



# Australia: Pacific pariah

Tom Pearson

The increasing influence in the Pacific of China, India and Indonesia has come after a long history of Australia treating its Pacific island neighbours with arrogance and contempt. In contemporary terms, it includes the ongoing commitment to coal exports at a time when Pacific governments are seeking reduced use of fossil fuels; the island nations are experiencing firsthand the profoundly destructive nature of climate change.

Also, the costly, unresolved and cruelly punitive treatment of asylum seekers, warehoused on Manus Island and Nauru; cuts to Radio Australia services, including the closure of its shortwave broadcasting; the shutting down of AusAID as an independent, statutory organisation; the gutting of the overseas aid program, slashed to the lowest ratio of national income ever recorded.

Australia's annual allocation for its international contribution towards climate change has remained at the same level since 2009 while our Pacific neighbours are trying to adapt to adverse climate impacts; any wonder they are looking beyond the ANZUS members for support.

The fact that China is building good-neighbour relations with the Pacific island nations appears to have surprised the Turnbull government who, in their arrogance, have not only cut the aid budget but are dictating to the recipients how they must spend their stripped-back allocation. At the same time Australia has increased its military budget to unprecedented levels and continues pouring resources into predatory wars in support of its big power masters.

Hypocrisy looms large with PM Turnbull's squawking about alleged Chinese bases amid unfounded claims that Chinese funding for Pacific infrastructure projects has a military trade off: Australia has foreign bases around the country, including the ultra-secret Pine Gap spy facility used for planning invasions and occupations in violation of international law, as well as the growing foreign military forces – US and Japan – in Australia's north.

## Racism

Australia has positioned itself as a deputy sheriff in the Pacific, imposing the dictates of the US in the region. Although circumstances and issues have changed in Australia since Federation in 1901, the main strategic considerations have remained substantially the same, irrespective of whether Liberal or Labor is in government.

In the early 1900s, the British Empire reigned supreme around the world. Britain administered vast colonial possessions – India, Malaya, concessions in China, South Africa,



Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) and many other territories. Other European colonial powers also held a share – the French in Indo-China and the South Pacific, the Dutch in Indonesia (then called the Dutch East Indies), the Portuguese in Africa, Macau (part of China) and, of course, East Timor. (See page 3.)

Australian governments looked to Britain for protection in what was portrayed as a potentially hostile Asia. The objective of the British and Australian rulers was to maintain Australia as a white, Anglo-Saxon imperialist base in the Asia-Pacific region. This objective was clearly stated when in 1901, Senator Staniford, in parliamentary debates on the White Australia policy, said: "Speaking from the imperial point of view, nothing could tend to solidify and strengthen the Empire so much as that we should build up in these southern lands a British race."

## Africa-Asia

In 2005 the heads of state of 104 Asian and African leaders met in Jakarta for an Asian-African Summit to reinvigorate the Spirit of Bandung which was enshrined in the Final

Communiqué of the 1955 Asian-African Conference, marking the 50th anniversary of the 1955 meeting of Asia-African countries in Bandung, Indonesia. The Summit meeting – a landmark gathering – of the leaders of the two continents decided to create a New Asian-African Strategic Partnership.

A declaration adopted by the meeting said: "We reiterate our conviction that the Spirit of Bandung, the core principles of which are solidarity, friendship and co-operation, continues to be a solid, relevant and effective foundation for fostering better relations among Asian and African countries and resolving global issues of common concern."

The declaration said that since the 1955 Conference, Asian and African countries have attained significant political advances.

"We have successfully combated the scourge of colonialism and consistently fought racism. In particular, the abolition of apartheid represents a milestone in Asian-African cooperation and we reaffirm our continued determination to eradicate racism and all forms of discrimination."

(Today, we have the Australian government

pleading the case for settlement of white South African farmers, who derived their privilege from the imposition of the vicious policies of apartheid, a system successive conservative Australian governments supported.)

The declaration continued: "As a result of our efforts over the last 50 years, we are all independent, sovereign and equal nations striving for the promotion of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law."

