



Defend the ABC

Peter Mac

Big rallies were held in state capitals last weekend in opposition to the Abbott government's proposal to cut ABC funding by \$254 million (4.6 percent) and SBS funding by \$53.7 million (3.7 percent).

In announcing the cuts the government has broken Abbott's pre-election promise to preserve ABC funding. The cuts are also likely to exceed eight percent per annum because of the government's axing of the ABC's overseas broadcasting service, plus the cost of redundancy payments for retrenched ABC staff, which was not allowed for in government funding estimates.

On Monday ABC manager Mark Scott announced that the cuts would result in the dumping of some programs and the loss of 400 jobs.

The Minister for Communications, Malcolm Turnbull, has also recommended that the roles of managing director and editor in chief, both of which are currently filled by Scott, should be split into two separate positions, and that the current role of chief operating and financial officer should also be separated.

Moreover, Turnbull wants the chief financial officer and editor in chief to report directly to the board. The recommendations are an obvious attempt to wrest editorial control from Scott, who has fought tenaciously to preserve the ABC's independence, and to allow the board to influence editorial and financial policy.

Lots of unhelpful advice

The major commercial broadcasters bitterly resent the ABC's involvement in digital broadcasting. To fulfil its charter obligations the ABC must develop in digital broadcasting, which is likely to become the dominant media form.

A retreat by the ABC from this media area would not only allow commercial broadcasters to maximise their profits but also facilitate media domination by right-wing forces.

Turnbull denies that the government wants the ABC to curtail or abandon digital broadcasting, but last week Anne Ruston, chairwoman of the Senate estimates committee, contradicted him, declaring that the ABC should boost its broadcasts to rural and regional areas, rather than developing its digital broadcasting capability.

She stated: "... [Scott] has to find savings in places that are not his core business. Running around chasing new platforms that have been extraordinarily well covered by commercial operators - he's got to do what others aren't doing before he starts competing with others."

Coalition MPs are also demanding that the ABC increase its presence in each state, despite the extra cost.

Closing state operations is a terrible move, because it inevitably involves loss of jobs and



ABC supporters in Sydney. (Photo: Jo Di Pietro)

cuts to local news content. However, centralising ABC offices is an obvious way to reduce costs, as this and previous coalition governments have demanded, and one of the government's current recommendations is for the ABC and SBS to collocate their offices.

Nevertheless, education minister and South Australian MP Christopher Pyne is conducting a campaign for the ABC to maintain its Adelaide production studios.

Fearing a voter backlash against the program cuts, last week he authorised an on-line petition against closure of the Adelaide studios, which received more than 2,000 signatures in two days and caused Turnbull considerable embarrassment.

To offset the funding cuts SBS management has sought permission from Turnbull to double the advertising content in its broadcasts.

That puts him in a difficult position. It's an obvious method of generating income, and the government is considering introducing legislation to facilitate it. However, increasing SBS advertising would not only anger viewers but would also enrage commercial broadcasters, who claim they would lose \$200 million in advertising revenue to SBS over five years.

The Ten Network's chief executive Hamish MacDonald advised the ABC to "save \$15 million in marketing because they are not required to make a profit, [and] merge the back offices of

the ABC and SBS, which would probably save them another \$25 million."

Conservative governments have insisted for years that the ABC must market its programs in order to reduce the funding load on the government, and the ABC shops have been a commercial success. Eliminating them would cost money rather than saving it.

Moreover, the government's still-secret Lewis report claimed that \$59.1 million could be saved by merging ABC and SBS "back room" services, but the \$254 million funding cut dwarfs this figure, and according to Scott the Lewis "savings" measures would actually cost \$76 million to implement.

On saving Aunty

Liberal National Party MP James McGrath has claimed that Scott is "pandering to inner-city socialists who are so fickle and will dump him". Some Liberals have questioned why Australia needs the ABC at all, but most know that killing it off would be politically suicidal.

In the short term the government intends to exert control over ABC news and current affairs, to use the ABC Board to pressure the ABC into adopting a right-wing editorial bias, and to reduce or eliminate ABC activities that compete with those of the commercial broadcasters, particularly in digital broadcasting.

The coalition's emerging long term strategy

is to shrink the role of the ABC, so that it eventually provides only local news and an emergency warning service for rural and regional areas, and does not compete with commercial broadcasters.

However, the public strongly backs the ABC, and last week veteran independent MP Bob Katter stated that although he often disagreed with the ABC he supported it because it was not controlled by big corporations.

The importance of a national broadcast network was highlighted in the United States last week. President Obama was due to give a speech to outline measures to grant citizenship rights to millions of people who have entered the US illegally, but now form a crucial element of its workforce.

However, the Republicans' bitter opposition to the scheme was supported by the commercial media operators, who refused to broadcast Obama's speech.

The US President is often described as the world's most powerful person, but when the chips were down he didn't have the power to broadcast a message of major national importance to the people of his country.

That's what you get when you have no national broadcaster, and that's the way the ABC is heading under the coalition government. And that's just one of the many reasons why we have to stop them. ☆

3  Land Rights under attack

5  Abbott government dogged by splits

10  Culture & Life "Iron clad guarantee"

12  A tradition of political struggle

Guardian

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The struggle will sharpen

The cutting back and privatisation of all arms of government is happening at an increasing rate. It is accompanied by attacks on public sector workers: on their wages and conditions and their very jobs. When earlier this month the Abbott government announced a “pay increase” that is below the cost of living and hence a pay cut for military personnel it was a signal of what was to come for the whole public service.

The government was using what Abbott is fond of calling “the brave men and women of the Australian Defence Force” as a club to beat up the whole of the public service. Workplace agreements for 165,000 public servants in more than 100 agencies ended in June. In the negotiating process the military is always the last sector to sign off. This time it was the first. In industrial matters the defence force has no defence: it cannot take action against the government.

But public sector workers aren't taking it lying down. Last week Human Services staff voted overwhelmingly for industrial action in protest at a proposal that will see two thirds of their rights stripped and cuts to an annual pay offer of less than 1%. An industrial action ballot at Veteran Affairs is underway. In a statement the Community and Public Sector Union national secretary Nadine Flood stated: “Bargaining across the public service has become a battleground as workers face wholesale cuts to their conditions and rights in return for a pay offer under 1%.” (See story opposite.)

The national broadcaster is also in the wide net, being hit by a slash and burn offensive that will hit news and current affairs and much more (see story page 1).

The government knows that the resultant savage exploitation and unemployment, the cutbacks and neo-liberal policies are causing widespread anger and opposition. Hence the increased powers to the police and spy agencies.

Fascism is characterised as the “terrorist dictatorship of finance capital”. We already have the dictatorship of finance capital. As the Australian people more and more reject the policies and the consequences of the policies being dictated by the big corporations the class struggle will sharpen. This is the nature of the class system in which we live.

Rationalising the system

In 2001 the then industrial relations minister in the Howard government, Tony Abbott, stated, “We can't abolish poverty because poverty, in part, is a function of individual behaviour ... We can't stop people from making mistakes that cause them to be less well-off than they might otherwise be.”

So, if you are poor and cannot make ends meet, if your children go to school with holes in their shoes, or if you lose your job and get thrown out of your house it is not the fault of the employer or economic policies or the social system or the landlord – it is the result of your own “behaviour” or that you have made “mistakes”.

This attitude reflects Abbott's and his government's utter contempt for working people. It is also reflected in the vicious budget they are attempting to impose on Australian workers, the working poor, the unemployed, the elderly and in general on the most vulnerable.

This is the system Abbott is perpetuating, a system based on theft, a system which is by definition corrupt to its core. Witness the ICAC investigations in NSW, a glimpse of a wider dysfunction of gross exploitation and warmongering, all in the name of democracy and freedom.

As the great Communist poet Nazim Hikmet put it: “You love your country/ But one day/they may endorse it over to America/ and you, too, with your great freedom/ you have the freedom to become an airbase/ there is no need to choose freedom:/ you are free./ But this kind of freedom/ is a sad affair under the stars.”

PRESS FUND

Under the Abbott government's proposed Medicare amendments, pensioners would have to pay the \$7 co-payment fee for 10 visits per year, after which they'd be covered for the scheduled fee as currently. Unfortunately, the costs incurred by the GP in verifying whether they'd already visited other practitioners, plus chasing relatives or carers of patients with severe dementia for payment, would undoubtedly exceed the co-payments received. However, doctors who decided not to charge the fee would be fined an equivalent amount by the government! The *Guardian* is dedicated to the struggle to block the co-payment scheme and bring down the odious Abbott government. However, we really need your help by way of Press Fund contributions, so please send us something for the next issue if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's supporters as follows:

G Ditura \$5, Mark Mannion \$5, “Round Figure” \$10.00, Eddie Seymour \$100, Brian Lowe \$10

This week's total: \$130 Progressive total: \$7,790

Employment Dept staff likely to reject “nasty” deal

Employment Minister Eric Abetz's hardline approach to public sector pay and conditions is facing a big test with staff in his own department set to vote on a deal that cuts a raft of their conditions and rights in return for a pay rise of less than 1% a year.

The Minister's own staff are expected to vote on a new agreement in early December but already a survey of workers indicates the Department's proposals are unacceptable. The Department is proposing a pay rise of 0.5% a year in return for cutting a raft of conditions, or 1% if staff also increase working hours, with the loss of 46 jobs.

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) national secretary Nadine Flood said: “Employment staff are angry and disappointed by these mean and nasty proposals, but they are not surprised by them.”

“Bargaining across the public service has become a battleground as workers face wholesale cuts to their conditions and rights in return for pay offers under 1%.”

“Minister Abetz is the one who imposed this unworkable policy on Departments and now he is trying to get his own staff to swallow the

dud deal the government's policy has produced.

“More than 70 public service agencies have been trying to bargain under his policy for the last six months and not one has been able to present a reasonable deal to staff. Does he really expect his own staff to stomach such a terrible deal?” asked Ms Flood.

Staff are particularly alarmed by the fact that in order to meet government bargaining rules, the Department of Employment is required to cut 46 jobs over the life of the agreement.

Last week Human Services staff voted overwhelmingly for industrial action in protest at a proposal that will see two thirds of their rights stripped and cuts to conditions for an annual pay offer of below 1%. An industrial action ballot at Veterans' Affairs is currently underway.

The cuts to conditions and rights in the proposed Employment Department agreement include the removal of protection around 15.4% super, making it harder for staff to progress to higher levels, cutting employees rights to be represented by a union, increasing working hours, stopping offices from closing early on Christmas Eve and many others.

“This offer to Minister Abetz's own staff shows how ludicrous the government's policy is. These show that while the Department has gained efficiencies in travel, accommodation, printing, reducing duplication and simplifying business processes, none of these count in bargaining under Minister Abetz's rules. He defines productivity as new cuts to employees' conditions that provide cashable savings. It is a bizarre, alternate IR universe.

