a 30 percent reduction in



Prime Minister Abbott shakes hands with Russian President Putin as he officially welcomes him to the G20 Summit.

emissions from 2000 levels by 2025. Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt won't comment on any targets beyond 2020 until the Paris conference on climate change to be held next year is upon us. The shameful reality is that the Abbott government's so-called "direct action plan" is unlikely to achieve even its stated, unambitious target of a 5 percent reduction by 2020. The resource sector's ownership of the Australian government was on show for all the world to see at the G-20.

Abbott's clangers about coal being "good for humanity" and his government's insistence that "clean coal" is just around the corner have raised eyebrows. Plans to dump dredge soil in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area to create deeper port facilities for coal exports just keep on coming. And while the world grapples with the consequences of record high temperatures and rising sea levels, the Abbott

government is cutting funding to the Australian Climate Change Science Program.

Labor has pulled out of discussions with the government about Australia's renewable energy target (RET). The Coalition wants to slash the RET from 41,000 gigawatt hours of baseline power by 2020 to about 26,000 gigawatt hours. Investment in the green energy sector has collapsed as a consequence of this sharply downgraded commitment. Labor's attempts at a compromise gigawatt hour target in the mid-to-high 30s have all been rebuffed. Frustration at Abbott & Co's eco-vandalism is building.

The failure of successive Australian governments to pull their weight on climate change is now internationally recognised. It is not how the people of Australia want to be viewed. The election of the Coalition government last year wasn't a ringing endorsement of its lifeless "direct action plan" but an expression of a lack of faith in Labor, its opportunism and deal-making on the question. As can be seen from the rapturous reception for Obama, Australians desperately want leadership on this and several other burning issues. Obama made direct reference to the Great Barrier Reef, "I want to come back, and I want my daughters to be able to come back, and I want them to be able to bring their daughters or sons to visit. (Applause.) And I want that there 50 years from now."


Unfortunately, faith in Obama and similar international figures is misplaced. Despite commitments by the US, Britain, Canada, the EU and others, the planet is still not on track for a happy climate ending. The UN's International Panel on Climate Change recently renewed its warning about the multiple threats facing humanity from anthropogenic global warming. Its earlier reports insisted there must be a 40 percent reduction on year 2000 carbon emission levels by 2020 if we are to avoid a global average temperature increase above 2°C. That's not going to happen.

Huge transnational corporations, most of them in charge of hugely polluting industries, dictate policy to the Abbotts, Camerons, Merks and Obamas of this world. Their job is to sell big business' agenda to the people of their respective countries. Obama does a very slick job, Abbott does a bumbling one.

The workers and other exploited people know there is a crisis and are resisting the reckless policies of the monopolies. They have managed to push back more successfully in the UK, the EU and elsewhere than in Australia but it's not enough. A greater understanding of the destructive essence of capitalism is required. Action on climate change has to be a central demand for all progressive people. It must become a core trade union concern. ✪

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3  APEC pursuing integrated Asia-Pacific

5  Little man drowning in big politics

10  Culture & Life Fascism being revived

12  Israel bans doctor for life from Gaza

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Terra nullius never went away

"As we look around this glorious city, as we see the extraordinary development, it's hard to think that back in 1788 it was nothing but bush ... Everything would have seemed so extraordinarily basic and raw ...," Prime Minister Tony Abbott told an international gathering in Sydney on November 14. He repeated the same words again at a post-APEC International Business breakfast on November 17. *Terra nullius* is back on the agenda, not that it ever really went away. Australia is open for business, for big business and this government is proudly clearing the way, in particular, for mining companies.

Consistent with Abbott's *terra nullius* outlook, the government is cutting its funding of essential services for remote Aboriginal communities. Responsibility is being handed over to the states, with a one-up payment to compensate the states for the additional cost of providing services. West Australian Premier Colin Barnett, who is cut from the same cloth as the PM, responded to the deal by flagging the closure of up to 150 remote Indigenous communities and the forced removal of more than 12,000 people from their land. Initially Barnett blamed the federal government's decision to cease funding of power, water and other services to remote communities beyond the next two years. Barnett said his hands were tied.

Past experiences of forced removal off country have proved disastrous. Towns, already short of housing, have not been able to cope with the influx of people. The result is more fringe dwellers, social problems, suicides and incarceration. Western Australia already has the highest rate of incarceration of Indigenous people, around 20 times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians. In fact Barnett hypocritically admitted that it "will cause great distress to Aboriginal people who will move, it will cause issues in regional towns as Aboriginal people move into them."

Barnett tried to argue it was necessary pointing to "high rates of suicide, poor education, poor health, no jobs ... it's a huge economic, social and health issue." He then played the "viability" card, blaming the Indigenous communities for their economic and social problems.

"They [the smaller remote communities] are not viable and the social outcomes, the abuse and neglect of young children, is a disgrace to this state ... this is the biggest social issue this state faces."

It certainly is a disgrace to the state and federal governments and to the big mining corporations. Not a single suggestion about addressing the causes of the social issues. No way does the WA Coalition government intend spending a cent of the royalties from minerals extracted from Aboriginal land on essential services that the rest of the Australian people take for granted. The federal government has closed the Community Development Employment Projects program, there is no serious job creation program; education and skills development are either not appropriate or unavailable. It is no accident that successive state and federal governments have deprived Indigenous communities of services, housing, job opportunities and the programs and incarcerated people on almost any excuse. Under such conditions, communities are set to "fail", providing the excuse to force them off their land.

"How can you even contemplate removing people from their land when it is the very essence of their being?" CEO of the Aboriginal Legal Services Western Australia (ALSWA), Noongar man, Dennis Egginton exclaimed. "If our people were pastoralists living in remote WA, we would be supported, accommodated and rewarded for our efforts. Yet, because we are Aboriginal people who perhaps don't share the same materialistic values as our non-Indigenous counterparts, we are seen as not being 'viable' and we should be 'removed' - there's that term again." These profits are from the land of Indigenous people. That is why funding is being cut, that is why the state and federal governments want to remove its Indigenous owners.

"Western Australia is more concerned about profits than people," Egginton said. There is no right to veto under the Native Title Act, but Traditional Owners have been able to take on the mining corporations and gain considerable public support and see projects delayed or even suspended. The mining companies want to be given *carte blanche* to plunder Indigenous land. We are talking about criminal neglect, theft, racism and assimilation. The closure of remote communities is nothing short of a land grab for mining corporations.

PRESS FUND

According to the ABC's economics reporter Allan Kohler, the world's textile manufacturers anticipated a never-ending demand for their products so they've now stored away enough cotton to make three pairs of jeans for everyone on the planet! If you also bear in mind that some people wouldn't have enough to buy one pair anyway, you get a nice picture of the anarchy of production under capitalism. But speaking of demand, the *Guardian* Press Fund really needs your support to help the paper meet the costs of production, so please send us a contribution for the next edition if you possibly can. We offer our thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

CC \$35, T Gale \$20, Iranian comrades \$20, Mark Mannion \$5, Donna McLaren \$20, "Round Figure" \$10, SS \$35, K Manski \$20, I Sale \$20

This week's total: \$180 Progressive total: \$8,015

Stop deportation of Afghan asylum seekers

The High Court finding that the Refugee Review Tribunal had failed to properly consider whether it was reasonable for an Afghan asylum seeker to relocate to Kabul because security for Hazaras was "relatively good" has serious implications for the government's recent moves to deport Afghan asylum seekers.

"We are calling on the government to immediately halt all plans to remove Afghan asylum seekers and to reconsider Afghan protection applications in light of the High Court finding," said Ian Rintoul,

spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The man who was removed to Afghanistan two weeks ago was also a truck driver driving in the same area as the case considered by the High Court in today's judgement.

"We are calling on the government to urgently arrange for the two asylum seekers forcibly removed to Afghanistan to be brought back to Australia. It is clear that the government has returned those asylum seekers to danger. Their existence in Kabul is precarious."

He said there are at least nine

Afghan asylum seekers who have been re-detained since Zainullah became the first forced removal to Afghanistan in August this year.

"The security situation in Kabul and Afghanistan is deteriorating by the day. It was always unsafe to rely on decisions made a year or more ago. Now the High Court has questioned the very basis of many RRT decisions.

"It is time for the government to provide the permanent protection that Afghan asylum seekers need." ☘

Save Victoria's threatened Owl's

Steven Katsineris

Three species of owls are in danger of becoming extinct in Victoria because the Victorian government has failed to protect the forest habitat where these threatened owls, the Sooty, Masked and Powerful Owls live.

The Powerful and Sooty Owls are listed as vulnerable and the Masked Owl as endangered, according to Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. Management plans for the owls state that the Powerful and Masked Owls require at least 100 areas of 500 hectares each, while the Sooty Owl needs 131 areas of at least 500 hectares.

The forests of the Gippsland region are a stronghold for the owls because the age of the trees in the forest means it is an ideal habitat for such birds of prey. Bushfires earlier this year burnt 170,000 hectares of forest habitat of the owls. Legally, the government is required to make sure these owls have enough suitable habitats preserved for them. Yet after the massive destruction of the fires, the government has failed to set aside more protected forests for the three owl species.

Since European settlement, over 65% of Victoria's forest cover has been cleared. And only about five percent of freehold land remains forested. This past loss of habitat has most likely led to an overall decline in owl numbers and fragmentation of the original continuous population into a series of small residual populations, each of which is in danger of becoming locally extinct. It is estimated that hollows suitable for owls do not form, even in the fastest-growing eucalypts, until they are at least 150-200 years of age.

The Powerful Owl is found throughout much of the state, except for the northeast and wetter mountain forests, wherever there is suitable habitat of large trees and sufficient prey. When the Powerful Owl was listed as a threatened species it was because the estimated population was less than 500 pairs, with no specific habitat protection outside of conservation reserves. And with the land clearing processes continuing across most of



Powerful Owl.

their range, the species was at risk of extinction.

Over much of its range, the lack of suitably large hollows for Powerful Owls is considered to be a limiting factor to successful breeding and population recovery. The Powerful Owl is, therefore, vulnerable to land management practices that reduce the availability of these tree hollows now or in the future. The loss of hollow-bearing trees has been listed as a potentially threatening process under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (SAC 1991). In addition, prey density may be an important determinant in their territory size and breeding successes.

The Sooty Owl is distributed around the Melbourne region, eastern and northeast Victoria and there is a small population in south Gippsland. They are found in rainforests, tall forests and some open forest. Their survival is also threatened by clearance and logging of habitat. To retain the species in the wild it is considered that Sooty Owls need good habitat for at least 500 breeding pairs. It is roughly estimated there could be 400-900 breeding pairs left in Victoria, although it is thought the

most realistic figure is less than 500 breeding pairs.