"However, having made these political gains, we are concerned that we have not yet attained commensurate progress in the social and economic spheres. We recognise the need to continuously strengthen the process of nation and state-building, as well as social integration."

The Summit reiterated a commitment to the principle of self-determination set forth in the Final Communiqué of the 1955 Bandung Conference and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

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# Guardian

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## Racism and empire

In a pamphlet called *Immigration and the White Australia Policy*, R Dixon, assistant secretary of the Australian Communist Party (as it was called at the time), wrote: "From the standpoint of British imperialism, it was of decisive importance that Australia should be built up and strengthened as a bastion of Empire, as a 'white' outpost of British imperialism in the Pacific."

The White Australia policy had nothing to do with defending the jobs or living standards of Australian workers although it was always justified on those grounds. This false assertion has been resurrected by ultra-nationalists within the Liberal Party and fascist groups such as One Nation. It was also justified on cultural grounds. The fact is that then, as now, employers attempted to reduce the wages and jobs of workers at every opportunity.

The first White Australia legislation was specifically directed against Chinese. This was thought to be too offensive and was then changed to "Asiatics". This too was thought to be too offensive by Britain which, at the time, was administering a number of Asian colonies. The legislation was then changed to provide for a dictation test in a foreign language as the device to keep out those who for racial reasons were considered to be "undesirable".

After the Russian Revolution of 1917 the element of class struggle against socialism became a major consideration in the foreign policies of all western governments. The destruction of socialism in the Soviet Union and action to prevent socialist revolutions from occurring elsewhere in the world became the top agenda item.

So, when in the period immediately prior to World War II, Robert Menzies travelled to Nazi Germany and came back praising Hitler and also supported the policies of the Japanese militarists in their aggression against China and the Soviet Union in the East, it was because of these anti-socialist policies. Menzies fully supported the appeasement policies of the British government before World War II.

Menzies went so far in his appeasement policies that he was prepared to give away the northern part of Australia (the Brisbane Line) to the Japanese when they were sweeping south in the early stages of the war in the Pacific. Fortunately, Menzies was thrown out as Prime Minister at this time.

Relations must be based on equality, mutual benefit, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and acceptance of the right of all countries to adopt their chosen social system.

This will require a substantial shift away from the underpinnings of the foreign policy pursued by successive Australian governments. If, however, this change is not implemented soon, Australia will have an increasingly rocky road in its relations with many of its Asia-Pacific neighbours.

China has emerged as Australia's main trading partner with trade between Australia and China overtaking that with Japan and the United States.

The US alliance, on the other hand, ties Australia to huge increases in the involvement of the Australia militarily at the behest of the US in any part of the world.

Closer relations with China mean very large and profitable trade deals and political relations based on "peace, friendship and mutual cooperation" and mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations.

These are principles that Australia signed up to when it reluctantly signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia early this century. If Australia were to adopt such an approach it would mean the pursuit by Australia of an independent foreign policy that is for the peaceful solution of any problems that might arise.

This approach is not acceptable to Coalition or Labor governments. They are still rooted in the past in which Australia has seen itself as the inevitable allies of the European and north American imperialist countries. They are still carrying the "white man's burden" in Asia and the legacy of the White Australia policy. But this approach is no longer valid and will become more and more out of date and unworkable in the years ahead.

China's influence for peace and development (and that of Russia too), will continue to grow while that of the US will wane and Australia will have to decide which relationship is in the best interests of the Australian people.