“This deal for Employment staff follows the script that Minister Abetz has written for public service bargaining – strip away important rights, make it easier to sack public servants, and remove protections around their super, all for a 0.5% pay rise, way below the cost of living.

That is why public servants are moving towards industrial action to try and press government for a fairer approach to their working conditions.

“Minister Abetz needs to acknowledge that his approach is not working and agree to sit down with the CPSU to work out a sensible way forward. I've left the door open but the Minister refuses to meet and discuss the government's policy,” said Ms Flood. ✪

Workers reject roster offer at Gorgon

The issue of family friendly rosters on the giant Gorgon gas project in Western Australia is coming to a head after Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) members joined other unionists in strongly rejecting an employer offer of a new agreement.

About 700 AMWU members among the fly-in, fly-out workforce voted against the offer by Chevron and its contractors including Chicago Bridge & Iron.

AMWU state secretary Steve McCartney said that rosters were the top priority for many FIFO workers concerned about the impact of long periods away from home on their family relationships and their own mental health.

The employers offered to cut back the existing 26 days on, 9 days off to 23/9 but the workforce of AMWU, CFMEU and ETU members want 20 days on, 10 days off.

The existing agreement runs out in January, with the first gas expected to flow in about a year.

“While Chevron has been secretive on the actual result of the ballot, we understand that, depending on the contractor, between 77 percent and up to 88 percent of workers rejected their roster proposal,” Mr McCartney said.


“The fact that the offer was rejected in a secret ballot by union members and non-union members alike, shows how important family

friendly rosters are to the lives of workers and their families.”

The union has also revealed that Filipino workers unnecessarily brought in to work on the Gorgon project when locals were available had been made to work 52 days in a row by Chicago Bridge & Iron.

Mr McCartney said working the 457 Visa holders “into the ground” was no way to make up for lateness of the project, also \$US17 billion over budget.

“We don't believe there is a need for 457 Visa holders on Barrow Island, but now that they are here, we want to make sure that Chevron and CB&I show them a duty of care and don't take advantage of them,” he said. ✪



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Land Rights under attack

Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory and Native Title rights across Northern Australia are under attack on several fronts, all in the name of promoting economic development, home ownership and employment.

After a meeting in Canberra of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on October 10, NT Chief Minister Adam Giles announced that his government, with the Commonwealth and Queensland, would urgently investigate Indigenous land administration and land use, "to enable Traditional Owners to attract private sector investment and finance for development".

"I firmly believe that the protracted and complicated processes for approving development projects on Aboriginal land are prohibiting Indigenous Territorians from pulling themselves out of poverty through economic development," Giles said.

"I am pleased that the Prime Minister has agreed to work with the Northern Territory on ways to remove those barriers to the development of Aboriginal land."

The announcement came in the wake of two official reports which attacked Aboriginal land tenure.

First, on August 1, came the review of Indigenous training and employment programs, called "Creating Parity-the Forrest Review". Then, on September 4,

communities to end the disparity themselves," is ominous reading. It represents rousing support for the Commonwealth's plans for 99-year leases over Aboriginal communities (under section 19 A of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act) and its plans to devolve the powers of land councils in the Northern Territory (under section 28A).

The report singles out the Northern Land Council as an impediment to long-term leasing for private investment and says the Commonwealth needs to consider how it will "ensure" that land councils "participate in and support the new arrangements".

It identifies the ability to purchase and use available land for home ownership and business as "the key to prosperity, empowerment and financial independence for first Australians and their families". It talks about "unlocking ... chronically under-utilised" Indigenous lands to achieve "significant sustainable economic advantages to first Australians".

And it suggests that the Commonwealth should exercise the "significant leverage" it holds in the Northern Territory, and favour spending on housing and infrastructure within those communities which agree to surrender control of their land under a Commonwealth lease.

It also recommends that the

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam shakes the hand of Gurindji leader Vincent Lingiari at the historic August 16, 1975 first act of land restitution to Aboriginal people – handing over the pastoral lease to 1250 square miles at Wattie Creek, NT, part of Vestey's Wave Hill Station, successful end to a mammoth struggle which involved Wesley-Smith, his wife, Jan, and many others from near and far, including crusading editor Jim Bowditch, author Frank Hardy and veteran Communist campaigner, Brian Manning.



"Pivot North" also identified land tenure (Aboriginal Land Rights NT and Native Title Acts) as an impediment to development in the north.

But the committee did record that it had heard no evidence that Aboriginal people wanted to alter the underlying inalienable freehold title over Aboriginal land in the NT; "On the contrary, evidence from the land councils in the Territory was that Traditional Owners were

Native Title Act that "this is having a significant impact on the ability of (Indigenous) communities to pursue economic development".

The Northern Territory government's submission to the Select Committee vigorously pursued that theme, and went a lot further. One consequence of the federal government's 2007 Intervention has been that governments now pay rent to Traditional Owners for their use of Aboriginal land in communities. The NT government's submission noted that "paying rent for Indigenous land is a major step in seeing land owners derive economic benefits from their land".

But the submission seemed to say that paying rent was now a bad idea because it had set a new benchmark and caused "unintended and undesirable consequences". Chief among them was the "near total absence of private investment and development, which had been a primary reason for the changed practice or the new way of doing business".

And the NT government yet again pressed the Commonwealth to surrender functions of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act to the Territory. It called for the Act to be reformed, including consideration of "which government is best placed to administer Northern Territory Lands. This should include potential delegations and timing of modifications".

It also wanted the existing model of land councils to be examined, "from the perspective of developing options that might better support traditional land owners in their continuing efforts to gain economic advantages from their vast land holdings."

But the NT government's real agenda may well lie in a draft of its submission which was mistakenly sent to ABC News. In that draft, the very first recommendation read: "At the very least there needs to be capacity to compulsorily acquire ALRA land for government/strategic purposes (Territory government including independent agencies and authorities, and local government)."

A sharp-eyed reporter in the ABC Darwin newsroom realised that this primary recommendation had been omitted from the final submission to the Select Committee which the NT government had published online.

The government's reaction was to plead (unsuccessfully) for the ABC not to report the draft recommendation, and Chief Minister Adam Giles later said he himself had ordered it to be removed.

The controversial recommendation may have been erased from the final draft, but its revelation indicated at least what's on the mind of some high-flying policy maker within the NT government's ranks.

Land Rights News – Northern Edition ☼

But the NT government's real agenda may well lie in a draft of its submission which was mistakenly sent to ABC News.

Federal Parliament's Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia tabled its final report, "Pivot North".

The Forrest review was led by the West Australian billionaire miner, Andrew Forrest. His commission by the Australian government was to "hear breakthrough ideas that will end the disparity in employment for Indigenous Australians".

"Seismic, not incremental, change is required and the time for action is now," reported Forrest and his team. Their final chapter, "Empowering people in remote

Commonwealth use its powers (under s28A) to devolve land councils' powers to more regional structures, "to ensure land councils are responsive to the wishes of traditional owners who have requested to freehold or lease their land to enable business investment and/or home ownership".

In early September, the parliamentary Joint Select Committee (comprised of members of both the Senate and House of Representatives) on Northern Development tabled its final report, titled, "Pivot North".

happy to use the current provisions of the (Land Rights) Act for both commercial and private development proposals".

The committee recommended that governments and business work with Indigenous people and land councils, "to maximise the economic development and employment opportunities on Aboriginal and/or Native Title land".

It noted difficulties of obtaining land tenure for residential or commercial purposes under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the

Pete's Corner



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Organised by the Communist Party of Australia Port Jackson Branch

Marchers vent deaths fury

More than 500 Aboriginal people and supporters rallied in Brisbane for the G20 summit to bring attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody. The G20 summit is an international meeting of 20 governments of 20 major economies, including Australia.

A chant of "they say justice, we say murder" echoed through the near-deserted and heavily policed streets of the city as the crowd waved Aboriginal flags and banners saying "Australia is a crime scene".

The group was urged to mobilise against the mistreatment of Indigenous people in custody by Lex

Wotton, the man who was once jailed for his role in a riot over the death of Cameron Doomadgee on Queensland's Palm Island in 2004.

Young people needed to be educated about the struggles of the past, Wotton said.

The family of Redfern teenager Thomas "TJ" Hickey was still waiting for justice more than 10 years after his death in Sydney, his cousin Darren said.

Riots were sparked in the inner-Sydney suburb of Redfern when the 17-year-old was thrown off his bike while trying to escape police, and was impaled on a fence on February 14, 2004.

"We're here to change your hearts and your minds, because the biggest battle is inside," Darren said. "If we can change one non-Aboriginal person here to say 'We're all in this together', the media, the police."

The only way to secure justice was to protest, Aboriginal poet Lionel Fogarty said. "We've been struggling for so long to get justice and we're not getting any justice," he said.

The march stopped several times to perform traditional dances under the watchful eyes of dozens of police. As the crowd made its way over the Kurilpa pedestrian bridge and

arrived in West End, many younger protesters began chanting, "Pigs kill blacks."

The rally marched into Musgrave Park in South Brisbane, just streets away from the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, the heart of the G20 security operation.

"Today we made history – we made Genocidal 20 history," protester Ruby Wharton told the crowd in front of a smouldering fire. Wharton, 16, had earlier recalled how her aunty died while in custody west of Brisbane in 2008.

"The police officers were negligent to her health condition and they know damn well that Aboriginal

health is on a downward spiral," she said.

Members of the Seed Indigenous Youth Climate Network also staged a protest about fossil fuels outside the Brisbane Global Cafe.

Indigenous coordinator for the Australian Youth Climate Coalition Amelia Telford said energy companies were operating in an outdated industry. "Unless world leaders take swift, ambitious steps to reduce pollution from coal and other fossil fuels, they will condemn our generation to catastrophic consequences from climate change," she said.

Koori Mail ☘

Defend public housing

"We reject the Baird government's plan to move as many people as possible out of social housing and into the private rental market. This is a recipe for increased private profits at the cost of increasing human misery," Hannah Middleton, Secretary of the public housing advocacy group, Hands off Glebe, said in the lead up to a public housing rally in front of Parliament House Sydney.

"Minister Upton's discussion paper on social housing makes it clear that the Baird government is busy planning to destroy the public housing system.

"When Minister Upton speaks of 'finite resources' and social housing as a 'safety net', she makes it clear that the Baird government intends to deal with the current housing crisis and intolerable levels of housing stress by throwing more and more people to the wolves of the private rental market."

Middleton said that the housing crisis extends from the homeless on the street to those who are well paid. "We have people paying extortionate rents or paying exorbitant rates to buy a house."