The Masked Owl is mostly found in the lowland forests and woodlands of East Gippsland and the Otway Ranges, but also in the Central Highlands, Midlands and around the Portland region. The species has been adversely affected by land clearance and habitat fragmentation, resulting in the loss of trees with large hollows and the reduction in prey species. As yet there is no reliable estimate of the numbers of Masked Owls in Victoria.

The government must take immediate action to preserve the remaining forests of the Gippsland region, in order to protect these at risk owls before it's too late. We have to convince the government to conserve this unique habitat for these endangered owls and other threatened wildlife. We should do what we can to help save these vulnerable native animals. To assist the campaign please sign and share the petition to save the Sooty, Masked and Powerful Owl.

Search online for "Help save three of Australia's most vulnerable owls from extinction". ☘

APEC pursuing integrated Asia-Pacific

Anna Pha

While the Australian media were focused on the Prime Minister making a fool of himself, an important meeting was taking place in Beijing. It was the 22nd Leaders Summit of APEC (See box below). The original intent of APEC when proposed by Australia (on the US's behalf) was an Asian Pacific regional group under US domination. The Summit was significant in a number of ways.

China and the US announced a secretly negotiated agreement between the two countries on climate change and emission reductions. (See page 1)

PM Tony Abbott was caught by surprise, after all his mate had not forewarned him despite Australia being the US's most loyal and subservient ally. Not exactly a public expression of trust or respect.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Obama have also agreed on a military accord designed to avert clashes between Chinese and American planes and warships in the waters off the Chinese coast. They are also cooperating on trade in hi tech goods and direct foreign investment.

There were interesting bilateral meetings between China and the US, China and Japan, the US and Russia, and Australia and Russia resulting in speculation about an easing of tensions. However, it seems clear that the dispute over islands between China and Japan has not been resolved.

The Australian media focused on the face-to-face public encounter between Abbott and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Not surprisingly, Abbott failed to carry out his threat to "shirt-front" Putin. We are told by Abbott's team that he did tell Putin to pull out of Ukraine, apologise for the shooting down of the Malaysian aircraft and pay compensation to the families of the dead. Russia still denies any involvement in the shooting or the presence of Russian forces in the Ukraine. The investigation into the cause of the crash is still underway.

Based on cooperation

The Beijing Declaration,

"Beijing Agenda for an Integrated, Innovative and Interconnected Asia-Pacific", states, "Through its unique approach featuring voluntary action, consensus, flexibility and pragmatism, APEC has successfully established a sound regional economic cooperation framework among member economies with remarkable diversity and at different stages of development.

"Adhering to the spirit of unity, mutual respect and trust, mutual assistance and win-win cooperation, we have been working to narrow the development gap among ourselves and have consistently promoted the robust, sustainable, balanced, inclusive and secure growth in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

"After years of rapid development, the Asia-Pacific has become the most dynamic region of the world, and has never been as important as it is today in the global landscape ..."

Regional integration

China used its position as host to advance the process towards concrete action on a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP).

The FTAAP includes China, unlike the US-driven Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). It involves the 21 APEC economies as compared with the TPP's 12. "Establishment of this Roadmap for APEC's Contribution to the Realisation of the FTAAP represents an important concrete step towards greater regional economic integration." ("The Beijing Roadmap for APEC's Contribution to the Realisation of the FTAAP", Annex A to Leaders' Declaration)

While the US has a strong preference for its TPP, China made it clear that the FTAAP should not be pitted against the TPP. The Leaders Declaration describes it as "a major instrument to further APEC's regional economic integration agenda which should be pursued as a comprehensive free trade agreement by developing and building on ongoing regional undertakings such as ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership."

"The FTAAP will be realised outside of APEC, parallel with the APEC process. APEC should maintain its non-binding, voluntary cooperation principles in its contributions



Chinese President Xi Jinping (centre) hosts and addresses the 22nd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting in Beijing, China, November 11, 2014. (Photo: Xinhua/Pang Xinglei)

"The Asia-Pacific has become the most dynamic region of the world, and has never been as important as it is today in the global landscape ..."

to the realisation of the FTAAP. APEC will encourage more unilateral trade and investment liberalisation and reform, continue to play a role as incubator of the FTAAP and provide leadership and intellectual input to its realisation."

The FTAAP has a unique approach, with significant differences in the principles of cooperation when compared with the approach of the WTO or TPP where the framework results in greater power of the stronger economies to exploit the weaker ones.

The APEC Leaders' Declaration is underpinned by five pillars of cooperation*: Economic Reform; New Economy; Innovative Growth; Inclusive Support; and Urbanisation. Each of these pillars is spelt out in detail.

For example, the New Economy has three components: Internet Economy, Blue Economy and the Green Economy. Blue Economy relates to coastal and marine ecosystem conservation, disaster resilience;

ocean-related food security and associated trade; and marine science, technology and innovation.

A statement on the 25th anniversary of APEC recapping its achievements states, "APEC has carried out practical cooperation in a wide range of areas, including structural reform; standards and conformance; women and the economy; health, education and labour; climate change; food security and food safety; energy security and sustainable energy development; green economy; blue economy; small and medium enterprises; information and communications technology; transport; infrastructure development and investment; forestry; mining; counter-terrorism; emergency preparedness; and, anti-corruption."

Big business plays a role through

APEC's Business Advisory Council. While much of the agenda of APEC is based on free trade, tariff removals, opening up to foreign investment, unlike free trade agreements, adherence is on a voluntary basis. Not everything in the statement is to be applauded. For example, in Annex C it states: "We support the safe and efficient development of nuclear power, which functions as a base load power source, in interested economies."

Looking ahead, the statement said, "We are committed to jointly building an open economy in the Asia-Pacific that is based on innovative development, interconnected growth, and shared interests. ☺"

* See full declaration, Annex C www.globaltimes.cn/content/891377.shtml Full coverage of G20 next issue.

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) The 21 member economies (not countries) are: Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; Russia; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; The United States; and Viet Nam.

The 21-member APEC involves a population of 2.8 billion, or 40 percent of the global total, and produces 57 percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and contributes 46 percent of global trade.

It was set up in 1989, an initiative of the Labor Hawke government, on behalf of the US. China is a member of APEC but is not included in the Trans Pacific Partnership. It is not a formal organisation, but a forum, with decisions based on consensus and their implementation is voluntary.

Pete's Corner



*Something to say?
Write to the Editor.*

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Death pressure mounts



Protesters gather at WA Parliament in response to the death of Dhu while in police custody.

Mez Fisher

Public rallies held around Australia have put mounting pressure on Western Australian Premier Colin Barnett to make urgent prison and policing reforms, following the death of a young Yamatji woman in police custody on August 4.

Della Roe has invited Barnett to meet with her, family representatives and Elders in Port Hedland, where

her 22-year-old daughter Dhu died in custody, after repeatedly asking for medical assistance.

News of a second Aboriginal death at a maximum-security prison in Casuarina has added to the campaign, amid questions being raised whether Dhu's arrest over \$1,000 in unpaid fines may have resulted from a domestic violence call-out.

Deaths in Custody Watch Committee WA (DICWC) chair Marc Newhouse said he is encouraged by

Barnett's public commitment made to the 300 people at the Perth rally.

"The full truth will come out. I will make sure of that," Barnett said after being mobbed by protestors. He also made a personal commitment to reduce the number of Aboriginal people incarcerated in the state, but was adamant that an independent inquiry would not be necessary.

Dhu died three days after being locked up in the South Hedland watch-house. Police said at the time that after complaining of feeling ill, she was taken to Hedland Health Campus three times, where twice she was reportedly declared fit and returned to custody. She died on the final visit.

Racism, sexism

Newhouse said Dhu's death was linked with racism and sexism.

"Clearly part of what's happened here is along the lines of criminalisation of Aboriginal women," he said. "For example, we know that there has been an 18 percent increase in the number of women locked up in WA."

Newhouse said Aboriginal women are not taken seriously when it comes to being victims of crime. He questioned whether Dhu's alleged

broken ribs were possibly from a previous injury and if police went to her address as part of a call-out.

"There's a clear police manual directive that if someone has a medical problem or injury they are not to be detained," he said. "If she already had an injury then why on earth was she taken to the lock-up?"

The recent prison death of a 31-year-old Aboriginal man who is believed to have taken his own life, highlights further concerns with the WA jail system, including ligature points still being accessible in cells.

"The other concern is we know that the Aboriginal visitors scheme is in disarray," Newhouse said. "The question is was this person able to access the Aboriginal visitors' scheme ... was he being monitored or under observation?"

Urgent action

Newhouse called for urgent action, particularly around the issue of people being locked up for unpaid fines. "That's something that can be changed with stroke of the pen," he said. "That's something that can happen now – we don't need to wait for a coronial inquest."

The Aboriginal Legal Service of

WA (ALSWA) is pushing for a mandatory Custody Notification Service (CNS) to be implemented in WA, saying it will save lives.

The 24-hour phone service notifying ALS officers when an Aboriginal person is taken into custody operates only in NSW/ACT.

"One life lost in custody is one too many and we implore Senator Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, to provide this vital service nationally," ALSWA chief executive Dennis Eggington said.

When asked by the *Koori Mail* about introducing such a system, WA Police said the Criminal Investigation Act already provides a legal basis for people in custody to have access to welfare and legal representation.

"Across the state, WA police are in contact with ALS officers on a regular basis for any Aboriginal person in custody," a spokesperson said.

"The issue of expanding the services of the ALS is a matter for government to consider."

Dhu's grandmother, Carol Roe, is asking for answers and wants an independent inquiry.

Koori Mail ☘

Principals survey finds lack of resourcing their biggest concern

New research shows over 80 percent of Australia's principals say that a lack of resources is hurting education at their school, the Australian Education (AEU) says.

The result, found in the Australian Council for Educational Research's Report "Australian Teachers and the Learning Environment" showed principals believe the biggest issue in their schools is inadequate schools' budgets and resources.

AEU deputy federal president Correna Haythorpe said the result should remind the Abbott government of the importance of committing to the full six years of Gonski funding, to ensure all schools meet minimum resource standards.

"Principals on the frontline know that the one thing which could make an immediate difference to their school is resources for extra staff or support programs to help students," Haythorpe said.

"Their main concern is trying to stretch their budgets to give their students the best education possible. They also cite workloads as a major concern, showing the lack of support they are currently receiving.

"The best way to improve our school system is to properly resource the public schools that educate the students with the greatest need. That means the full six years of needs based Gonski funding."

The report also reveals concerns about teacher training, with almost 38 percent of teachers saying their training did not address content of all the subjects they are now teaching.

Principals also raised concerns that a lack of properly qualified teachers was hindering school performance, including 37 percent saying they had shortages of teachers trained in teaching students with special needs, and 27 percent shortages of teachers in vocational education.

"Ensuring as many children as possible are taught by a properly qualified teacher is important for the quality of their education," Haythorpe said.

"We need better workforce planning, and to ensure all teaching degrees are a post-graduate two-year degree to give teachers the knowledge they need for the classroom."