### PRESS FUND

Australian General John Monash (much in the news lately) experienced discrimination as a Jew of German origin during WWI. War often carries bitter ironies. Monash's brilliant tactics of very fast, highly-mechanised surprise attacks helped to end the war, but many years later they were adopted as blitzkrieg, or lightning war, by the Nazis, who set out to exterminate European Jews. Monash is still denigrated by military officials, and his name has been adopted by the troglodyte parliamentary representatives of that decrepit but very dangerous juggernaut, the Australian coal industry. You'll find more about them on page 5 of this *Guardian*, but right now we really need Press Fund contributions, so please send in something for the next issue if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

Dr G Dittura \$5, MM \$10, R Reed \$20, "Rough Red" \$5, "Round Figure" \$15, E Seymour \$25

This week's total: \$80 Progressive total: \$2,100

# Trickle-down greed

The Australian Council of Trade Unions has slammed a plan by the Australian Mines and Metals Association to abolish the award system that underpins the working rights of all Australians.

The plan would see all 122 awards abolished, erasing more than a century of workplace progress for working people.

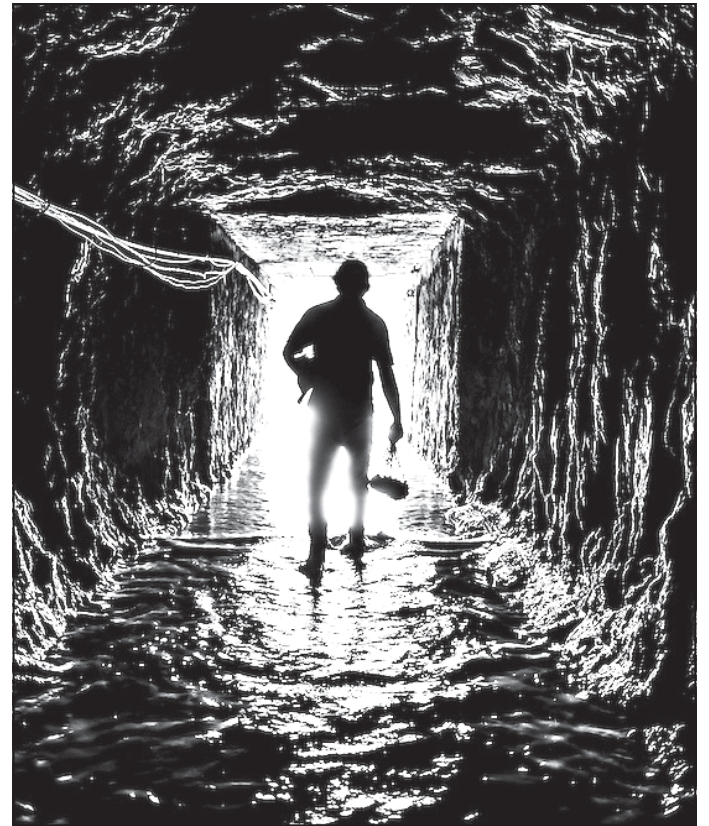
"This proposal would take Australia back to the bad old days of the 1870s when working people had no rights," said ACTU secretary Sally McManus. "It would cut the pay and deny the rights of all working Australians."

The 2.3 million working people on awards are already among the lowest paid with the least secure jobs. And everyone on an agreement or employment contract negotiates from a floor set by the award system.

"The mining lobby are ideological warriors for trickle-down economics who want to boost their profits the expense of working people," continued McManus.

"Their greed is only matched by their insensitivity to damage already done by the 70 year highs in inequality that is the direct result of the failed experiment with this ideology.

"We need an award system that improves with the times so that working people can have more secure jobs and fair pay rises." ✪



## Australia: Pacific pariah

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"In particular, we express our abhorrence that, 50 years since the 1955 Bandung Conference, the Palestinian people remain deprived of their right to independence. The conference called for the creation of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

"We recognise that the current global situation and the prevailing conditions in Asia and Africa necessitate the need to actively pursue a common view and collective action to ensure the equitable sharing of the benefits of globalisation," said the declaration.

The declaration highlighted that poverty and under-development, gender mainstreaming, communicable diseases, environmental degradation, natural disasters, drought and desertification, digital divide, inequitable market access, and foreign debt, remain as issues of common concern which call for our closer co-operation and collective action. These struggles still apply in 2018.