Teachers are reporting that children are coming to school hungry because of housing stress, she said.

"What is needed is massive investment in public, affordable housing – more money for more homes for more members of our community," Denis Doherty from Hands off Glebe said.

"Government has a responsibility to ensure that everyone can find a decent home they can afford. To do otherwise is to increase the welfare burden and the number of people on the street.

"Rents in the private sector are way beyond the means of increasing numbers of people. The private sector has failed the people of NSW.

"We will be outside Parliament House on Wednesday 19 November at 12 noon to tell the Baird government that for economic, social and moral reasons it must massively increase investment in public affordable housing," Doherty concluded.

More info 0418 668 098 ☘



Photo: Tom Pearson

Taking Issue by Andrew (Andy) Alcock

Re: Obama's comments at the G20

The article, *G20 Summit Abbott govt – climate pariah*, by Bob Briton, (the *Guardian* 19.11.2014) summarises very well what happened to the Australian government at the G20 Conference when the US and China put climate change on the agenda. And then, Obama made comments about the Great Barrier Reef which have troubled the government.

Since then, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, has come out criticising Obama and making very dubious claims about what the government she is a member of is supposedly doing to save the Reef.

Barack Obama, of course, was a very naughty boy at the recent G20 conference for speaking out about climate change and expressing

concern for the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

After all, Tony almost announced Australia's involvement in the new Iraq War almost before Obama declared it!

These Americans have no sense of fair play and decency. If our leaders support their lies internationally, why can't the US leaders support our leaders' lies?

The statement by Julie Bishop does not alter the fact that scientists who have been keeping a close professional watch on the Reef, believe there are many problems and they consider the actions by the Queensland and Australian governments are making the situation worse.

Mr Obama has been a bitter disappointment to some in many areas

he has done nothing about bringing peace to the Middle East and just backs Israel no matter what it does (he could organise an international ban on military hardware to Israel). There is his use of drones which have taken the lives of thousands of innocent people. His government has been arming ISIS and now it believes that it must defeat it (he should have thought about this before!)

As a key person who knows Indonesia very well, including the genocidal and human rights abuses committed by the Indonesian military (TNI) in several countries in Asia, Obama has done nothing to curtail its behaviour. (At least, Bill Clinton stopped military aid to Indonesia after the huge orgy of killing that accompanied the 1999 independence

referendum in East Timor – now Timor-Leste).

Now they say that he is a lame-duck president after the mid term elections. However, he has spoken out strongly about the need to take climate change seriously and to take greater steps to protect the Great Barrier Reef. And that is good. As bad as he is, he is not as right wing and stupid as his Republican counterparts or Hilary Clinton for that matter. So let us be thankful that at least he has done a few small good things to make a change even if he should have done more.

The icing on the cake is that he has embarrassed a very right wing Australian government that was not taking climate change or steps to preserve the Great Barrier Reef at all

seriously. Julie can tell a lot of fibs about it, but it might just make her and Tony do more on the environmental front. Of course, it would be good if they got really annoyed and called off the Australia US Alliance that sees us get involved in so many unnecessary wars.

Sadly, this is not likely to happen. We need to be working towards becoming an independent, non-aligned nation that works more seriously for human rights, social justice, fairness between nations and environmental responsibility and not involve ourselves in the machinations of the big powers who only want to take resources from smaller nations and tighten their grip on international political power. ☘

Abbott government dogged by splits

Peter Mac

The Abbott government is engaged in an unsuccessful attempt to cover up dissension and splits within its own ranks. The rot set in after the May budget, when federal members of the coalition realised they could never persuade the public of the need for its savage impact on ordinary working families.

Rather than admit to any error, Abbott directed his "Team Australia" troops to sell the budget initiatives more effectively, show unity during public appearances and avoid "thought bubbles" that would contradict the government's policies.

However, the subsequent performance of Abbott and his ministers made relations with their colleagues even worse. Treasurer Joe Hockey was forced to apologise publicly after claiming that raising the fuel excise wouldn't hit the poorest taxpayers because they either didn't have a car or only drove short distances.

Hockey attempted to gain ground by hiring author and former government critic David Hunt as his speechwriter, but that didn't help either.

In late August Abbott's colleagues became irritated when he failed to attend the coalition's annual gathering and chose to attend a fundraising dinner in Melbourne instead. The mood turned to anger the next day when he airily excused his late arrival for the parliamentary meeting because he had to attend a function at a Melbourne cancer centre so that his flight in the government plane would meet parliamentary travel rules!

The government received criticism from within its own ranks of its demand that unemployed people seeking relief should apply for 40 jobs a month, by applying for one job in the morning and one in the afternoon. However, in late August after complaints from employers that the policy would load them up with a massive extra workload, the government was forced to abandon it.

In September Abbott rejected a demand from MP Christian Porter for a greater share of the GST revenue for Western Australia. Joe Hockey then launched a verbal attack on WA Premier Colin Barnett, saying that the state's financial performance was the worst in Australia. Abbott and

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop both contradicted Hockey and defended the state government.

Things go from bad to worse

The next issue of dissent was industrial relations. Some MPs want penalty rates to be cut quickly, and oppose the government's policy of letting the Fair Work commission determine them.

In September the government attempted to appease them by declaring its commitment to changing workplace relations laws on pay and conditions, union militancy, workplace "flexibility", penalty rates and the impact of the Fair Work Act on employment.

Late in September Liberal MP Cory Bernardi and Queensland nationals MP George Christensen publicly advocated the banning of full face coverings in public. That forced Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull to warn that attacks on Muslims would play into the hands of terrorists.

Abbott urged the public not to "fret" about people's religion or clothing, and opposed a proposal by Bernardi and Lower House speaker Bronwyn Bishop to ban the wearing of burqas or niqabs in parliament.

The government's pathetically ineffective "direct action" climate change policy is opposed by some members of the government. Significantly, cabinet minister Malcolm Turnbull has never been offered a portfolio that concerned energy or the mining industry.

Last month the government applied considerable pressure on the Australian National University authorities to modify or abandon their previous decision to divest the university of its shares in fossil fuel companies.

However, various Anglican dioceses joined the divestment campaign, and the International Panel on Climate Change has now declared that the use of fossil fuels must be phased out this century to avoid a catastrophic 2 degree rise in average world temperatures. Climate change emerged as a major issue at the Brisbane G20 meeting.

The government recently took

the chairman of the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) to task for suggesting that Australia was becoming a paradise for white collar criminals.

However, Nationals senator John Williams has called for a royal commission into white collar crime in the wake of revelations about the widespread use of tax havens by Australian corporations and overseas businesses operating here.

That may not go anywhere. ASIC had its funds cut by \$120 million over four years in the May budget. In order to monitor the financial planning activities of the big four banks as well as AMP and the Macquarie Bank, it has now had to dip into the special fund reserved for taking cases to court, so if it finds evidence for a prosecution it may not have enough funds to pay for it.

The government's Paid Parental Leave scheme is opposed by virtually every coalition MP, and discussions with the state governments over integrating state parental leave programs into the federal PPL scheme have broken down.

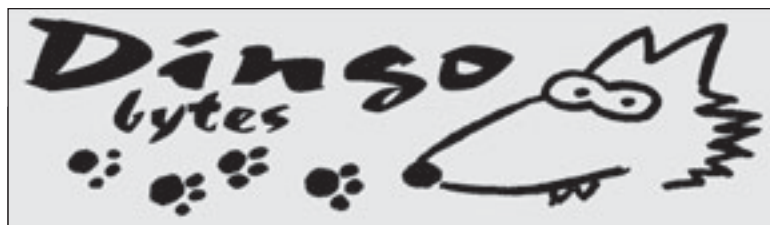
Earlier this month the Prime Minister found himself involved in a bitter row within his own electorate, over the government's approval of plans to convert former military buildings at Middle Head on Sydney Harbour to an aged care home. The plan is opposed by the PM's own sister, a local resident, and the largest Liberal Party branch in the electorate recently passed a motion calling on the government to reject the development.

And now tensions are simmering between the two coalition partners. The Nationals bitterly resented the government's wooing of the Palmer United Party to gain its support for the "direct action" climate change plan. The Nationals are concerned about implications of the "carbon farming" aspects of the policy, and are also fully aware of growing opposition within rural communities to coal seam gas mining, which the government wholeheartedly supports.

The government is dogged by splits and dissension, but it only has itself to blame. As someone once remarked, be sure your sins will find you out. ☺



Liberal MP Cory Bernardi and Queensland nationals MP George Christensen publicly advocated the banning of full face coverings in public.



Thirty states meeting in Berlin last week pledged \$9.3 billion for a fund to help developing countries cut emissions. The United Nation's South Korea-based Green Climate Fund aims to help developing countries invest in clean energy and green technology. Its other goals are to build up defences against rising seas and worsening storms, floods and droughts. During the G20 summit US president Barack Obama said the US would contribute US\$3 billion. Japan's contribution would be US\$1.5 billion. The Abbott government snubbed the meeting and explained its absence from the Berlin conference by stating that "Australia is playing its part in an effective international response to climate change through direct national action, and through our aid program," a spokesperson for Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said. "Australia is not planning to make a contribution to the Green Climate Fund at this time, but will continue to prioritise assistance through our development program," he said. Australia's aid budget has been cut and Australia's contribution to help poorer countries "to build resilience to climate-related shocks" is simply empty phrases.

Victorians are going to vote at the weekend and the Liberal Party must be really in a panic mode. How else can you explain the premier's decision to place the far-right Rise Up Australia Party ahead of the Greens? It is the same premier who several months ago was asked if the party would negotiate with Rise Up Australia. Then Mr Napthine's reply was: "We won't be doing deals with extremist parties". Mr Napthine said the party would put the Greens last because they could not be trusted on jobs, infrastructure and the economy. I suppose by the same token the Rise Up Australia Party can be trusted with its anti-Islam, anti-multiculturalism and divisive policies any day. Just as well many Victorians think for themselves and do not follow how-to-vote cards, especially of the kind offered by the Liberals.

Some people are paranoid and some aren't. But it is always good to know facts and then decide whether you should be. Australia Post has just released statistics on how much confidential information is disclosed to law enforcement, security and other government agencies. The total of 10,002 disclosures in 2013-2014 was 5 percent higher than the previous year and an increase of 25 percent over the past four years. Only 19 disclosures of postal information were made to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) – the lowest figure in a decade. The previous year it was 31. There was a 4.8 percent decline in the volume of letters delivered by Australia Post in 2013-2014. The Australia Post statistics show that despite consistent declines in mail volume, confidential postal information is increasingly assessed by police, government agencies enforcing laws that impose financial penalties and for "the protection of the public revenue".