The report also raised concerns about the ageing teaching workforce in Australia, with 37.1 percent of teachers aged 50 or over ahead of the OECD average of 31.8 percent.

"Our ageing workforce makes it even more important that we focus on giving the next generation of teachers the best training possible," Haythorpe said. ☘

Qld government footing the bill for Galilee rail line

The Queensland government's agreement to sink tax-payers' money into the controversial Carmichael coal project railway line to the Galilee Basin is an expensive waste of money that threatens irreversible damage to water resources in Queensland.

Lock the Gate Alliance says Premier Campbell Newman's announcement that the government would fund the rail line to ensure the Carmichael coal mine goes ahead plumbs new depths in the government's perverse support for the mining industry, against the interests of Queensland primary producers and the interests of the public more broadly.

Lock the Gate Queensland Campaign coordinator, Kate Denehy said Premier Newman had not confirmed how much the taxpayers were giving to the project.

"This apparent blank cheque shows that mining companies

are running Queensland," she said. "The litany of concessions and sweet deals the Queensland government keeps throwing at the Galilee Basin keeps growing.

"They've offered them land grabs, free water, royalty concessions, and now they're taking the extraordinary step of sacrificing Queensland tax-payers' money on this highly damaging and unwelcome project.

"Nobody but Campbell Newman, Jeff Seeney and a couple of Indian billionaires wants this coal mined. It's dirty, expensive, and will come at the cost of enormous quantities of ground and river water that Queensland can hardly afford to sacrifice.

"The Newman government is prepared to waste taxpayers' money, ruin the environment, trash family farms and communities for mines the world knows has no future."

In another "free kick" a report

is expected from a parliamentary committee inquiry into the latest Bill to provide concessions to coal mines. The Water Reform and Other Legislation Bill is slated to allow the Galilee mine proponents, and all other coal miners in Queensland, to take billions of litres of groundwater without having to obtain licences under water resource plans.

Lock the Gate is backing the 'Queensland People's Bill' to bring back fairness and democracy to this state through the re-introduction of the defunct Upper House. We will hold a Q&A event about the Queensland People's Bill at the Old Museum on November 29 with politicians and leading experts on the panel.

Detailed reports on GVK and Adani mines by the Energy Resource Studies Australasia at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) here: www.ieefa.org/category/reports ☘

Little man drowning in big politics

Anna Pha

The past week has not been a good one for Tony Abbott or his mate Joe Hockey. Abbott attempted to throw his weight around, using Australia's position as host of the G20 leaders' Summit to impose his own domestic agenda on world leaders. He appeared completely lacking in diplomatic skills, demonstrated little understanding of international relations and seemed to have lost his way on other occasions. He hardly did Australia or the Australian people any credit. The Australian media focused on Abbott and Putin rather than the real issues.

"I'm going to shirt-front Mr Putin. You bet you are – you bet I am," PM Tony Abbott vowed in the lead-up to APEC and the G20, much to the amusement of overseas media. The "shirt-fronting" threat was intended for domestic consumption, but it took off around the world making a complete fool of Australia's so-called leader.

In Australia, 7 News took it to extremes with the headline, "Russian warships bearing down on Australia" and then linking it to Abbott's threat!

Not surprisingly, the Russian President showed no signs of being intimidated and, as expected, Abbott failed to deliver. They co-existed peacefully in public, disappointing local media.

The US and its Western allies including Australia, without a shred of evidence, without waiting for the results of investigations, has found Russia and Putin in particular, responsible for the shooting down of the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine. They accuse Russia of supplying the rebel forces in East Ukraine with the missile system and now sending in Russian troops – claims strongly refuted by Russia and not backed with any evidence.

The Dutch investigators have left open the possibility that the plane was shot down by a military aircraft, possibly Ukrainian, in the area. (rt.com, "Independent inquiry: New radar data indicates other jets on MH17 course before crash") While Abbott is insisting on an apology from Putin (and compensation), the Russian TV and digital media outlet *Russia Today* is demanding an apology from Abbott.

The accusations are political, part of the US's plans to isolate and characterise Russia as a pariah and to send troops into Ukraine to occupy

the east on Russia's border. The positioning of its own or NATO's forces on Russia's border, is a vital part of the US's encirclement of and war preparations against Russia.

Russia is not a socialist state but none-the-less poses a number of challenges to US global domination with its refusal to be part of the US alliance and its involvement in other independent groupings.

BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) is one such group asserting its independence and in economic terms has the potential to far outgrow the US. So far, in trying to break the group, the US has drawn India into the US military sphere and is now seeking a bilateral free trade agreement.

Parochial

Perhaps one of the most humiliating moments for Abbott was his opening of the "Retreat" prior to the formal sessions of the G20 Summit. He blew big time his chance to prove to world leaders and the rest of the world his international leadership skills. Instead of giving leadership, of putting forward a vision, a framework for the Summit, he babbled on about co-payments, deregulation of universities, how he stopped the boats and abolished carbon pricing.

Because leaders thanked and politely praised Abbott for his chairing and organising of the Summit, it seems Abbott has no idea that they would not do otherwise. Protocol and diplomacy dictate it. Nor does he understand the role of a host for an organisation like the G20. Putin was singled out for differential treatment, being met at the airport by an assistant minister for defence, whereas other leaders were welcomed by the Governor General or Attorney General.

Climate change denial

As the G20 kicked off, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told reporters at the International Media Centre in Brisbane, "Climate change is the defining issue of our times, therefore it is only natural that the G20 leaders should focus on this." Abbott and his climate denier mates still didn't get it, they hadn't heard how the Pacific was already being affected or that coal is not the future.

He dug his head even deeper into the sand, steadfastly refusing to put climate change as a formal agenda item despite demands from other participants. Obama was not used to being told what he could or could not do, especially from a little,



arrogant upstart touting Tea Party economics.

When addressing a predominantly student audience at Queensland University, Obama included issues that the homophobic, sexist and climate change denying PM has failed to address. Obama spoke forcefully on the need for action on climate change, to resounding applause. "We will stand up for our gay and lesbian fellow citizens because they need to be treated equally under the law," Obama said to more applause. His support for women's equality was greeted with an even louder response.

Adding insult to injury, Obama called on some of the dirty industries that powered our development to "go straight to a clean-energy economy that allows them to grow, create jobs and at the same time reduce their carbon pollution." He then called Australia's youth to "keep raising your voices" and challenge "entrenched interests".

None of it was music to the government's ears, a government that seeks to place Australia's economic future on coal. But then, what else can be expected from a government beholden to the powerful mining companies and needing to do deals with a mining magnate's political party in the Senate.

Obama struck the final blow "It's been a good week for American leadership and for American workers," he told a press conference. Clearly the message was directed at his audience back home, but perhaps, just perhaps there was a message for Abbott as climate change did appear prominently in the final communiqué. ☘



It is not a great secret that defence loves their military equipment, always lusts for more and usually gets what it says it needs. Millions of dollars have been wasted in military purchases and at present Australia is quietly selling off dozens of missiles to other countries in order to recoup some of the \$200 million spent on them. The Australian Defence Force has sold 30 anti-ship Penguin missiles to Brazil (through Norway), several to New Zealand and two Popeye air-to-surface missile to South Korea since the beginning of last year. The sales have been conducted without any publicity – not surprising really if you consider the amount of money that is being spent now. A missile purchase spree of \$200 million is peanuts compared to one of Australia's biggest defence fiascos when the Howard government ordered 11 Sea-sprite helicopters in 1997 but serious flaws in the helicopters delayed the project by seven years and then it was scrapped. That particular exercise in wasting money cost more than \$1.4 billion dollars to taxpayers.

Life expectancy has always been a good indicator for managing the provision of health and social services for its citizens. Australia is considered to be among the top countries when it comes to longevity. But there is a problem. While wealthy Anglo-Saxon-dominated suburbs in large cities top life expectancy lists, the average person in remote western NSW can expect to live a shorter life than somebody in Iraq, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Life expectancy in rural NSW is among the worst in the country with only Western Australia and the Northern Territory falling under remote NSW's life expectancy of 67.8 years. Primary health care with an emphasis on prevention is hard to access. Severe lack of permanent GPs, under-resourcing, closure of health facilities are the factors which contribute to this state of affairs.

Forbes' list of the world's most powerful leaders should be "shirt-fronted" – it has failed even to mention in passing our very own Tony Abbott. Mister Putin is there as number one, Mr Obama at number two and the Chinese leader Xi Jinping at number 3. Two of Mr Abbott's cheer leaders and supporters are there – Rupert Murdoch and Gina Rinehart.

Across the United Kingdom, government departments and local councils are taking back contracts from companies like Serco and G4S which were supposed to provide services for the elderly and disabled people. The outsourcing of services there proved a disaster, with rorting and expensive blowouts proving the norm rather than the exception. Now the NSW government is planning to do the same. Do they ever learn from experience? Do they ever listen to the people who work in this area? Older people and people with disabilities are not going to be the winners when an essential public service is being transferred to private companies. If it is such a good idea, why not ask NSW voters in March what they think about it?

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The silence of the Israelis on IS

Stephen J Sniegowski

In the war on the Islamic State, the alleged scourge of humanity, little is heard about the position of America's much-ballyhooed greatest ally in the Middle East, if not the world, Israel. Now the Islamic State has been conquering territory in very close proximity to the border of Israel. But Israel does not seem to be fearful and it is not taking any action.

And the Obama administration and American media pundits do not seem to be the least bit disturbed. This is quite in contrast to the complaints about other Middle East countries such as Turkey that are being harshly criticised for their failure to become actively involved in fighting the Islamic State.

For example, a *New York Times* editorial, "Mr Erdogan's Dangerous Game", begins, "Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, once aspired to lead the Muslim world. At this time of regional crisis, he has been anything but a leader. Turkish troops and tanks have been standing passively behind a chicken-wire border fence while a mile away in Syria, Islamic extremists are besieging the town of Kobani and its Kurdish population."

An article in the *Boston Globe* read, "Turkey has failed Kobani, Kurds". An editorial in the *USA Today* was titled "Turkey waits as ISIL crushes Kobani".

Neocon Charles Krauthammer in "Erdogan's Double Game":

"For almost a month, Kobani Kurds have been trying to hold off Islamic State fighters," Krauthammer wrote. "Outgunned, outmanned, and surrounded on three sides, the defending Kurds have begged Turkey to allow weapons and reinforcements through the border. Erdogan has refused even that, let alone intervening directly."

Even the normally anti-war Noam Chomsky expressed support for protecting the Kurds. "With regard to Kobani, it is a shocking situation," Chomsky opined. "This morning's newspaper described Turkish military operation against Kurds in Turkey, not against ISIS, a couple of kilometres across the border where they are in danger of being slaughtered. I think something should be done at the UN in terms of a strong resolution to call for a ceasefire."