Perth

Spring Sundowner Celebrate 30 years of Union Aid Abroad

6:30pm Thursday November 27

The Inglewood Hotel, Verandah Bar, cnr Fifth Ave & Beaufort St, Mt Lawley

Meet and Greet with the new Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA Executive Officer Kate Lee
Kate will speak about APHEDA's project work in Asia and the Middle East, particularly in Gaza, Lebanon and the West Bank.

Coinciding with Asbestos Awareness Month, all funds raised by the night will support APHEDA's Vietnam – Australia Asbestos Disease Prevention project.

Tickets: \$50 or \$40 unwaged

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More info: Tim Dymond at TDymond@unionswa.com.au or call 0438 000 566

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The overseas humanitarian aid agency of the ACTU

The role of US and Turkey in battle of Kobani

Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya

A war is being fought for control over Western Kurdistan and the northern areas of Syria, including three de facto Kurdish enclaves there. The fighting in Western Kurdistan is a means to an end and not a goal in itself. The objectives of gaining control over Syrian Kurdistan and northern Syria are critical to gaining control over the rest of the Syrian Arab Republic and entail US-supported regime change in Damascus.

Western Kurdistan is alternatively called Rojava in Kurmanji, the dialect of the Kurdish language that is used locally there and spoken by the majority of the Kurds living in Turkey. The word Rojava comes from the Kurdish root word roj, which means both sun and day, and literally means “sunset” (“the sun’s end”) or the “end of the day” (“the day’s end”) in Kurmanji and not the word “west”. The confusion over its meaning arises for two main reasons. The first is that in the Sorani or Central dialect of the Kurdish language the word roj is only used to refer to the day. The second is that Rojava connotes or suggests the direction of the west, where the sun is seen to set when the day ends.

The siege of Kobani

Despite the fact that neither the Syrian military nor the Syrian government controls most of Syrian Kurdistan and that a significant amount of the locals there have declared themselves neutral, the forces of the Free Syrian Army, Al-Nusra, and the ISIL (DAISH) have launched a multiparty war on Rojava’s mosaic of inhabitants. It has only been in late 2014 that this war on Western Kurdistan has gained international attention as the Syrian Kurds in Aleppo Governorate’s northeastern district (mintaqah) of Ayn Al-Arab (Ain Al-Arab) became surrounded by the ISIL in late September and early October.

As this happened, the behaviour of the US and its allies, specifically the neo-Ottomanist Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, exposed their true objectives in Rojava and Syria. By the time that the Syrian Kurds in northeastern Aleppo Governorate were being encircled by the ISIL, it was clear that Washington and its counterfeit anti-ISIL coalition were actually using the ISIL outbreak to redraw the strategic and ethno-confessional maps of Syria and Iraq. Many of the Syrian Kurds think that the goal is to force them eastward into Iraqi Kurdistan and to surrender to Turkish domination.

Fears of another exodus in Syria – similar to the one that was felt when Turkey assisted Jubhat Al-Nusra’s violent takeover of the mostly ethnic Armenian town of Kasab (Kessab) in Latakia Governorate in March 2014 – began to materialise. Nearly 200,000 Syrians – Kurds, Turkoman, Assyrians, Armenians, and Arabs – fled across the Syrian-Turkish border. By October 9, one-third of Ayn Al-Arab had fallen to the pseudo-caliphate.

Washington’s objectives

Washington’s stance on Ayn Al-Arab or Kobani was very revealing of where it really stood in regards to the battle over control of the Syrian border city. Instead of preventing the fall of Kobani and supporting the local defenders which were doing the heavy fighting on the ground against the ISIL and containing its pseudo-caliphate, Washington did not move. The US position on Kobani is an important indicator that the US war initiated against the ISIL has been mere bravado and a fictitious public relations stunt aimed at hiding the real objective of getting a strategic foothold inside Syrian territory.

When the ISIL attacked the forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraqi Kurdistan in August 2014, the US acted quickly to help the KRG’s forces. In July, a month after the June capture of the Iraqi city of Mosul by the ISIL, which coincided with the military takeover of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk by the KRG, the ISIL began its siege

of Kobani in Rojava. Up until October, the US just watched.

Even more revealing, the Pentagon announced on October 8 that the US-led bombing campaign in Syria, which it formally named Operation Inherent Resolve on October 15, could not stop the ISIL offensive and advances against Kobani and its local defenders. Instead the US began arguing and insisting for more illegal steps to be taken by NATO member Turkey. Washington began to call for Turkish soldiers and tanks to enter Kobani and northern Syria. In turn, President Erdogan and the Turkish government said that Ankara would only send in the Turkish military if a no-fly zone was established over Syria by the US and the other members of Washington’s bogus coalition.

Northern buffer zone

Using Kobani to make a case, the US and Turkish governments took the opportunity to repackage their plans for an invasion of Syria from 2011, which called for the establishment of a Turkish-controlled northern buffer zone and a no-fly zone over Syrian airspace. This time the plans were presented under the humanitarian pretext of peacekeeping. This is why the parliamentarians in the Turkish Grand National Assembly had passed legislation authorising an invasion of the Syrian Arab Republic and Syrian Kurdistan on October 2, 2014.

Although Turkey passed legislature to invade Syria on October 2, Ankara remained cautious. In reality, Turkey was doing everything in its power to ensure that Kobani would fall into the control of the ISIL and that Kobani’s local defenders would be defeated.

Due to a lack of coordination between the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) and Turkish law enforcement officials, a domestic scandal even emerged in Turkey when undercover MIT trucks were detained in Adana by the Turkish gendarmerie after they were caught secretly transporting arms and ammunition into Syria for Al-Nusra and other anti-government insurgents.

In the context of Kobani, numerous reports were made revealing that large weapon shipments were delivered to the heavily armed battalions of the ISIL by Turkey for the offensive on Kobani. One journalist, Serena Shim, would pay with her life for trying to document this. Shim, a Lebanese-American working for Iran’s English-language Press TV news network, would reveal that weapons were secretly being delivered to the insurgents in Syria through Turkey in trucks carrying the logo of the UN World Food Organisation. Shim would be killed shortly after in a mysterious car accident on October 19 after being threatened by the MIT for spying for the “Turkish opposition”.

To hide its dirty hands as a facilitator, the Turkish government began claiming that it could not control its borders or prevent foreign fighters from entering Iraq and Syria. This, however, changed with the battle for Kobani. Ankara began to exercise what appeared to be faultless control of its border with Syria and it even reinforced border security. Turkey, which is widely recognised for allowing Jabhat Al-Nusra and the other foreign-backed insurgent forces to freely cross its borders to fight the Syrian military, began preventing any Kurdish volunteers from crossing the Syrian-Turkish border over to Kobani to help the besieged Syrian city and its outnumbered defenders. Only under intense domestic and international pressure did the Turkish government finally let 150 token KRG peshmerga troops from Iraqi Kurdistan enter Kobani on November 1, 2014.

Turkey takes note of Syria’s friends

The Syrian government rejected the suggestions coming from Ankara and Washington for foreign ground troops on its territory and for the establishment of a northern buffer zone. Damascus said these were intentions for blatant aggression against Syria. It released a statement



Kurds in Turkey celebrate their holiday of Newroz.

on October 15 saying that it would consult its “friends”.

In context of the US-Turkish invasion plans, the Turkish government was monitoring the reactions and attitudes of Russia, Iran, China, and the independent segments of the international community not beholden to Washington’s foreign policy objective. Both the Kremlin and Tehran reacted by warning the Turkish government to forget any thoughts about sending ground troops into Syrian Kurdistan and on Syrian soil.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Lukashevych, the spokesperson of the Russian Foreign Ministry, announced that Moscow opposed the calls for a northern buffer zone on October 9. Lukashevych said that neither Turkey nor the US had the authority or legitimacy to establish a buffer zone against the will of another sovereign state. He also pointed out how the US bombardment of Syria had complicated the problem and influenced the ISIL to concentrate itself among civilian populations. His words echoed the warnings of Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, the permanent representative of Russia to the UN, that the US-led bombings of Syria will further degenerate the crisis in Syria.

On the part of Tehran, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian publicly announced that Iran had warned the Turkish government against any adventurism in Syria.

Making ISIL stronger

Is it a coincidence that the ISIL or DAISH gained ground in Syria as soon as the US declared war on it? Or is it a coincidence that Rojava contains most of the oil wells inside Syria?

The inhabitants and resistance in Kobani fighting the ISIL offensive have repeatedly asked for outside help, but have defined the US-led airstrikes in Syria in no uncertain terms as utterly useless. This has been the general observation from the actual ground about the illegal US-led bombing campaign of Syria by local paramilitary and civilian leaders. Locally selected officials in Syrian Kurdistan have repeatedly said, in one form or another, that the US-led airstrikes are a failure.

The People’s Protection Units (Yekineyen Parastina Gel, YPG; the all-female units are abbreviated as YPJ) of Kobani made multiple statements that pointed out that the US

bombing campaign did nothing to stop the ISIL advance on Kobani or throughout Syria. While calling for Kurdish unity and a united front between Syria, Iraq, and Iran against the pseudo-caliphate of the ISIL, Jawan Ibrahim, an YPG officer, has said that the US and its anti-ISIL coalition are a failure as far as the YPG and Syrian Kurds are concerned, according to Fars News Agency (FNA).

Before the US officially inaugurated its campaign in Syria by launching airstrikes on Ar-Raqqah, the ISIL’s fighters had left the positions that the US and its petro-sheikhdom Arab allies bombed. Instead of bombing the ISIL, the US has been bombing Syrian industrial and civilian infrastructure. While saying that some of these bombings, which include civilian homes and a wheat silo, were mistakes, it is clear that the Pentagon strategy of eroding an enemy state’s strength by destroying its infrastructure is being applied against Syria.

After heavy criticism and international pressure, the US began to drop token medical supplies and arms shipments for the locals and Kobani’s local defenders. Some of these US arms got into the hands of the ISIL. The Pentagon says this was the result of miscalculations and that the ISIL were not the intended recipients. Sceptics, however, believe that the Pentagon deliberately parachuted the US weapons near places that the ISIL’s battalions could easily see and obtain them. The arms caches included hand grenades, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and ammunition, which were all displayed in at least one video produced by the ISIL during the battle for Kobani.

In parallel to the reluctant help of the US, the Turkish government was pressured into allowing a token number of KRG peshmerga fighters from Iraq cross its border into Kobani on November 1. These peshmerga, however, are part of the security forces of the corrupt, Turkish-aligned KRG. In other words, “Turkey’s Kurds” (as in their allies; not to be mistaken for Turkish Kurds) were allowed to enter Kobani (instead of the YPG, YPJ, or volunteers). Since Turkey’s detrimental role in Kobani became widely known, Ankara was also fearful that the fall of Kobani would effectively end the peace talks between the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish government and result in a massive revolt in Turkish Kurdistan.

How big pharma keeps drug prices high



Stealth US war against Syria?

The US-led bombing campaign is not intended to defeat the ISIL, which is also doing everything it can to destroy the fabric of Syrian society. The US-led bombing campaign in Syria is intended to weaken and destroy Syria as a functioning state. This is why the US has been bombing Syrian energy facilities and infrastructure, including transport pipes, under the excuse of preventing the ISIL from using it to sell oil and gather revenues.

The US rationale for justifying this is bogus too, because the ISIL has been transporting stolen Syrian oil shipments through transport vehicles into Turkey and, unlike the case of Iraq, not using the transport pipes. Moreover, most of the oil stolen by the ISIL has been coming from Iraq and not from Syria, but the US has not taken the same steps to destroy the energy infrastructure in Iraq. Additionally, the purchases of stolen oil from both Syria and Iraq have taken place at the level of state actors. Even the European Union's own representative to Iraq, Jana Hybaskova, has admitted that European Union members are buying stolen Iraqi oil from the ISIL.

The Pentagon's two different approaches, one for Iraq and one for Syria, say a lot about what Washington is doing in the Syrian Arab Republic. Washington is still going after Syria and in the process it and Turkey want to either co-opt the Syrian Kurds or to neutralise them. This is why the battle for Kobani was launched with Turkish involvement and why there was inaction by the US government. Also, when it comes down to it, the ISIL or DAISH is a US weapon.

The Syrian government knows that Washington's anti-ISIL coalition is a façade and that the masquerade could end with a US-led offensive against Damascus if the US government and Pentagon believe that the conditions are right. On November 6, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallem told the Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar that Syria had asked the Russian Federation to accelerate the delivery of the S-300 anti-aircraft surface-to-air missile system to prepare for a possible Pentagon offensive.

globalresearch.ca ✪



Deborah Gleeson and Hazel Moir

Efforts by pharmaceutical companies to extend their patents cost taxpayers millions of dollars each year. In some cases, they also mean people are subjected to unnecessary clinical trials.

Big Pharma makes big profits. Their useful new drugs are patented, protecting them from competition and allowing them to charge high prices. When the patent ends, other companies are allowed to supply the previously patented drug.

These are known as generics. The prices of generic drugs are much lower than the prices of in-patent drugs – it has been suggested that for widely used drugs, price falls can be as much as 95 percent.

Pharmaceutical companies want to get their new products listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), because they will sell in much higher volumes.

Taxpayers have an interest in ensuring that these drugs move from the high in-patent price to the much lower off-patent price as early as possible.

On average, a patent provides effective protection from competition for about 14 years. But, of course, companies like monopolies and would like to extend the patent period. Over the past few decades they have used a process known as evergreening to keep generic companies out of the market for longer.

How it works

Evergreening is achieved by seeking extra patents on variations of the original drug – new forms of release, new dosages, new combinations or variations, or new forms.

Big Pharma refers to this as “lifecycle management”. Even if the patent is dubious, the company can earn more from the higher prices than it pays in legal fees to keep the dubious patent alive. Evergreening is possible because in Australia the standard required to get a patent is very low. Different methods of delivering drugs (such as extended release, for example) have been known for decades.

When one of these known delivery methods is combined with a known drug, the patent office considers this sufficiently inventive to grant a new 20-year patent. Another favourite evergreening strategy is to patent a slight variation of the drug.

Brand pharmaceutical companies argue that these “lifecycle management” patents provide improved health outcomes to the community. They meet the (very low) patentability thresholds of novelty and inventiveness. Critics argue that the claimed improved health outcomes are small or non-existent.

An evergreening story: from Efexor to Efexor-XR to Pristiq

An example is useful. In the case of depression drug venlafaxine (marketed as Efexor), the original version had major side-effects. However, when provided in extended release form, these side-effects were substantially reduced.

Naturally, the extended release form (Efexor-XR) became the

preferred one. Although it might seem obvious to combine venlafaxine with an extended release form to overcome the side-effect problem, the patent office granted two new patents for extended release versions of venlafaxine.

One of these was written in such a broad form that it delayed generic entry by two and a half years, while legal wrangling took place. Eventually, the evergreening patent was declared invalid. But the cost to taxpayers of this delay is estimated at \$209 million.

Pfizer has a second evergreening strategy for venlafaxine. When venlafaxine is taken, the human body converts it to desvenlafaxine. In other words desvenlafaxine is a variant of the original active pharmaceutical ingredient venlafaxine.

Clearly, the two compounds are closely related. So it is astonishing that desvenlafaxine passed the tests for getting a patent. Desvenlafaxine is marketed as Pristiq. Pristiq entered the market early in the two-and-a-half-year period of legal wrangling over the extended release venlafaxine (Efexor-XR) patent.

Pfizer's marketing of Pristiq in February 2009 was so lavish that it attracted the attention of investigative journalists. Pristiq has no additional benefits for patients. Despite this, during the first six months of 2014, half of prescriptions were written for Pristiq rather than for the clinically identical Efexor-XR.

But Pristiq costs between \$20 and \$23 more than Efexor-XR, depending on the dose. Based on reported prescription volumes in 2013-14, the cost to the taxpayer of doctors prescribing Pristiq rather than Efexor-XR exceeds \$21 million a year.

Unless generic companies challenge the desvenlafaxine patent, there will be no generic versions of Pristiq until after August 2023, when the patent expires.

Would you like a placebo with that?

When such minor variations in drugs are patented and marketed, there are also ethical considerations. Pfizer had to undertake clinical trials to obtain marketing approval for Pristiq. These involved blind comparisons with placebos.

Thousands of seriously depressed patients involved in these trials received placebos for no good reason, since the chemical compound was identical with the action of venlafaxine in the body.

Marketing Pristiq clearly offers few benefits to the public. It does, however, offer Pfizer the benefit of extracting additional income whenever a doctor prescribes Pristiq.

Many patients suffering severe depression were subjected to a placebo, in order for Pfizer to undertake the clinical trials needed to obtain marketing approval for Pristiq. There seems to be no system for protecting patients from clinical trials undertaken only to support drugs based on evergreening patents.

Evergreening entails large-scale economic and social costs for Australians. Reform of our patent laws to prevent evergreening is long overdue.

This should be a priority for any government interested in reducing unnecessary costs to the health system.

New Internationalist ✪

Who is responsible for crisis in Colombian peace talks?

WT Whitney

At a midnight press conference in Bogotá on November 16, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos announced a halt to peace talks in Havana between his government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Surrounded by military officers, Santos was reacting to the seizure that day in Chocó state of General Rubén Darío Alzate, a corporal, and an army lawyer. Blaming the FARC, Santos declared peace talks as “suspended until there is clarification and the prisoners are liberated.”

Government negotiators wouldn't be heading back to Cuba for further negotiations and a military rescue mission was heading to Chocó.

Why, one asks, did a top general defy army rules and move about without a military escort deep inside an area occupied by the FARC? Why was he and the others wearing civilian clothes, Bermuda shorts in his case? Why did the first announcement of his capture come not from the government but from former President Álvaro Uribe, an avid foe of the peace talks?

According to Defence Minister Juan Carlos Pinzón, the General's party “was surprised by men in civilian clothes with rifles. *El Tiempo* newspaper heard otherwise from Presentación Palomeque, a community council official in Las Mercedes, population 120, where the encounter took place. Travelling on the Atrato River, Alzate and the two others reportedly arrived by launch and waited nearby for half an hour before three ununiformed, unarmed “subversives” arrived in their launch. The two groups conferred peacefully in front of a church, and then all concerned headed north on the river in one boat.

The possibility exists that the FARC's capture of its highest ranking prisoner ever was contrived. The next day, Uribe, now a senator, called upon “the international community ... to require this terrorist group (the FARC) unilaterally to stop [its] criminal activities.” Twice before, in 1992 and in 2002, seizure of a government official by insurgents halted other peace negotiations.

In the two years since the present talks began on November 19, 2012, negotiators have secured preliminary agreements on agrarian reforms, political participation of insurgents during peacetime, and drug trafficking. Discussion was to have continued on victims of armed conflict. The last agenda item, still waiting, is demobilization of combatants.

The stakes for Colombia's majority population are high. As reported recently by *Deutsche Welle*: “Fifty years of armed conflict have provoked 218,000 murders, 27,000 kidnappings, 25,000 disappeared persons, and more than 5.5 million internally displaced persons.”

Interviewed in Havana recently, FARC negotiator Pablo Catatumbo said, although “we have advanced considerably, we are not at the point of irreversibility [in the talks].” He cited paramilitaries as an unsolved problem. Ex-President Uribe provides the main challenge, however. Candidate Óscar Iván Zuluaga, a Uribe protégée, forced Santos into a second round of presidential voting in May, 2014. Defending the peace talks, Santos won because Colombian leftists came to his rescue.

Uribe enjoys backing from many military leaders. According to a website friendly to the FARC, “While ex-President Álvaro Uribe is on tour mobilising allies of the extreme international right against the peace process, Colombian military intelligence (...) is carrying out electronic espionage and has



FARC Commander Pastor Alape talks to the press, accompanied by Pablo Catatumbo, chief of the FARC's western bloc, second left, in Havana, Cuba, Tuesday, November 18, 2014.

implanted a virus in the computer of Humberto de la Calle, head of the government's peace delegation.” Earlier, the mainstream *Semana* newspaper attributed the electronic intrusions “US intelligence agencies, the Colombian military high command, military intelligence and counterintelligence, and high state functionaries.”

FARC peace negotiators confirmed that General Alzate and his companions were in FARC hands. Defending the peace talks, they promised the FARC “will respect the life and physical and moral integrity of our prisoners and we are fully disposed to guarantee this to the extent the state's wrath allows us [to do so.]” They condemned the state's “gigantic [military rescue] operation”

for risking prisoners' lives and the peace talks alike.

The FARC labelled the captured general as a prisoner of war rather than kidnap victim. Governmental refusal to let “talks evolve within a situation of truce or armistice contributes, negotiators explained, to the necessity for warlike measures. “Negotiating under fire makes very little sense,” they said. As inducement for the government to follow suit as negotiations proceeded, the FARC has carried out unilateral ceasefires lasting weeks at a time.

Colombia's left is demanding that henceforth negotiations proceed under conditions of bilateral ceasefire. Comprising almost 2,000 political and social organisations, the Patriotic March called for a bilateral

truce and also nationwide demonstrations on behalf of the peace talks.

For the first time since its formation in 2012, Patriotic March recently announced it would be engaging in electoral politics, and would do so within a “Broad Front for Peace.” This same Broad Front headed street mobilisations in Bogotá and elsewhere on November 19 in support of the talks.