"It is hard to impose the use of force," Chomsky continued, "but to the extent that it can be done try and protect Kobani from destruction at the hands of ISIS, which could be a major massacre with enormous consequences." Chomsky added that "the strategic significance of the town in the Kurdish region is pretty obvious, and the Turkish role is critical in this."

Israel's reticence

Returning to the issue of Israel, the fact of the matter is that Israel acts to protect its own national interests. At the current time, the primary goal of the Islamic State is to purify Islam rather than attack non-Muslims.

In response to Internet queries as to why the militant group wasn't fighting Israel instead of killing Muslims in Iraq and Syria, its representatives responded: "We haven't given orders to kill the Israelis and the Jews. The war against the nearer enemy, those who rebel against the faith, is more important. Allah commands us in the Koran to fight

the hypocrites, because they are much more dangerous than those who are fundamentally heretics."

As justification for this stance, the group cited the position of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, who began his caliphate by fighting against those he deemed apostates who still professed to be followers of Islam. (Shiites hold a negative view of Abu Bakr and his policies). Also cited was Saladin, who fought the Shiites in Egypt before conquering Christian-controlled Jerusalem.

Considering the Islamic State is targeting Muslims, the Israeli government does not see it as a significant enemy at this time. And it is reasonable for Israeli leaders to believe that the Islamic State would never move on to attack their country because it will never be able to conquer its major Islamic foes, though American military involvement would further secure Israel from any possible threat from the Islamic State.

Moreover, the fact of the matter is that the Islamic State actually benefits Israel by causing problems for those very states that do actively oppose Israel and support the Palestinians, such as Syria. What the Islamic State is causing in the Middle East is perfectly attuned with the view of the Israeli Right – as best articulated by Oded Yinon in 1982 – which sought to have Israel's Middle East enemies fragmented and fighting among themselves in order to weaken the external threat to Israel.

Currently, these divisions are not only plaguing Syria and Iraq, but also Turkey, where ethnic Kurds are rioting because of the government's unwillingness to help their brethren in Syria, and Lebanon, where the Shiite group Hezbollah – allied with Iran, Israel's foremost enemy – is being assailed by the radical jihadist Nusra Front, which has the support of many Lebanese Sunnis. [See Jonathan Spyer, "The Shia-Sunni War Reaches Lebanon", *Jerusalem Post*, Middle East Forum, October 17, 2014.]

More than this, the Netanyahu government is trying to take advantage of the Islamic State's aggression by falsely claiming that Hamas is its equivalent. In an address to the UN General Assembly on September 29, Netanyahu asserted that "Hamas's immediate goal is to destroy Israel. But Hamas has a broader objective. They also want a caliphate. Hamas shares the global ambitions of its fellow militant Islamists."

Thus, Netanyahu claimed that it is wrong for countries to criticise Israel's brutal treatment of the Palestinians in its conflict with Hamas, pointing out that "the same countries that now support confronting ISIS, opposed Israel for confronting Hamas. They evidently don't understand that ISIS and Hamas are branches of the same poisonous tree. ISIS and Hamas share a fanatical creed, which they both seek to impose well beyond the territory under their control."

In short, Netanyahu maintained that the Islamic State and Hamas were essentially identical, "when it comes to their ultimate goals, Hamas is ISIS and ISIS is Hamas."

National interest

Now there is nothing strange about Israel's position here. It is simply acting in its own national interest. There is no reason to fight a group that doesn't threaten it. Furthermore, it is in Israel's interest to try to make it appear that it is acting for the good of all humanity when attacking Hamas, and though these arguments are unlikely to sway any UN members,



Syrian Kurds use blankets to help them cross a barbed wire border fence into Turkey.

the prime minister did provide ammunition to the Israel lobby and its supporters that could be used to persuade some gullible Americans.

It can be argued that if Israel openly entered the fray as a member of the anti-Islamic State coalition, it would be counterproductive. Since many Arabs see Israel as their major enemy, Israel's involvement in the war would turn them against fighting the Islamic State and maybe even cause some of them to support that militant jihadist group as an enemy of Israel.

So it might be understandable that the United States would not demand that Israel participate in the war against the Islamic State, just as it did not expect Israel to fight against Saddam Hussein. Although this might be understandable, if true it would mean that Israel could not really be an ally of the United States in the Middle East because it could not participate in America's wars in the region, which is the very *raison d'état* of an ally.

Conceivably, Israel could covertly support the enemies of Islamic State. Israel has been doing just that in regard to Syria. During the past two years it has launched airstrikes against Assad's forces which has helped the opposition. Israel takes the position that any attacks on its territory from Syria are the responsibility of the Assad government even if they are made by the opposition.

Moreover, just like the United States, Israel has provided training for Syrian opposition. For example, Abdul-Ilah al-Bashir al-Noeimi, currently the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of the Free Syrian Army, secretly trained in Israel in 2013 after being admitted into the country for medical treatment. [See "Report: Commander of Syrian Rebels Trained in Israel, Jewish Press News Briefs", February 24, 2014. In regard to Israeli participation in training Syrian opposition, see:

Jason Ditz, "Report Claims US, Israeli Trained Rebels Moving Toward Damascus," *Antiwar.com*, August 25, 2013; Jinan Mantash, "Israeli analyst confirms link between Israel, 'moderate' Syrian rebels," *Alakbar English*, October 17, 2014.]

Staying out of the fray

Israel's pro-rebel activities in the Syrian conflict have not been counterproductive in that they have not caused any of Assad's many Arab enemies to abandon their effort to remove his regime. But it is not apparent that Israel is taking any steps like this regarding the Islamic State, and the United States does not seem to be pressuring it to do so.

What this means is that Israel is not really any type of ally of the United States. It does not bend its foreign policy to aid the United States but only acts in its own interest. It takes actions against the Assad regime because the latter is an ally of Iran and provides a conduit for weapons being sent to Israeli's enemy Hezbollah.

Israel's inaction toward the Islamic State, despite its close proximity, should actually provide a model for the United States to emulate. It shows that the Islamic State should not be regarded as a threat to the faraway United States. And this lesson is further confirmed by the fact that the nearby Islamic countries, which should be far more endangered than the United States, do not seem to be fighting hard against it.

Considering Israel's inactivity, it is ironic that in the United States it is the supporters of Israel, such as the neoconservatives, who have taken the lead in pushing for a hard-line American military position against the Islamic State. [See Jim Lobe, "Project for a New American Imbroglio", *LobeLog Foreign Policy*, August 28, 2014.]

Considering Israel's inactivity, it is ironic that in the United States it is the supporters of Israel, who have taken the lead in pushing for a hard-line American military position against the Islamic State

IS



Neocon Max Boot, for example, wrote about the need for “a politico-military strategy to annihilate ISIS rather than simply chip around the edges of its burgeoning empire”, which would “require a commitment of some 10,000 US advisors and Special Operators, along with enhanced air power, to work with moderate elements in both Iraq and Syria.”

Fred and Kimberly Kagan have developed a strategic plan involving up to 25,000 American ground troops to combat the Islamic State, which I have already discussed at length. Some of the other noted members of the neocon war-on-the-Islamic-State chorus include Bill Kristol, John Podhoretz, Dan Senor, David Brooks, John Bolton, Richard Perle, Danielle Pletka (vice president for foreign and defence policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute), and, as noted earlier, Charles Krauthammer.

Needless to say, neither the neocons, nor any other mainstream commentators for that matter, have uttered a word about Israel's inaction. As Scott McConnell wrote in August in *The American Conservative*, “over the past two generations thousands of articles have been written proclaiming that Israel is a ‘vital strategic ally’ of the United States, our best and only friend in the ‘volatile’ Middle East. The claim is commonplace among serving and aspiring Congressmen. I may have missed it, but has anyone seen a hint that our vital regional ally could be of any assistance at all in the supposedly civilisational battle against ISIS?”

Those American supporters of Israel who have, because of their influence on American Middle East policy, have promoted and supported the United States in endless wars creating a regional environment beneficial to Israel from the perspective of the Israeli Right.

Information Clearing House ✪

So much for consulting with the First Nations

Leaders angered as South Australia's Premier refuses to include leaders in meeting with Andrew Forrest, Professor Marcia Langton to discuss concerns on “Creating Parity”

Gerry Georgatos

So much for consulting with First Nations People over Andrew Forrest's controversial “Creating Parity” report, says the First Nations People of South Australia. When Forrest and his assistant author of the report, Professor Marcia Langton arrived in Adelaide last month to discuss the proposal with South Australia's Labor Premier, Jay Weatherill requests for First Nations leaders to attend also were rejected.

The Forrest report has been heavily criticised by First Nations People in South Australia, none of whom were adequately consulted before the Creating Parity report was being developed nor since its release but that has not stopped Premier Weatherill delivering glowing support for the reports' recommendations.

Weatherill received a formal request that leaders of South Australia's First Nations clans be included in the meeting with Forrest and Professor Langton but the request was rejected. Instead, it was only Weatherill and government advisers included.

Weatherill has come out in glowing support of the report's recommendations which has surprised and angered many First Nations communities in the State.

South Australian First Nations leaders have labelled the report's recommendations as “reductionist, paternalistic and assimilationist”. That was why the Premier received a request to allow First Nations leaders be included so they could discuss their concerns.

Local rights advocate, Roxley Foley, son of Dr Gary Foley, was scathing of the report labelling it the “worst, most dangerous proposal” he had ever seen on Indigenous rights.

Chair of the Narrungga People, Tauto Sansbury was among those leaders nominated to attend the discussions and he was furious the Premier had denied him and other leaders the opportunity to be included.

“Jay Weatherill may be Premier but he must respect that he cannot speak for our people, or understand as we understand ourselves,” Sansbury said.

“The impacts from this report, if implemented, will stretch beyond the imagination, they will hit us hard.”

Premier Weatherill has already announced he would offer the broadest possible support to the 27 recommendations in the “Creating Parity” report including support for the controversial expansion of income management to all working age Centrelink recipients, which is potentially up to 2.5 million people.

Weatherill's blanket endorsement of the report puts him at odds with federal Labor, which has refused to back the “Creating Parity” report in its entirety. Not even Prime Minister, Tony Abbott has completely backed the recommendations.

On the same day as Premier Weatherill held his meeting with Forrest and Professor Langton, nearby South Australia's Parliament House, at the vast Tandanya Cultural Centre, the large Tandanya auditorium was filled with First Peoples from communities from across the state to hear the other side of the story on Forrest's and Langton's report. In the audience were Liberal Opposition leader, Steven Marshall and Greens parliamentarian, Tammy Franks.