By that day's end, government and FARC representatives had agreed to conditions for General Alzate's release and that of his companions. Spokespersons for Cuba and Norway, guarantor countries for the peace talks, indicated “liberations will be accomplished in the shortest time possible.”

People's World ☪

Making new victims out of revictimisation

Eric A Gordon

It is now possible in American law, under the cover of “victim relief,” to create new victims by depriving them of their freedom of speech. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, House Bill HB2533 and Senate Bill SB508, the Revictimisation Relief Act, was passed in mid-October, fast-tracked to the governor's desk, and signed into law by Governor Tom Corbett on October 21 (as of the beginning of next year he will be ex-governor). This new law would silence all Pennsylvania prisoners if, by exercising their right to free speech, they allegedly cause “mental anguish to their victims”.

The international Call to Action opposing this new legislation, signed by numerous civil rights organisations and leaders, recounts the history of the law. “This legislation emerged as a politically charged response on the part of the Fraternal Order of Police and its political allies, because they failed to stop Pennsylvania prisoner and radio journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal from delivering his October 5,

2014, commencement address at Goddard College in Vermont, from where Abu-Jamal earned his BA in 1996 while on death row. Students at Goddard collectively chose Abu-Jamal as their commencement speaker and the administration supported the invitation. In this case, this law would deny the school the right to hear from its alum, Abu-Jamal.”

Mumia Abu-Jamal delivered his address by video.

The Call adds that “the law affords virtually unlimited discretion to district attorneys and the attorney general to silence prisoner speech ... [and] targets both prisoners' speech and supporters who sponsor that speech.” Legislators, and the governor, have claimed powers that would be extremely difficult for citizens to challenge and check.

How should “victim relief” be achieved? “By just verdict and the extension of due process to all parties involved,” says the Call. In a climate where large numbers of people are imprisoned, many of them poor and people of colour, what redress is left to reverse

wrongful convictions and harsh sentences except to freely exercise constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech?

Indeed, could the current debate over mass incarceration have been engaged without prisoners themselves “exposing systemic violations of their rights in the courts?” From now on, might a prisoner speak out about conditions behind the prison walls and be subject to a retaliatory civil suit?

The new Pennsylvania law not only attempts to block Abu-Jamal's free speech, but that of all prisoners in Pennsylvania on the hypothesis that “someone” could be hurt and offended by a prisoner's voice or words heard in public. The law is tantamount to locking people up and tossing the key into the Schuylkill River.

The First Amendment exists not just to protect speech we agree with, but also that which might offend and challenge us. This is the legal morass into which the Pennsylvania legislators and governor have stepped. The issue also has resonance in the current national wave of laws and policies mandating that

teachers and professors post “warnings” that certain courses, or certain units, might be offensive to some students. Better alert those vulnerable high school sophomores that the biology teacher might try to explain evolution - or worse, the human reproductive system! Or that the college prof in Middle East Studies might care to say something about the illegality of Israeli settlements in the West Bank!

The Call denounces “the increasingly ominous display of rogue state power in Pennsylvania.” The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania has taken up the challenge to the law.

Among the signers of the Call to Action Against the Silencing of Constitutionally Protected Prisoner Speech in Pennsylvania are several defence groups for Mumia Abu-Jamal, as well as his literary agent Frances Goldin, the Prison Action Network, the Centre for Constitutional Rights, National Lawyers Guild, Cornel West, and the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban 5.

On November 16, the National Writers Union UAW Local 1981

passed a resolution to sign the Call to Action at its National Executive Board meeting held in New York City. “The National Writers Union believes in the right of all people and members of all communities, especially those that are oppressed, including prisoners, to practice journalism and to write and express themselves in their own words, in addition to having their stories told by outsiders.”

Affirming “the free flow of information in society”, the NWU resolution also points out that Mumia Abu-Jamal “was invited to become an honorary member of the National Writers Union in 1995 when the state of Pennsylvania first tried to put him to death, and has since received the support of the union over the years as an exemplary broadcast journalist and author who tells the truth about the prison-industrial complex from behind the walls.”

Eric A Gordon is a member of the National Writers Union.

People's World ☪

Secret tribunals part of "Trojan Horse" TPP

James Raines

The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a free trade agreement between the US and 11 Asian and Pacific countries that few people have heard of. If enacted, the TPP would encompass nearly 40 percent of the global economy (US\$27.5 trillion) and affect the lives of 800 million people. The stated goal of the partnership is to eliminate tariffs, and increase the flow of investment capital between signatories. Concealed within this naked move by the global One Percent to squeeze as much profit as possible from the planet is the mechanism for multinational corporations to subvert democracy and legal process through the implementation of secret tribunals.

Last Thursday, Communication Workers of America (CWA) president Larry Cohen agreed with cable channel MSNBC's Ed Schultz's assessment that regarding the TPP, "the president [Obama] clearly is on the wrong side of the issue." Not only would the trade deal result in the

"The Trans-Pacific Partnership will give special rights to corporations. It will allow them to challenge any laws that could impact expected future profits." Citing the recent example of a fracking ban passed by the people of Denton, Texas, under the TPP Denton "could be sued for the amount of profit [the corporation] expected." The suit would be filed, not in any US court, but in a "secret tribunal" run by multinational corporations.

Just today Johnson learned that under the articles of the trade deal, "US companies can set up overseas dummy corporations for the sole purpose of suing the United States" for losses of expected profit. In other words, any regulation or limitation of corporate profitability would result in that profit being extracted directly from the citizenry without their consent, or even awareness.

Often referred to as NAFTA on steroids, the TPP is not limited to the manufacturing and agricultural economic sectors like its predecessor. President Obama's proposed trade deal would include the service sector,

the Trans-Pacific Partnership a key feature in the President's "pivot" to Asia and many have raised the spectre of an ascendant Chinese economy to argue for the necessity of the TPP, Johnson points out that partnering with countries like Brunei is not the way to do it. CWA is not against trade, "there could be a trade deal with Vietnam" Johnson offers, "so long as workers rights have the same attention paid to them as investor rights."

Speaking from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's embassy in Washington DC, Chi Dung Le from the economic section agrees that any trade deal must "improve the lives of working people." Le recognises that "Vietnam is a developing economy" and that while "not on the same level" as all of proposed members of the TPP, "economic integration" is the future of the Socialist Republic.

As one of the proposed partners in the TPP, the low average wage of Vietnamese workers (US\$.70 an hour) is often cited by organised labour as evidence that jobs currently held by US workers will be shipped overseas. Some say the legitimate concerns of job losses are exacerbated by the thinly veiled chauvinism many unions indulge in. They note that framing the TPP as a struggle between US and foreign workers not only fosters latent racism, it is deceptive. The Chamber of Commerce is the creator, sustainer, and should the White House have its way, the largest beneficiary of the TPP.

Chi Dung Le says Vietnam, like any good union, "is fighting for a well balanced agreement" with its former enemy. He is adamant, "we won't lower standards, or serve an interest... that does not improve the lives and economic position of the people."

The CWA has always built broad coalitions to win with their partners what would've been impossible to win alone. Given the powerful, and well funded, interests behind the Trans-Pacific Partnership, it is certain that new alliances must be formed if organised labour hopes to stop the TPP.

People's World ✪

"The Trans-Pacific Partnership will give special rights to corporations. It will allow them to challenge any laws that could impact expected future profits."

loss of jobs and diminish the power of US workers to collectively bargain it would also grant special powers to multinational corporations. Cohen spoke passionately about the TPP's broad side attack on democracy: "If any of these nations improve standards for workers, if they improve environmental standards, or safety standards that cut corporate profits the TPP allows these corporations to try to stop those moves by suing for billions of dollars."

Candice Johnson, communications director for the CWA explains,

and according to Johnson, "25 percent of the work done in the United States would be considered 'tradeable'" or eligible for "export."

Considering that the CWA represents 150,000 call centre workers whose jobs would be immediately "tradeable" if the TPP is enacted it is understandable why president Larry Cohen has sworn to keep his members mobilised against "the joint efforts of the State Department and the Chamber of Commerce ... to shred our rights."

While the White House has made



Region Briefs

To protect the working people's economic equality, the Vietnamese government announced that from the beginning of 2015, all workers' minimum wages would increase by 15 percent depending on regional development. The monthly minimum wage in the most developed regions including Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City would increase to around A\$150. The wage in the least developed region would at least increase to A\$103.

On November 12, unionists together with tea garden workers went on a 12-hour strike in North Bengal, India, demanding revision of tea garden workers' minimum wage. Almost all local left-wing political parties and unions supported the strike which consequently led to a situation that almost everything in the region was shut down, including many shops and schools.

Vietnam's Hue city held a workshop on energy saving and climate change reduction. To fight against climate change, participants suggested improving state management, increasing communication and mobilising stakeholders, as well as using devices and equipment that are more environment-friendly, such as using solar and wind power as alternative sources to generate electricity. At the workshop, energy-saving cooking devices, biogas technology and solar power systems were also exhibited.

The first high-speed bullet train started to operate between Urumqi and Hami, in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The train runs at an average speed of 200 kilometres per hour with four trains running per day. The trip takes three hours from one destination to the other destination 530 kilometres away. Passengers can buy a A\$30 ticket from local train stations, online or by telephone. Commuters will be able to travel to Beijing from Urumqi by train in 16 hours after the high-speed train link finishes being constructed in 2017, instead of the current travel time of 40 hours.

On November 19, Hong Kong police strongly condemned protesters' violent attack, which resulted in invading the legislative council that endangered public order and damaged the building. Three police officers were injured and were taken to hospital. According to a Hong Kong police statement "the Hong Kong community regard that individuals should express their views in a rational and peaceful manner".

According to a statement released by China's State Council, China provided more assistance to children from rural impoverished families, ensuring their healthy growth and free compulsory education. Pregnant women from rural impoverished households will now receive higher medical care insurance compensation and prenatal checks.

Gender pay gap highlights part-time pay penalty

BRITAIN: Commenting on the latest annual pay statistics published last week by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – which show that the full-time median gender pay gap reduced to 9.4 percent in 2014 (from 10 percent the year before). Trade Union Congress General Secretary Frances O'Grady said:

"It's good to see the gender pay gap narrowing again. But after last year's widening we're only back to where we were in 2012.

"Part-time women's pay still lags some way behind that of their full-time colleagues. Nearly six

million women work part-time and they earn £5.15 less per hour than full-time men. Two in five of part-time women earn less than the living wage.

"We need better paid, flexible, part-time work opportunities, and better paid leave for fathers to encourage more equal parenting.

"The full-time gender pay gap may have closed for younger women but it widens dramatically for women in their 40s and 50s. Far too many women still find they have to take a step down to access flexible or reduced hours once they become mothers, and their earnings never

recover even when they return to full-time work."

- On the ONS preferred measure the full-time gender pay gap fell from 10 percent to 9.4 per cent in 2014. In 2012, it was 9.5 per cent. This measure compares the full-time median hourly earnings (excluding overtime) for men and women.
- On the mean measure of the gender pay gap, the gap is now 14.2 per cent, down from 15.7 per cent in 2013. In 2012, it was 14.8 per cent.
- The UK living wage is £7.85, rising to £9.15 in London. ✪

Letters to the Editor
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On torture

The Senate Intelligence Committee's "torture report" is expected to detail shocking abuse of prisoners at the hands of the CIA during the Bush administration, and even possible CIA lies to Congress to cover it up. Unsurprisingly, the CIA is trying to prevent much of the report from seeing the light of day.

As we understand it, the report of course covers waterboarding and other torture that's euphemistically been called "enhanced interrogation", but also makes it clear that the CIA engaged in even more grotesque, unreported acts as well. All in our names.

But seven months after the Senate Intelligence Committee voted overwhelmingly to release the report to the American people the White House is stonewalling Congress and demanding "redactions" – blacked-out sections that make the report

unintelligible – before making its contents public.

We have a real chance to have the report released before the end of the year, when Senator Mark Udall leaves office.

Here's how: Members of Congress have an absolute right to free speech, and a member could release the report in its entirety without fear of prosecution.

This is just as the Pentagon Papers, disclosing lies that underpinned our involvement in Vietnam, were released in 1971.

That's exactly what transparency advocates are calling on the outgoing, staunchly anti-torture and pro-transparency Senator Udall to do – and he's made it clear that he's actively considering doing so.

This would be a courageous act that would incur the ire of very powerful interests – so we need to make sure that Udall knows countless people will support him if he chooses to move forward.

We have a real chance to make history – and hold the Bush administration and the CIA's torturers accountable. Let's get it done.

Watchdog.net and Demand Progress

Stars to Rock the Gate

Human rights campaigner and urban roots musician Natalie Pa'apa'a of Blue King Brown is

urging people across Australia to "Rize-up" against the unconventional gas industry. Pa'apa'a will join an impressive line-up of national and international stars at a benefit concert for Rock the Gate in Sydney.

The Melbourne-based singer and lyricist will join nearly 70 other musicians in an event that will showcase the music scene's support for Australia's fracking resistance. Pa'apa'a said she would be performing for justice and an end to coal seam gas mining.

"Music and the arts are a vital part of any community and hold an important role to represent the voice of the people, to tell and share stories that reflect that community," Pa'apa'a said.

"We are alive in a time where our community is global, as is the real threat to our environment and our right to safe and clean water."

Included on the bill are Ash Grunwald, Tex Perkins, The Herd, Declan Kelly, Pete Murray, Diesel n' Dub and Trevor Hall.

"We support Lock The Gate and Rock The Gate because we support justice over exploitation, people over profits and reality over the illusion of perpetual blunder without consequence.

"CSG mining must stop now and we must stop participating in systems that favour corporations over people; over us.

"It's time to wake up and take back our power... and our future. Rize Up!"

Pa'apa'a, who started her career in Byron Bay, was described by *Rolling Stone* magazine recently as having one of the nation's most refreshing voices.

**Phil Laird
Lock the Gate Alliance**

"Abbott shirt-fronted by climate change reality"

That's just one of thousands of embarrassing headlines for the Abbott government to come out of the G20, as Barack Obama talked about climate change and threats to the Great Barrier Reef.

Mr Abbott had deliberately instructed that climate change be kept off the agenda. US President Obama refused, instead praising the wonder of the Reef and expressing his concern for its future by stating: "The incredible natural glory of the Great Barrier Reef is threatened ... I want my daughters to be able to bring their daughters or sons to visit and I want that there 50 years from now."

It was such an embarrassing indictment on the world stage that the Queensland Premier Campbell Newman has tried to personally reassure Obama that his government

is "really solid on Reef protection". Seriously.

The good news is, together we've already stopped some of the world's biggest investment banks from financing the coal industry's outrageous destruction of our Great Barrier Reef. Huge banks like Citigroup and HSBC have declared they won't go near the Reef.

But we also know corrupt Indian mining giant Adani is still pushing ahead to find other lenders. A new report states that coal projects near the Reef are "highly unlikely to proceed without the support of the four Australian bank majors." Which means our banks could hold the key to the protection or the destruction of our Reef.

With your help, we can keep the heat on the Big Four banks to refuse to fund these projects. With your help we'll also be able to:

- Continue our vital research and media work to expose the destructive impacts of coal expansion on the Reef.
- Send our *Rainbow Warrior* ship to the Reef to get the nation talking about what's really going on – holding those in power to account.

**Shani Tager
Greenpeace Australia Pacific**

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

Chickens come home to roost

Prior to the last State election in NSW, the local community newsletter that circulates in the Wyong shire where I live was very hostile on the then-Labor government and very supportive of the Liberal Party opposition.

At the time, Korean power generating company Kores was negotiating with the state government to open a long-wall coal mine under the main water-catchment valleys on the Central Coast with potentially disastrous effects on the region's water supply, air quality and health.

The local newsletter, a glossy magazine called *The Grapevine*, was unremitting in its attacks upon the Labor government for its support of mining in a water catchment area, and trumpeted every statement by Opposition leader Barry O'Farrell who, in his quest for electoral support, eagerly donned an anti-coalmining T-shirt and even gave an "iron clad guarantee" to a public meeting that a Liberal government would not allow any mining under the water-catchment valleys near Wyong: "No ifs, no buts, a guarantee!"

Once elected, the Libs' position did a predictable about-face and Kores' long-wall mine, with its accompanying threat to the water table and its inevitable subsidence and other calamitous side-effects was firmly back on the table. Barry, of course, has gone now (for lying to ICAC) but the Libs are still pushing the new coal-mine. And *The Grapevine* has dumped them with a vengeance.

Under the headline "Plethora of broken promises", the November issue of *The Grapevine* ran the following short article: "Last month the Abbott government put on the Notice Paper its intention to guillotine debate and rush through the House of Representatives its remaining social security cuts.

"There is no doubt many Central Coast citizens feel the Abbott government's 'budget of

broken promises' will cost Australians more, at a time when many people are already struggling to make ends meet. Tony Abbott is trying to hide from the Australian people, and keep his cruel cuts from getting proper debate and scrutiny in the Parliament.

"The Abbott government is rushing through \$9.8 billion worth of cuts to pensions, cuts to the seniors supplement, cuts to veterans' pensions and family payments, and increasing the pension age. They have forgotten that every Budget is about choices, but instead of tackling the real issues, Tony Abbott has taken the wrong path, the unfair path to a more unequal Australia.

"Instead of hurting pensioners, Tony should scrap his unfair and unaffordable paid parental leave scheme.

"Instead of a GP tax on the sick, Tony should scrap the tax break on super accounts over \$2 million.

"Instead of \$5.8 billion cut to universities, Tony should crack down on multinational tax avoidance.

"The Abbott government needs to come clean with the Australian people and reveal what else they've got planned."

Opposition to Abbott's government "by the wealthy for the wealthy" is undoubtedly growing. How could it be otherwise, given the savage, brutal way he and his ministers are shamelessly bashing the poor, the sick, the disabled, the helpless – in fact anyone and everyone they think they can gouge cash from to tip into the bottomless pockets of the wealthy and the corporations that keep them that way.

Whether that will translate into defeat for Abbott at the next election remains to be seen. "Pig-iron Bob" Menzies and little Johnny Howard were equally hated but both remained in office for years on end. Some pro-people policies from Labor would certainly go a long



Liberal Member for Terrigal Chris Hartcher (L), Opposition leader Barry O'Farrell (C) and Australian Coal Alliance campaign director Alan Hayes (R) join angry residents in their opposition to the Kores coal mine proposal – once elected, the Libs' position did a predictable about-face.

way towards helping to rid us of the Abbott blight, but Labor leader Bill Shorten is severely handicapped by the fact that he basically agrees with Abbott's policies. His only hope is to convince the powerbrokers of Australian capitalism that Labor could run the country on their behalf better than the Libs. Considering the mess the country's getting into, that should not be too difficult.

However, a pro-business Labor government is not going to be of significant help to ordinary Australians: workers, farmers, small business people, students, professionals – they are all going to continue being screwed unless there is a significant, fundamental shift in the policy aims of government in this country.

Only pressure from the organised working class and its allies can bring that about. Which is one reason the Libs are so intent on muzzling the trade unions and making action by workers illegal, going so far as to equate it with "terrorism".

Disenchantment with so-called Labor parties is spreading, not just in Australia but abroad too. In Britain, where 100,000 people marched last month in a joint trade union protest over low wages, many are questioning whether simply electing the Labour Party to government is any kind of solution. In Scotland, where a large number of people – a minority to be sure,

but a *large* minority – were so pissed off they voted to secede from the UK altogether, Labour MP Margaret Curran has called for her party to dump the opportunism that is the hallmark of social democrat parties everywhere today.

"Being timid won't win us any supporters," she says. "We need a response from the left that responds to the conditions of people's lives. The socialist principles of equality, redistribution and social justice need to shape our politics as much today as they did when I joined the party."

Social democracy began as the political arm of the trade union movement. Capitalism however assigned it a different role, that of alternative caretaker when capitalism was on the nose. Ever since 1914, when most social democratic parties voted to support the imperialist war, the history of social democracy has been a slow decline into subservience to the rule of capital.

Margaret Curran's plea for Labour to "return to its socialist principles" can only fall on deaf ears today, but she is right in one sense: for the answer undoubtedly is socialism, but to achieve that requires the building of a strong Marxist-Leninist party dedicated not to patching up the present system to make it better, but to *changing* the system altogether, changing it to the proven superiority of socialism. ✪



Sunday November 30 –
Saturday December 6

Michelle Leonard is the founder and Artistic Director of the Moorambilla Voice Regional Choir. She has a mission: to teach primary-school children in outback NSW contemporary, original, demanding music by Australia's best, up-and-coming composers. She wants the children to sing in harmonies and perform with a professional orchestra, in front of hundreds of people.

Outback Choir (ABC Sunday November 30 at 7.40pm) follows Michelle and four children from different towns through auditions and music camp to the end of year concert. Michelle Leonard is among Australia's foremost choral conductors, educators and advocates and the film makes it clear that her reputation is well deserved.

In his classic documentary **Ordinary Fascism**, Soviet director Mikhail Romm showed that the atrocities committed by Nazi soldiers were made possible by a deliberate policy of dehumanising them with training that, in his words, "turned boys into beasts". Near the end of the film he showed US soldiers being given the same type of dehumanised, follow-orders-without-question training.