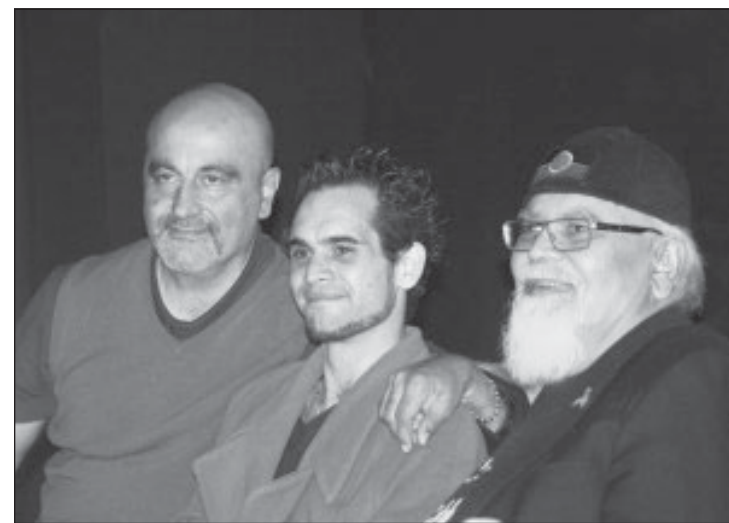
“I take it not only as a slap in the face but as a slap in the face to all Aboriginal people. Premier Weatherill refused our inclusion in the meeting. So much for consultation,” Sansbury said. “Income management is a failed policy that disempowers and humiliates vulnerable members of the community.”

But Forrest's report is not limited to income management. Many believe the report's recommendations actually seek to support the erosion of Aboriginal land rights. Sansbury said it was clear in the report that it supports “a land grab.”

“Under the guise of purported economic rights instead of land rights, they want to effectively freehold our lands so they can grab the land,” Sansbury said. “If they monetise the land, they can buy the land. There is no reason why we can't own our homes and enterprises on our lands without putting our land at risk by having it monetised and put at risk of default.

“What will happen is our people will be enticed with low interest loans and the most vulnerable will default and then they'll take the land – the land that will have been used as security for the low interest loan. It will go into non-Aboriginal ownership.

“What little worth Native Title is, well, they now want Native Title and the whole Native Title process out of the way. Recommendation 26



Rights advocate, Roxley Foley, son of Dr Gary Foley, with Chair of the Narrungga People, Tauto Sansbury at the meeting in Adelaide of community representatives to discuss their concerns with Andrew Forrest's “Creating Parity” report. (Photo: Gerry Georgatos)

of the report is about Traditional Owners selling our lands to interested parties effectively.

“We have to put aside small issues and unite. We have to stand together on the big picture, on who we are and move on all this before it's too late,” Sansbury said.

Sansbury said he was concerned if the Forrest report's recommendations were implemented they would compound and worsen extreme poverty, homelessness, arrest rates, suicide rates.

“The emotional, social wellbeing of our people, their mental health is at risk from this report that belongs to a time long gone, long outdated, to before the 1930s,” Sansbury said. “It is up to us to empower ourselves with a belief that we can stop this and to stand up in numbers, right across Adelaide, right across South Australia, right across the whole of this country.”

Advocate, Nadine Schoen said the Forrest report pushes for Aboriginal communities to change from high cultural contexts to low cultural contexts.

“We need to mobilise, we need to critically think, we need to stand in the way,” Schoen said.

Roxley Foley was also scathing in his assessment of the Forrest report, declaring delegations of First Peoples needed to go to all the communities to explain to them what is happening, what is at risk.

“In all my years, I have never seen anything worse or more dangerous than the Forrest report, it will take us backwards,” Foley said. “There has never been a more powerful opportunity to mobilise, to bring our people together, to unite in the struggle against the agendas of this government and of the Forrest report.”

The Greens Tammy Franks said she was stunned the Labor Premier, Jay Weatherill would support the Forrest report. “I am at a loss to understand why he has given so much support to this report,” Franks said.

South Australian parliamentarian, Kelly Vincent from Dignity for Disability, also condemned Premier Weatherill's blanket endorsement of the report.

“The recommendations in the Forrest Review further restrict access to the Disability Support Pension, make it easier for payments to job seekers to be cut or suspended without warning or justification, which will increase poverty without dealing with the fundamental under-supply of jobs, especially in regional and remote communities and the many societal barriers Aboriginal people and people with disabilities in particular can face when looking for work,” Vincent said.

“The Forrest recommendations regarding land ownership have the potential to further erode Aboriginal control of their lands and communities, which will destabilise these communities and further deny them the right to self-determination.”

National Indigenous Times

For analysis of report, see Guardian, “Dispossession, disempowerment: The Forrest ‘solution’ for first Australians”, #1652, 20-08-2014. ✪

Right wing hypocrisy on Berlin wall

Victor Grossmann

BERLIN: American readers are now probably wondering and/or worrying about their own election results. But, different as they may be, there are similarities between there and here. In the US Republicans are loudly jubilant. Jubilation here is about an event 25 years ago.

The joy for most people was justified. But every day and every evening endless hours of TV and op-ed columns treating us to rhapsodic notes about the clefts in the Berlin Wall have a triumphant undertone: "We beat those red SOB!" Weren't both defeats, of today's Democrats and yesterday's GDR, as much due to the wealth of the winners as to the losers' loss of contact, their neglect of rapport with the feelings and hopes of much of the population?

But is there not, hidden behind the confetti, helium balloons or crowing of the victors in both Germany and the US an occasional jarring note of worried anxiety?

A man with good reason for anxiety, as we shall see later, is Germany's president, Joachim Gauck. A pastor by profession, he is a skilled rhetorician and notable father figure, both suited to a position tailored to New Year's addresses, unveiling monuments and greeting foreign kings and presidents, while Merkel and her cabinet ministers take care of the politics.

The cameras usually show him with a broad paternal smile, occasionally moistened by tears when he recalls the suffering endured under that repressive dictatorial regime in East Germany, where he lived, preached (and actually got along very well) until those crucial changes 25 years ago opened wide new horizons – and the portals of a presidential palace in Berlin's Tiergarten park.

But those portals – and all the celebrations – cannot shield Herr Gauck from some anxious worries. For example, a majority of Germans stubbornly oppose foreign military involvement. And he scolded, though with careful words: "We should not use our troops too quickly, but we must not let reservations based on Germany's past history stop us, together with the European Union, NATO and the UN, from sending them in whenever necessary to maintain a world order which permits Germany to coordinate its interests with its basic values."

In GDR days his church, like most dissidents, demanded disarmament. But in 2012 he proudly told officers: "Germany has taken this road since reunification ... step by step changing from a beneficiary to a guarantor of international security and order ... In the Balkans, along the Hindu Kush Mountains and the Horn of Africa, the Bundeswehr is engaged in confronting terror and pirates. Who would have thought that possible 20 years ago?"

I think of the Balkans, where on May 30, 1999 a NATO missile destroyed a civilian bridge at a Sunday marketplace in the little Serbian town of Varvarin. Another missile minutes later killed those who had run to help. A victim of the first attack was Sanya Milenkovic, a girl of 16, a brilliant mathematics pupil. In all 10 died and 17 were severely wounded.

Or I recall how on September

4, 2009 up to 142 Afghan civilians in Kunduz, many of them children, were killed by a bomber called in by German Colonel Georg Klein, again without even the usual warning fly-over. His courage – from a safe distance – was rewarded with a promotion to Brigadier General. But, as Gauck insists, we "shouldn't reject from the start the use of military methods as a last resort."

In September, at Gdansk in Poland, he equated Nazi Germany's attack there 75 years ago with current Russian policy in the Ukraine. In his usual slightly veiled yet menacing language he threatened Putin: "History teaches us that territorial concessions often only whet the appetite of aggressors. Europe will hold to its libertarian values. We will adjust our political path, our economy and our defence preparedness to this new situation."

He did not overly stress that his father, like his mother an early Nazi Party member – had been a loyal captain in Danzig, as Gdansk was then called by the Germans, during World War II before advancing to teach Navigation and Military Law to future officers. Doubtless to his joy, Poland, backed by NATO, is moving more troops to the Russian border, making de-escalation in the Ukraine even tougher.

German uniforms have been deployed in 13 foreign regions since unification: over Serbia, in Kosovo, Afghanistan, in naval blockades at Lebanon and the Horn of Africa, in Turkey with Patriot missiles at the Syrian border, and in many African countries. But still too few for Joachim Gauck!

This relates to another worry of his. Although a polled majority wants no more military adventures, only one party in the Bundestag opposes past, present and future foreign deployments; that is the Left party. And now these heretics may become, for the first time, the leading party in a German state, Thuringia!

State politics are not directly tied to military matters but a Left minister-president, Bodo Ramelow, would automatically become a member and occasional chair of Germany's Upper House (Bundesrat); his position could help legitimise his party in western Germany where age-old anti-Communist prejudices have thus far kept it to a role as despised ragamuffins, with low polling results. But Ramelow cannot easily be red-baited as a "left-over hack from the old GDR, with Stasi connections;" until moving east in 1990 he was a proper, pious, church-going West German.

The Left won this unprecedented opportunity by coming in a close second to the Christian Democrats (CDU) in state elections, and because the badly-beaten Social Democrats (SPD) preferred gaining respect as junior partners with the Left to getting further squeezed as juniors by overbearing Christian Democrats, which had cost them half their votes. This also gave the Greens a chance to join in and get two cabinet seats. The Thuringian SPD leaders voted unanimously to take this path, then put it to a membership referendum to make a final decision. A quick and angry counterattack was immediately mounted; heading the pack was Joachim Gauck:

"People of my age who experienced the GDR (East Germany) will have real trouble swallowing



Germany's leading anti-Communist and anti-progressive, Joachim Gauck.

this. We ... respect decisions by the people but, all the same, must ask ourselves: Is this party, which is to provide the minister-president, really far enough removed from ideas once held by the ruling Socialist Unity Party (GDR predecessor of the Left) about oppressing its people so that we can now fully trust it? ... What is this party in reality?"

Not everyone was happy about Gauck's interference. SPD Vice-Chairman Ralph Stegner said: "In controversial questions of ongoing party politics it is wise and correct to maintain reserve, for the official authority of the president depends on his maintaining distinct non-partisanship."

The noted Lutheran theologian and a leading dissident in the GDR 25 years ago, Friedrich Schorlemmer, called Gauck's condemnation "completely absurd ... Nowhere can I observe that the Left party is acting in any way outside the law of the land."

A commentary in the important *Der Spiegel Online* stated: "Now he has gone beyond the bounds of his office. Worse yet: He is mixing directly in the process of forming a government in Thuringia, during a referendum among SPD members on whether their party should negotiate a Left-SPD-Green coalition ... In a free election the citizens gave the Left, the SPD and the Greens a slim majority in the legislature. A

coalition between Christian Democrats and SPD could also rule by an equally slim majority. The coming suspense-filled weeks will decide who is to become minister-president. That is democracy. Joachim Gauck has done it no service."