The eight-part series **Commando School (SBS ONE Monday December 1 at 8.30pm)** shows the British army's Royal Marines' Commando Training Centre in Devon basically doing the same thing.

A couple of weeks ago, **Secrets Of Britain** dealt (none too sympathetically) with the exploits of

Kim Philby, the courageous British member of Soviet Intelligence who is buried in a place of honour in the Kremlin wall. This week's episode (SBS ONE Tuesday December 2 at 7.30pm) in contrast, is concerned with the very British London store Selfridges – and its *American* creator, Harry Gordon Selfridge. The flamboyant Mr Selfridge is the man who coined the expression, "the customer is always right".

The three-part series **A Country Road – The Nationals** started last week. It is presented by Heather Ewart, "a seasoned political reporter who grew up on a sheep and wheat farm in National Party country in Victoria". The series is essentially a cleverly disguised puff piece for the Nationals, formerly the Country Party, claiming that "there's no other political party in the world quite like The Nationals".

This week's second episode (ABC Tuesday December 2 at 8.30pm) focuses on Queensland and the reactionary but thankfully disastrous "Joh for PM" campaign. It drew on the same redneck prejudices as One Nation's Pauline Hanson, and more recently Clive Palmer.

In the end, the once dominant Queensland Nationals led by Joh Bjelke-Petersen has vanished, merged with the Liberal Party to form the equally reactionary LNP.

Tony Abbott no doubt wishes climate change would just go away and stop bedeviling him and his simple understanding of the world. Many Americans on the other hand, from the President down, have a different view. The nine-part documentary series **Years Of Living Dangerously (SBS ONE Tuesdays at 9.30pm)** uses Hollywood celebrities to tell first-hand stories about the effects of climate change.

The series won the 2014 Emmy Award for Outstanding Nonfiction Series. In this week's episode, **End Of The Woods**, Harrison Ford continues his investigation into the global effects of the palm oil industry and further explores the corruption that has ravaged the Indonesian landscape resulting in the country being one of the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases through deforestation. Meanwhile, Governor Arnold



Darcy (Matthew Rhys) and Elizabeth (Anna Maxwell Williams) – *Death Comes To Pemberley* (ABC Fridays from November 28th at 8.30pm).

Schwarzenegger joins an elite team of wild-land firefighters as they battle a new breed of forest fire, one made more deadly by climate change.

This week sees the conclusion of **The Twilight Saga with Breaking Dawn Part 2 (ABC2 Wednesday, December 3 at 8.30pm)**. For reasons known only to the producers, but which can easily be deduced as greed, the decision was made to split the novel in two and make two films from it (producing twice the income).

The climax of Stephenie Meyer's novel however is deliberately anticlimactic, with the blood-thirsty Volturi being persuaded not to destroy the Cullens and their assembled supporters. This did not suit the filmmakers at all, so they created a devastating final battle anyway – as a kind of apocalyptic warning of what *could* happen. It is too transparently commercial, designed presumably to provide some good scenes for the trailer, and jarringly at variance with the mood of the sequence in the book.

The documentary **North Of Capricorn (NITV Wednesday December 3 at 9.00pm)** looks at Australia's tropical north. The north has always been closer to Timor, PNG and Indonesia than to Sydney or Melbourne. They were part of the Chinese, Japanese, and Indonesian Archipelago trade route for trepang (sea cucumber) long before the British and French sailed down under. The program attempts to assert that this changes the whole story of Australia's history.

Like most programs seeking to radically revise accepted history, it overstates its case, claiming that "the tropical north has different ancestors, architecture, music, fashions, food, vegetation and work ethics and has cultural ties with Asia/Pacific. Today's descendants revel in their difference, and celebrate being part of the 'Asian century'."

Jane Austen's glorious novel **Pride And Prejudice** has been adapted as an impressive television serial, a couple of movies, and in

2009 as a rather delightful fantasy (*Lost In Austen*) in which a young woman finds that a door in her 21st century bathroom opens into the 18th century home of the novel's principal characters. Now crime writer PD James has turned it into a period murder mystery, the three-part series **Death Comes To Pemberley (ABC Fridays from November 28th at 8.30pm)**.

Although one can say that James is just "having a bit of fun" using the characters and setting of *Pride And Prejudice* in this way, and James' novel has been described as an "homage" to Austen's work, but to me it still smacks of cheating. More importantly, it is the kind of story that Austen herself would *never* have written, not because she was incapable but because her concerns were with other aspects of life. To hijack her characters in this way is unfair to her.

That said, the series is very well done, and within its limitations is a thoughtful, careful adaptation. ☺

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POLITICS
IN THE PUB

November 27

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A tradition of political struggle

Interview with Matthieu Bolles-Reddat

Matthieu Bolles-Reddat is a railroad worker in Paris and General-Secretary of the CGT (Confédération générale du travail) of railroad workers in Versailles. He is also a member of the PCF (Parti communiste français) in the 15th Arrondissement. This interview by *MLToday's* Roger Keeran occurred in Paris on November 9, 2014.

MLT: Today is the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. What thoughts do you have on this occasion?

MB-R: For me the end of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union that accompanied it was not good news for workers worldwide. It has ushered in two decades that have not been good for workers. The Soviet Union was the shield for the working class of the world.

Of course, the Soviet Union was not a paradise, but it was on the side of workers. Workers and Communists must look at the mistakes that were made in the Soviet Union, but we must keep in mind that they were our mistakes. We do not need bourgeois commentators to try to tell us what was wrong. Rather, it is for us to examine.

I went to Berlin a few years ago, and the workers there told me a joke. They said, "During socialism 50 percent of what we were taught in school was propaganda. When they told us the GDR was a paradise it was not true. But when they told us that capitalism was hell, that was true. We know, because now we have capitalism."

Nowadays, emboldened by the collapse of socialism, the capitalists are on the attack. They tell us now you see socialism was wrong. Before this, we had a model. Now we don't.

MLT: How would you characterise the situation facing French unions today?

MB-R: First, you have to understand that the general situation of French unions is completely different than what workers have in Germany, England, and the United States. There you have one or two federations that are dominant, and you have a tradition of negotiating with the bosses over wages and conditions.

Here it is not the same tradition. For one thing, we have six or seven different federations linked with different political orientations. The biggest union is the CGT, which has links with the French Communist Party. But there are many rightist trade unions.

Moreover, the French trade unions have a smaller membership than in other European countries. The CGT, which is the largest union, has only 700,000 members. All the trade unions in France have only 2 million members. Contrast that with Germany, where the largest union has 6 million members.

In spite of such differences in size, there is

another difference. What trade union in England, or Germany, or the US can put 3 million people on the streets like the CGT can? That is because French trade unions have a tradition of political struggle, that is, struggle over government policy, more so than unions elsewhere.

Historically, the French unions took up the struggle for world peace, against colonialism, and against the war in Algeria, and French unions were in the vanguard of the resistance to the occupation of German fascists. My federation has a huge tradition of political struggle. The General Secretary of my union was murdered by the Nazis. Eight thousand of our members were killed during the Second World War. Today, everyone knows the sacrifices of those who went before.

This tradition influences our struggles today. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was for many unionists the collapse of hope and the strengthening of reformist thinking in the unions. Now there is the idea that unions today must be modern, that they must work together with the bosses. But the base of the unions is still healthy. Workers realise we must struggle not just against the bosses or the government but against reformism in the trade unions, because we cannot do battle with the bosses with these kind of reformist ideas and leaders in our ranks.

MLT: Last Wednesday, your union had a demonstration in Paris. What was that about?

MB-R: What we are trying to do is organise a "rassemblement" [MLT: a regrouping in a common front]. Last June, we had a two-week railroad strike, and we lost. In Marseilles, there was a two-week strike on the docks, and they lost. In September, there was a three-week strike of airline pilots, and they lost. So, we say, "Stop!" Let's all fight alongside each other and win. We need a convergence of struggle. All of these strikes were over the same thing, the attempt of the European Union to break the working conditions in each country.

This was the main purpose of the creation of the European Union. We now have this European Union law that relates to railroads, ports, and airlines that proposes to create private companies and "concurrence" (competition) in these public sectors. This is just a way of cutting workers' pay, benefits, and pensions.

Railroads, airlines and ports are a public service. They are not profit-makers. They take



The biggest union is the CGT (Confédération générale du travail), which has links with the French Communist Party.

huge public investments to run. The trains serve small, remote places, even with only a few passengers, because they are a public service. It is the same with safety. Safety does not make profit, but it is obviously good for the traveller. French railroads are the safest in the world, because they are run as a public service and not for profit.

The French did not create railroads. They started in England, which is why our trains drive on the left side and why our rails are exactly the same width as England's, the width of the wheels on the Queen's carriage. But we are very proud of our railroads, and safety is very important for us.

Another issue for us with the European Union is a law that allows an employer to pay an immigrant worker wages comparable to the normal wages in the worker's home country rather than the normal wages in the country where he is working.

MLT: Do the various confederations of workers cooperate with each other?

MB-R: No.

MLT: How important is international trade union solidarity? How are you and your union participating in international solidarity work?

MB-R: The CGT left the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in 1995. It was part of the fallout from the Soviet collapse. The leaders of the CGT decided, instead, to join the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (IFCTU) with the idea of taking it in a more progressive direction. But as George Mavrikos, the General Secretary of WFTU asked, "Who took whom, and where?"

The IFCTU is for the collaboration of classes. It is imperialist. It supported the coup by Pinochet against Allende, the coup against Chávez, the Vietnam War, the Israelis against the Palestinians and so forth. This is why our union, the CGT of railroad workers in Versailles, is part of the WFTU. It is a way to have a debate within the CGT. The WFTU is not perfect, but it is family. We need international solidarity in the class struggle. We need to share our experiences and our ideas.

For example, last year the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers Union of Great Britain had the WFTU hold a meeting in London for delegates of transport unions of the WFTU in France, Cyprus, Greece and Italy. We talked about how to combat the liberalisation laws. On May 27 in France we organised a demonstration against these laws and delegates came from Italy and the UK. Where was the IFCTU? Solidarity in action is better; this is the best. Lenin said when you have ideas, you have the way. Now we are raising funds to give to Palestinian workers because in the last conflict the Israelis destroyed not just schools and hospitals, which everyone knows, but also the trade union buildings.

MLT: Thank you, Matthieu. We hope to continue this discussion and have you meet some American trade unionists when you come to New York next June.

Journal of Marxist-Leninist Thought ✪

"Workers realise we must struggle not just against the bosses or the government but against reformism in the trade unions, because we cannot do battle with the bosses with these kind of reformist ideas and leaders in our ranks."



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