The SPD membership has since given the three-way coalition a go-ahead signal with nearly 70 percent approval. Despite Gauck! A special congress of the Left has done the same; the new coalition now seems very likely. This will strike a blow against the worst of German caveman-rightists, but may also raise questions as complicated as anthropologist debates on how many Neanderthal genes remain today in Europeans' cell structures.

The SPD, and even more the Greens, will exact a price for joining a Left-led government which they can upset with a single No-vote. They want Ramelow's party not only to vigorously condemn the GDR and join in building monuments and revamping museums in this spirit, but to suppress any members who refuse to reject all the GDR stood for, good or bad.

This reminds me personally of the old red-baiting era of Joe McCarthy and the HUAC. And it brings to mind that it was the SPD and the Greens who nominated Gauck for the presidency, pressuring other parties to back him and almost hysterically

denouncing the Left for refusing to do so.

As Germany's leading anti-Communist and anti-progressive, he had gained fame as first "Federal Commissioner for Stasi Records" from 1990 to 2000. Hatred of the Stasi – fostered far, far more intensely than any ever directed at Nazi war criminals in leading positions – was constantly inflamed anew by Gauck, and his unceasing witch-hunt against many, many thousands, some undoubtedly nasty, others by no means so, destroyed countless livelihoods and led to not a few suicides.

For some Social Democrats and Greens he has become a Frankenstein monster. But not for others, like Katrin Göring-Eckardt, chairperson of the Green caucus in the Bundestag, who also supported military measures against Libya, in Syria and Iraq and went all-out in backing the Maidan coup and demanding pressures against Russia. She said: "Gauck has done just the things we elected him to do."

As for Gauck, whose smiles will often shine down on the celebrations, it now seems that he himself once worked secretly – and on a friendly basis – with the Stasi. Yet I have a feeling that such incredible hypocrisy – and many such problems of victory or defeat – are by no means restricted to Germany.

People's World ☸

Did ISIS "find" \$420 million in "lost" US military supplies?

Robert Bridge

How does the military lose half a billion dollars worth of equipment in one year? That's the question Pentagon auditors are asking after it was revealed that US military equipment worth US\$420 million went missing in action in Afghanistan last year.

According to a recent Pentagon report, 156,000 pieces of hardware, including sophisticated weapons systems, vehicles and communications gear vanished into thin air in fiscal year 2013. The report also revealed that between 2006 and 2010, 133,557 pieces of equipment valued at \$238.4 million could not be accounted for.

No matter how you slice it, that's a lot of military hardware slipping out the back door. And since we are talking about the US Army here, where no general wants to lose a star or two over the question of inventory, it stands to reason that the figures have been greatly scaled back.

Karen Kwiatkowski, a retired US Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, confirmed the suspicion when she told *RT* "there's probably a lot more missing than what's been reported by this Inspector General's report."

So now the billion dollar question: Who has got their grimy hands

The reason for the last-minute change of tactic was not due to prudence on Obama's part, or some kind of respect for the trampled Constitution, but rather the understanding that taking sides in the Syrian civil war was a bad public relations move since Al-Qaeda was also allied with the Syrian opposition against the Assad government.

Senator Ted Cruz, who, in a moment of impressive perceptiveness for an American politician, summed up the situation best.

"We certainly don't have a dog in the fight," Cruz said, echoing the timeless message of Ron Paul. "We should be focused on defending the United States of America. That's why young men and women sign up to join the military, not to, as you know, serve as Al-Qaeda's air force."

Meanwhile, there was also the nagging problem of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal. It goes without saying that bombarding a country bubbling with large stocks of chemical weapons may not be the best way of supporting your rebel allies, who are on the ground in the thick of it. Thus, US Secretary of State John Kerry diplomatically, if not cunningly, suggested that Washington would call off the dogs if Bashar Assad would hand over his stock of chemi-

cal weapons in "one week."

Russia successfully intervened and the unenviable task of removing Syria's chemical weapons was eventually assumed by the United Nations. Today, Syria is without its chemical weapons – the poor man's equivalent of nuclear weapons – but that does not mean Washington is content with Assad – an ally of the Iranian regime (which in all likelihood is the Endgame here) – still hanging around.

In fact, Washington has openly stated its intentions of assisting the opposition to usurp the elected leader of Syria. But without the chemical casus belli for military intervention in Syria, Washington needed a new strategy to jump into the fray.

So guess what magically appeared on the desert horizon, motoring along with a head of steam in an endless convoy of Toyota Tacoma pickup trucks and sophisticated weapons – the very same brand of merchandise that went mysteriously AWOL in Afghanistan?

Yes, the bad boys of Islamic State, whose highly publicised video beheadings of several American and British journalists handed Washington the opportunity to do what it could not do just one year earlier: launch attacks on Syria territory.

Admittedly, the US military, from what we are being told, has thus far practiced restrained self-control in Syria and not gone off the rails with an attack on Syrian government forces. But that's not to say that the Pentagon's "defensive strategy" today will not abruptly morph into an all-out offensive against Assad's forces tomorrow. Indeed, it is the opinion here that only a miracle will prevent such a disastrous scenario from happening.

Unfortunately, news of America's activities in Syria is being tightly controlled by the US military, which has given up the practice of "embedded journalism" in the ranks after a few media mavericks, like the late Michael Hastings of *Rolling Stone* fame, took one too many liberties with their "privileges". To put it another way, they could not be "trusted".

Meanwhile, the aerial campaign against the barbaric Islamic State seems to have taken a backseat as the US military goes on a joyride around Syria, seemingly hunting for anything but members of IS.

Just last week, the US aerial campaign targeted new Syrian territory in the northwest of the country, this time hitting a compound belonging to the al-Nusra Front, and despite the fact this group is equally opposed to the Islamic State. It was also reported that a compound belonging to the Islamic group Ahrar al-Sham in Syria's north-western territory came under American attack, according to the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Then the US military announced it carried out air strikes against the Al-Qaeda-linked Khorasan group, an organisation few people had heard of before the aerial campaign began in Syria. According to military officials, US forces targeted several vehicles and buildings near the border with Turkey.

Increasingly, and oddly, the allegedly ruthless Islamic State seems to be falling out of the equation in Syria as a host of other lesser known groups are becoming the target of the US-led aerial campaign. This is having the effect of confusing the situation in Syria to the point that few people understand what is happening. When and if the US attacks Syrian government forces this dust being thrown into the public's face will have served its purpose.

Of course I hope I am wrong, but it appears only a matter of time before the Syria campaign, initially against Islamic State, will start to resemble the former war in Iraq, carved up with no-fly zones and massive bombardments and the eventual toppling of Damascus.

At that point, nobody will remember the name Islamic State, nor the loss of US military equipment from Afghanistan.

RT ★



Region Briefs

On November 8, Bangladesh river vessels workers in Chittagong and Mangla went on strike, demanding protection from robberies and intimidation. A few nights earlier, criminal gangs ambushed and looted a boat, with seven workers still missing. Police, navy and coastguards took no action after receiving reports of the incident. Lighter Vessels Workers Union general secretary, Alam Nabi, said that the workers felt extremely insecure and that workers around the country supported their strike. He added that the strike would continue until their demands were satisfied and the missing workers found.

On November 9, during his visit to Beijing, Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang met the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) Chairwoman, Li Xiao Lin. President Truong praised the CPAFFC's contribution to friendship between Vietnam and China. The President hoped that the CPAFFC would continue to promote exchanges benefiting their people, especially for next year's event to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Li recalled milestones in the relationship and replied positively to the President's proposals.

At a seminar on November 11, 84 people from Vietnam's northern province of Bac Giang were honoured for their hard work to escape from poverty. Ngo Sach Thuc, the Vietnam Fatherland Front President of the province, said at the seminar that together with the country's supporting policy, the province had provided considerable support for the poor. He also pointed to limitations such as poor communications that restricted the government's poverty reduction program. Participants called on the government to build more infrastructure in remote areas to facilitate local people's social and economic activities.

On November 12, a Japanese protester committed suicide by setting fire to himself at a park in Tokyo, opposing Japan's "collective self-defence right" that Parliament approved in July. The bill allowed the Japanese military to fight overseas on the excuse of defending its allies from threats. The man left a note condemning Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's militarism. Two days ago, over 1,000 people including Japanese opposition party leaders gathered in front of the parliament building protesting against the approval of the bill.

On November 12, South Korean opposition party leader, Yoon Hu-duk, proposed a bill requiring the government to restrict anti-Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) leaflets which were distributed across the border by air balloons. He added that according to the Interchange and Cooperation Act, anti-DPRK leaflets had to be approved by the related government ministry. The air balloons undermined the friendly atmosphere of scheduled high-level talks between the DPRK and South Korea, and lead to a halt in the talks he said. Progressive activists and border residents opposed the launch of the air balloons, as it increased tension.

Meanwhile, the aerial campaign against the barbaric Islamic State seems to have taken a backseat.

on America's top-shelf military hardware from Afghanistan? If all that equipment was sold or stolen, it would eventually appear on the radar. And perhaps it already has.

A likely culprit in this great American weapons heist is Islamic State, formerly known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the motley crew of ultraviolent cutthroats that rose out of the Iraqi desert at precisely the same time that US hardware in Afghanistan was disappearing from the shelf like it was Black Friday at Wal-Mart.

The curious thing about Islamic State is how this group, which is apparently so vicious that even Al-Qaeda alienated them, suddenly emerged on the scene last year, and at almost precisely the same time the Obama administration suddenly braked hard on what appeared to be an ironclad decision to invade the Syrian government of President Bashar Assad.

America's Commander-in-Chief, who has never waited in the past for congressional consent to initiate a military offensive (seven offensives to date for the Nobel Prize winner with still two years left to go), this time left the decision to Congress.

cal weapons in "one week."

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Open letter from ASLA

Australian Solidarity With Latin America – ASLA Brisbane – would like to send you warm greetings in support of the activities that are being organised in regards to the G20. We would also like to express our interest in being part of these peaceful demonstrations that have been planned. We believe that it is very important to take part in these movements where the community can express our rights in a free and democratic way.

As Latin American people living in Brisbane, we are part of this society that has offered and given us its

humanitarian support and protection when we had to leave our countries due to different reasons.

ASLA is a non-profit organisation that supports human rights and social justice – not only in our continent, but also wherever these human rights and social justice principles are in danger of being violated. Our solidarity work is focused towards the most vulnerable regions of Latin America and are aimed at supporting Indigenous communities and social projects for low socio-economic areas.

The dangers of asbestos

During Asbestos Awareness Month my fellow ambassadors Cherie Barber, Don Burke, Scott Cam, Barry Du Bois, Scott McGregor and I speak with one voice to all Australians about the dangers of asbestos to homeowners, renovators, tradies and handymen hoping they'll hear our potentially life-saving message.

For those who think asbestos-related diseases are a thing of the

past, think again. There is no safe level of exposure to asbestos fibres and if breathed in, it can have the potential to cause mesothelioma, a deadly cancer that can take 20 to 50 years to develop. There is no cure and people have a very short life expectancy – just 10 to 12 months after diagnosis.

I lost a good mate Harold Hopkins to mesothelioma because he breathed in asbestos fibres when he was a young bloke on building sites so I know first-hand how dangerous asbestos can be. Asbestos can be found in at least 1 in 3 Australian homes and it doesn't matter what kind of home you live in, brick, weatherboard, clad or fibro, so if it was built or renovated before 1987, it will most likely contain asbestos.

Australian's need to think smart, think safe and get to know asbestos this November by visiting asbestosawareness.com.au because it's not worth the risk!

Contact campaign managers Clare Collins or Alice Collins on 02 9518 4744.

John Jarratt
Ambassador: Asbestos Awareness Month Campaign ✪

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Support event outside
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Friday December 5, 5pm

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Further info Maria 0431 275 434



*Something to say?
Write to the Editor.*

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

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Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Fascism being revived



Swiss retailer Migros, coffee cream pots which included the faces of Adolf Hitler and his Italian colleague Benito Mussolini!

Fascism, accurately called “the last resort of capitalism in decline”, is being actively fostered in various countries around the world. Even more countries are putting in place laws that deny basic democratic rights while maintaining a façade of bourgeois democracy. This is usually done these days under the cloak of “combating a terrorist threat” (that the “threat” is invented is ignored by the capitalist media which are eager participants in the whole exercise).

Nowhere has resorting to fascism (and to fascist thugs) been more blatant than in Ukraine (although the post-Soviet leadership in the Baltic states has been praising the wartime Nazis and building monuments to them – at the same time as they destroyed Soviet war memorials – for several years now).

Last month's elections in Ukraine, which predictably returned the pro-NATO and pro-EU government that had been installed by the Maidan coup earlier in the year, were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation and terror. Nearly half the electorate stayed home. To bolster the illusion of inclusive democracy, half a million expats in 73 countries were designated as being eligible to vote, but most of them didn't even bother to register.

The poll itself was conducted in what Ukrainian Communist leader Peter Simonenko described as a climate of “total intimidation” with the Right-wing not only controlling a complete monopoly over the media but also using pro-fascist gangs to physically prevent the Left from taking part in the campaign.

Ivan Melnikov, deputy leader of the

Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) said the election had merely replaced the “orange” coalition with a “brown” one of “Nazi and Russophobic policy makers”. Russian senator Andrey Klishas said: “Ukrainians themselves cannot fail to notice the mass violations of human rights during the latest parliamentary campaign. These were the ban on free speech, attacks on opposition candidates, mass violence in the form of so-called ‘popular gatherings’, even lynch mobs on the side of the pro-fascist political forces.”

That did not stop the clique running the show in Kiev from declaring, apparently with no sense of irony, that the election would “usher in a new era of democracy”. They also hailed the election result as ensuring a “realistic European future” for the country, despite the fact that by severing their economic ties to Russia they have condemned Ukraine to a future of austerity and savage cuts to jobs and social services. Ukraine's future will be as grim as that of other EU “junior partners” such as Greece, Spain and Portugal.

Murderous attacks on (and “disappearances” of) progressives in the Russian-speaking east of the country led to the areas now identified as Novorossiia establishing their own self-defence militias and kicking the Kiev regime's troops out. Kiev then invaded the self-proclaimed people's republics in the east, killing thousands in aerial and artillery bombardment of housing in towns and villages. Once again, the anti-fascist militia had to defend the region and drove Kiev's army out again.

They were helped by the enormous

number of defections from the Ukrainian army (thousands of deserters have sought refuge in Russia).

Ironically, the time when Kiev's neo-Nazis were celebrating their election “victory” coincided with the 70th anniversary of Ukraine's liberation from Hitlerite occupation. Last April, Russia's parliament, the State Duma, approved a bill that provides up to five years in prison for denying the facts set out in the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals, trying to rehabilitate Nazism, or distributing false information about the actions of the Soviet Union and its allies during the Second World War.

Victor Shapinov, a former member of the left-sectarian Russian Communist Workers' Party (RKRP) and a founder of the Ukrainian Marxist organisation Union Borotba (Struggle), commented “the forces awakened by Maidan are very destructive and dangerous for all society. We are face-to-face with the Fascism of the 21st century. It is not because they have portraits of [wartime Ukrainian Nazi collaborator] Stepan Bandera or because they say ‘Ukraine über alles’ like clones of Nazi Germany.

“The nature of Fascism is that this is direct state power of big capital that uses some mass support from the middle class and other groups to destroy any political opposition with violence. This is the essence of Fascism.”

Shapinov is critical of the leadership of the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) which he says “was always seeking alliances in parliament with whichever capitalist party

was strongest. Not many people in the West know this, but before allying with the Party of Regions of [deposed President Victor] Yanukovich they were partners with the party of Yulia Tymoshenko [reactionary politician associated with the 2004 ‘Orange Revolution’ and today part of the Kiev junta].

“It was an unprincipled position by the KPU leadership and for us it meant that we couldn't just be the left wing of the Communist Party.”

At the other extreme from the struggle against Fascism in Ukraine is the case of the Swiss retailer Migros, which for reasons it has not revealed, thought it was timely to supply coffee shops and restaurants in that country with a range of coffee cream pots adorned with the faces of Adolf Hitler and his Italian colleague Benito Mussolini! A German-language news magazine exposed the extraordinary sales ploy, its reporter writing about his “horror” at being confronted with the face of Hitler while enjoying a cup of coffee in Baden.

The resultant uproar was presumably not what Migros expected (one wonders just what they *did* expect). In any case, they had to issue an apology for what their PR people called this “unforgivable incident” and to recall and replace around 2,000 cream pots that had been delivered to various cafes and shops.

It is good to know that the images of Fascism's former leaders still provoke revulsion. But images of them, even monuments to them, are still being erected and “honoured” in Ukraine, Latvia, and elsewhere. ✪

Film review by Joseph Zimmermann

Fury

The first half of the new war film *Fury* is grim, gritty, and intriguing, but soon it all goes terribly awry. The premise of the film is not particularly unique in the war movie genre, an experienced squad, or in this case the crew of a Sherman tank, have an inexperienced new recruit thrust into their ranks.

The setting for the picture is Nazi Germany in what will prove to be the final weeks of the war. The evil of the fascist state is aptly illustrated, and the landscape remains dangerous. Upon surveying the destruction all around them one GI appropriately comments, "It's hard to believe we're winning the war."

Brad Pitt portrays Staff Sergeant Collier, a combat veteran who stays alive thanks to experience and instinct, and always staying one step ahead of the situation with a sharp eye, and a steady temperament.

The film seems authentic as it shows the camaraderie, rivalry, and locker room humour of the tank crew. In the best scene of the film the crew sits down to an impromptu meal with two civilian occupants of a German home in a town that was only moments ago cleared of hostile combatants.

It is this scene in which we realise that the whole crew is on the verge of a total psychological breakdown and is likely only able to hold themselves together thanks to their training and a will to survive.

One of the strange things the viewer notices early on is the unusual amount of religious imagery and quoting of Christian Biblical verses. At first the viewer might suppose that this is going to be a device used to question the faith of man in a situation of endless horrors, which are graphically illustrated in the combat scenes.

At one point a character so prone to quoting the scripture that his nickname is "Bible" is asked if Jesus

loves Hitler, and for those keeping score at home, the answer is "yes," if Hitler were to accept Christ.

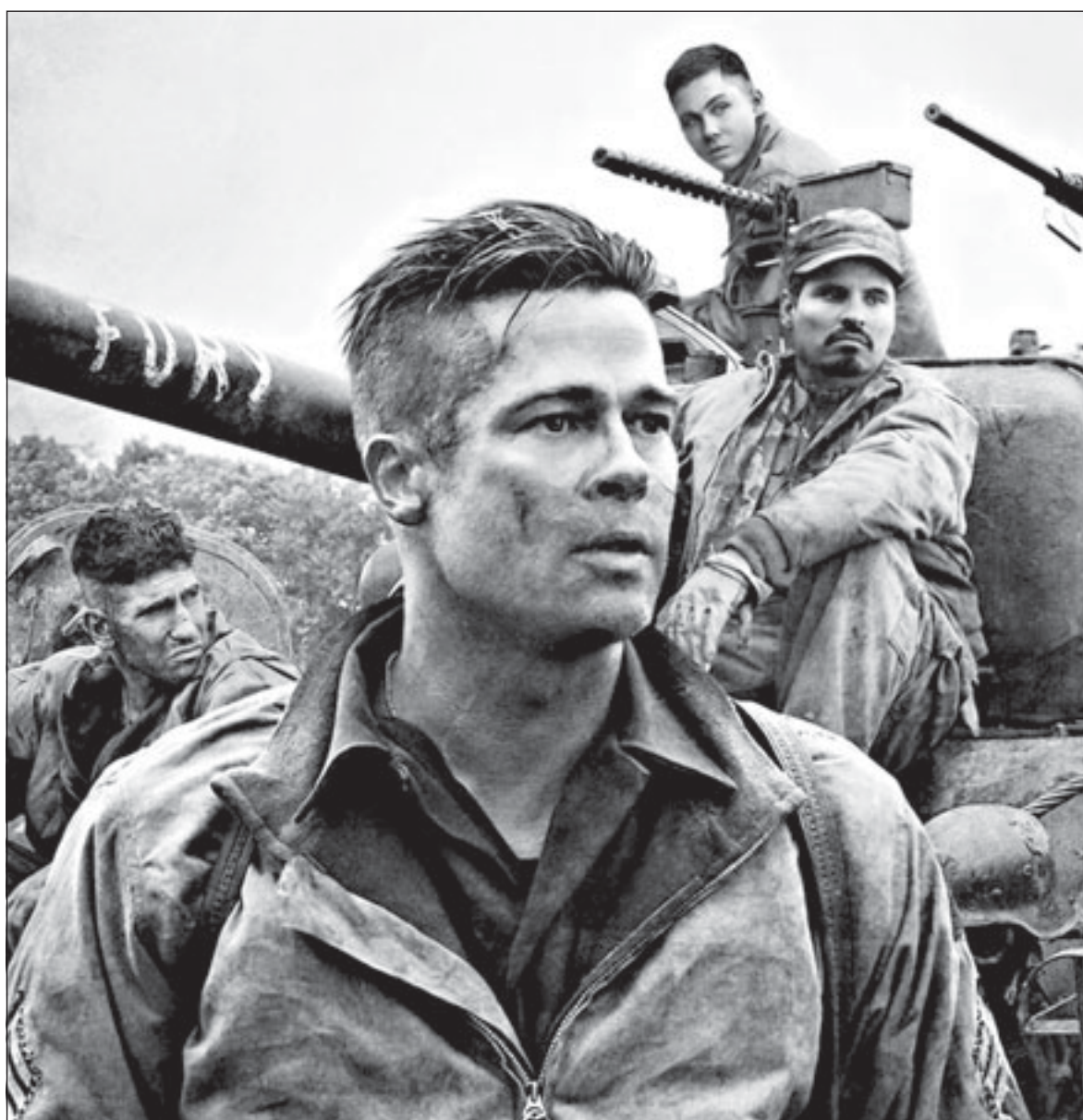
By the second half of the film two things go wildly wrong. First, the combat scenes go from the tense and shocking to so over the top and unlikely, that they seem straight out of a horror flick or adolescent video game. Secondly, the dialogue goes from being sprinkled with Bible verses to positively clogged. I began to wonder if it was the American Army or the Salvation Army that was fighting the Third Reich.

The film does boast some excellent performances, including Chicago native Michael Pena, known best for portraying farm worker activist Cesar Chávez in the film of the same name. English actor Jason Isaacs adopts a convincing New York accent in a small role as a weary and realistic Captain, and actor Jon Bernthal, who studied at the Moscow Art Theatre School, is memorable as a loudmouthed north Georgia Redneck. Sadly, these performances are all wasted by the second half of the film when the script turns utterly preposterous.

For films set during the waning days of WW2 one would do well to check out *I Was Nineteen*, a 1968 production of the German Democratic Republic, that not only deals with the fanaticism of last ditch Nazi resistance led by the SS, but unmasks the aristocratic Wehrmacht officer corps as well. For a look inside the lives of a tank crew of the same period it is hard to beat the 1969 Soviet production *In War as in War*.

As for *Fury*, after they cut out all the dirty words, it might have a future being screened at Baptist Bible summer camps or at Promise Keeper rally after-parties, but for a working class audience it will remain little more than a curious oddity in the war movie catalogue.

Worth Watching will return next week
People's World ☛



The combat scenes go from the tense and shocking to so over the top and unlikely, that they seem straight out of a horror flick or adolescent video game.

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November 20

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Anne Gardner, General Secretary Public Service Association;

November 27

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This Sydney newsagent regularly stocks *The Guardian*

Israel bans renowned doctor for life from Gaza

Ben Norton

Israel has banned Norwegian doctor and human rights activist Mads Gilbert from entering Gaza for life. Gilbert, a professor at the University Hospital of North Norway, where he has worked since 1976, earned international renown for his philanthropic work in late 2008, during Israel's Operation Cast Lead, an attack that, according to Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem, killed roughly 1,400 Gazans, including almost 800 civilians, 350 of whom were children.

The aid worker, along with fellow Norwegian doctor Erik Fosse, decided to volunteer in Gaza as soon as he heard that bombing had started, on December 27, 2008. Thanks to diplomatic and economic support (in the sum of US\$1 million of emergency funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the two physicians managed to arrive in the strip by December 30.

The Israeli government prevented all international press from entering Gaza during Cast Lead (a documentary, *The War Around Us*, was made about the only two foreign reporters in the strip at the time), in what Gilbert called Israel's insidious "PR plan". The doctor, as one of the only international aid workers in Gaza, thus devoted considerable time to speaking with local Palestinian news outlets, some of whom were reporting on behalf of foreign networks including BBC, CNN, ABC, and Al Jazeera.

BBC aired an interview with Gilbert, conducted in the hospital. The questions asked, and the answers garnered, were eerily similar to those he would give just five years later, during Operation Protective Edge. The interviewer began by asking him to respond to Israel's claims that it was not targeting civilians, that it was only attacking Hamas militants. Gilbert called the claim "an absolutely stupid statement" and explained that, among the hundreds of patients he had seen at that point, only two had been fighters. The "large majority" were women, children, and male civilians. "These numbers are contradictory to everything Israel says," he reported.

Gilbert drew attention to the fact that the overflowing hospital did not have enough supplies to treat all of its patients, and censured the international community for doing nothing to assist them. Israel would not let in foreign doctors, and yet Palestinians were "dying waiting for surgery".

"This is a complete disaster," he remarked, calling it "the worst man-made disaster" he could think of. "There are injuries you just don't want to see in this world."

Operation Protective Edge

In 2008 and 2009, Gilbert treated Palestinians who had been grievously wounded by Israel's use of experimental and illegal chemical weapons, including white phosphorous, dense inert metal explosives (DIME) munitions, and flechette shells. In July 2014, in the midst of Israel's most recent attack on Gaza, Gilbert spoke with *Electronic Intifada*, revealing that he saw indications of renewed use of DIME weapons and flechettes.

While volunteering in Shifa hospital this past summer, Gaza's principal medical facility, Gilbert penned an open letter, lamenting the unspeakable horrors the Israeli military was instigating.

[Israel's] "ground invasion" of Gaza resulted in scores and carloads with maimed, torn apart, bleeding, shivering, dying ... All sorts of injured Palestinians, all ages, all civilians, all innocent.

The heroes in the ambulances and in all of Gaza's hospitals are working 12 to 24-hour shifts, grey from fatigue and inhuman workloads (without payment in Shifa for the last four months). They care, triage, try to understand the incomprehensible chaos of bodies, sizes, limbs, walking, not walking, breathing, not breathing, bleeding, not bleeding humans. Humans!

Ashy grey faces – Oh no! not one more load of tens of maimed and bleeding. We still have lakes of blood on the floor in the emergency room, piles of dripping, blood-soaked bandages to clear out – oh – the cleaners, everywhere, swiftly shovelling the blood and discarded tissues, hair, clothes, cannulas – the leftovers from death – all taken away ... to be prepared again, to be repeated all over.

More than 100 cases came to Shifa in the last 24 hours. Enough for a large well-trained hospital with everything, but here – almost nothing: electricity, water, disposables, drugs, operating-room tables, instruments, monitors – all rusted and as if taken from museums of yesterday's hospitals. But they do not complain, these heroes.

Now, once more treated like animals by "the most moral army in the world."

The doctor directed one heart-wrenching passage to President Obama, writing "Mr Obama – do you have a heart? I invite you – spend one night – just one night – with us in Shifa. I am convinced, 100 percent, it would change history. Nobody with a heart and power could ever walk away from a night in Shifa without being determined to end the slaughter of the Palestinian people."

Israel later attacked Shifa hospital. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) "strongly condemn[ed]" the incursion, saying it "demonstrate[d]" how civilians in Gaza have nowhere safe to go." MSF director Marie-Noëlle Rodrigue stated, in an official statement, "When the Israeli army orders civilians to evacuate their houses and their neighbourhoods, where is there for them to go? Gazans have no freedom of movement and cannot take refuge outside Gaza. They are effectively trapped." Shifa was one of the over 10 medical facilities Israel bombed in its 50-day offensive.

Human rights work

In 2000, Gilbert made headlines for saving the life of a skier who had been trapped in sub-zero water. She had been pronounced clinically dead, with a body temperature of 57 °F, but Gilbert managed to revive her. For his service, Gilbert was awarded the Northern Norwegian of the Year award.

Before Operation Protective Edge commenced in early July 2014, Gilbert toured medical and health facilities and individual homes in Gaza, researching for a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) report on the dire state of the strip's health sector. He wrote of "overstretched" health facilities, widespread physical and psychological trauma, "a deep financial



Doctor Mads Gilbert.

crisis," a lack of needed medical supplies, and a "severe energy crisis."

He also noted the "devastating results of the blockade imposed by the Government of Israel," with rampant poverty, a 38.5% unemployment rate, food insecurity in at least 57% of households, and inadequate access to clean water. All of these already extreme ills were only exacerbated by the July-August Israeli assault on Gaza, an onslaught that left roughly 2,200 Palestinians dead, including over 1,500 civilians, more than 500 of whom were children.

Gilbert is not the only one Israel has recently prevented from entering Gaza. In August, just after the end of its military assault, Israel refused to allow Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the world's leading human rights organisations, from entering the strip, impeding them from conducting war crimes investigations. The organisations had been requesting access for over a month, before Israel had even begun its ground invasion of Gaza, yet were continuously prevented from doing so, Israeli journalist Amira Hass reported in *Haaretz*, "using various bureaucratic excuses".

Israel has banned Human Right Watch investigators from entering Gaza since 2006; Amnesty International has been refused access since 2012. Dr Mads Gilbert is the latest esteemed persona non grata to be added to this growing list.

Solidarity, not pity

Other aid workers and medical professionals have faced even worse consequences for volunteering to help Palestinians. In August, Israeli occupation forces killed a social worker. In the same month, as the Israeli military engaged in a campaign to target and openly murder Palestinian civilians who spoke Hebrew, Israeli forces assassinated volunteers working with the Palestine Red Crescent, a non-profit humanitarian organisation, part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

A common myth suggests that Israel ended its occupation of Gaza with its 2005 disengagement. The state's ability to ban, and even kill, internationally recognised human rights organisations and doctors – not to mention food, construction equipment, and medical supplies – from entering Palestinian territory, however, demonstrates that Gaza is by no means autonomous. Israel's siege of the strip is clearly a continuation of its 47-year-long illegal military occupation.

As legal scholar Noura Erakat explains:

Despite removing 8,000 settlers and the military infrastructure that protected their illegal presence, Israel maintained effective control of the Gaza Strip and thus remains the occupying power as defined by Article 47 of the Hague Regulations. To date, Israel maintains control of the territory's air space, territorial waters, electromagnetic sphere, population registry and the movement of all goods and people.

Palestinians have yet to experience a day of self-governance. Israel immediately imposed a siege upon the Gaza Strip when Hamas won parliamentary elections in January 2006 and tightened it severely when Hamas routed Fatah in June 2007. The siege has created a "humanitarian catastrophe" in the Gaza Strip. Inhabitants will not be able to access clean water, electricity or tend to even the most urgent medical needs. The World Health Organisation explains that the Gaza Strip will be unlivable by 2020. Not only did Israel not end its occupation, it has created a situation in which Palestinians cannot survive in the long-term.

In his July interview with *Electronic Intifada*, Gilbert made it clear that his work as a medical professional cannot be done – the Palestinian people cannot live healthy, yet alone free, lives – while Israel continues its illegal siege and occupation. "As a doctor, my prescription is very clear. Number one, stop the bombing, and that means stop Israel from bombing civilians and indiscriminately hitting families. Number two, lift the siege. And number three, find a political solution," he stated.

In a late October discussion with the *Daily Targum*, Gilbert encouraged Americans to do what they can to speak out against Israel's illegal occupation and blockade of the Palestinian territories, and to pressure their government to stop its indefatigable support for Israeli crimes.

At present, the US provides Israel with over US\$3.1 billion of military aid per year. In the past 52 years, over US\$100 billion US tax dollars have been given to the country in military aid alone.

"You are the change-makers," Gilbert told American readers. "The key to the change when it comes to the occupation of Palestine lies in the United States."

"Solidarity, not pity," he said, is the solution.

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