"We envision an Asian-African region at peace with itself and with

the world at large working together as a concert of nations in harmony, non-exclusive, bonded in dynamic partnership and conscious of our historical ties and cultural heritage.

"We visualise an affluent Asian-African region characterised by equitable growth, sustainable development as well as a common determination to enhance the quality of life and well-being of our people. We further envisage a caring Asian-African society where the people live in stability, prosperity, dignity and free from the fear of violence, oppression and injustice."

### Principles

The strategic partnership provided a momentum in achieving peace, prosperity and progress, based on the following principles and ideals:

- Recognition of diversity, including different social and economic systems, a commitment to open dialogue, based on mutual respect and benefit, non-exclusive cooperation, equal partnership, common ownership and vision, a shared conviction to address common challenges, the

promotion of a just, democratic, transparent, accountable and harmonious society, the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.

- Practical co-operation between the two continents in areas such as trade, industry, investment, finance, tourism, information and communication technology, energy, health, transportation, agriculture, water resources and fisheries is to be promoted.
- The Asia-African states are to address issues such as armed conflict, weapons of mass destruction, transnational organised crime and terrorism, which are fundamental to ensuring peace, stability, and security.
- Determination to prevent conflict and resolve disputes by peaceful means.

It is instructive to note that the governments of Australia and New Zealand did not attend the Summit. The Pacific Island nations did. ✪



## QUOTE OF THE WEEK



Am I Not A Man And A Brother?

Motto of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1790)





## Timor-Leste

## Some justice, more needed



Following the announcement in March that agreement had been reached between the governments of Australia and Timor-Leste that the maritime boundary between the two nations will be the midline between their coastlines, the Australia East Timor Friendship Association of SA released the following statement:

**The agreement signed by Agio Pereira for Timor-Leste and Julie Bishop for Australia is a truly historic occasion because, finally, the Australian government has been forced to accept the principle of international law (the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea or UNCLOS) in relation to the maritime border between the two nations in the Timor Sea.**

However, it is not a proud moment for Australia, whose leaders from the beginning of negotiations in 2002, sought to cheat Timor-Leste, the poorest nation in the region that was still recovering from 24 years of brutal occupation by the Indonesian military (TNI) out of its fair share of the oil and gas resources in its half of the Timor Sea.

Later, Timor-Leste took Australia to an International Court over allegations of ASIS (Australian Security Intelligence Service) spying on its negotiating team in 2005 and

accused it of bullying tactics during the early stages of its independence, forcing the new East Timorese to accept an unfair deal.

Then in 2016, Dili took the maritime border dispute to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague. The International Court ordered compulsory arbitration between the two parties which has finally led to the current agreement. The response of the then Attorney General, George Brandis was to order an ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) raid on the office of Bernard Collaery, the Australian lawyer who was representing the government of Timor-Leste and to withdraw the passport of Witness K, a former Australian military intelligence officer, who became a whistle blower because of Australia's unfair treatment of Timor-Leste. Many international legal observers consider that these tactics were intended to pervert the course of justice.

These outrages followed 24 years of aiding and abetting the TNI during its long and illegal occupation of East Timor. All of this has to be considered as a disgraceful and contemptible way to treat our valiant World War 2 ally whose people suffered greatly at the hands of the Japanese military for supporting Australia.

If Australia is acting in good faith, it should return the royalties for the resources that were removed from Timor-Leste's half of the Timor Sea to help it provide urgently needed humanitarian, rebuilding and development programs to build a healthy and viable nation in the future. Its people still suffer high levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, malnutrition, youth unemployment, illiteracy and infant mortality.

While AETFA SA is pleased that the East Timorese have gained some justice with the signing of the treaty, it notes that there is still disagreement over how to share revenue from the lucrative Greater Sunrise oil and gas field in the Timor Sea which analysts have valued at between \$40-\$50 billion. Timor-Leste wants a 70:30% split in its favour with processing being done in Timor-Leste. Australia wants to share profits with an 80-20 percent split

in Timor-Leste's favour, but with oil and gas processed in Darwin.

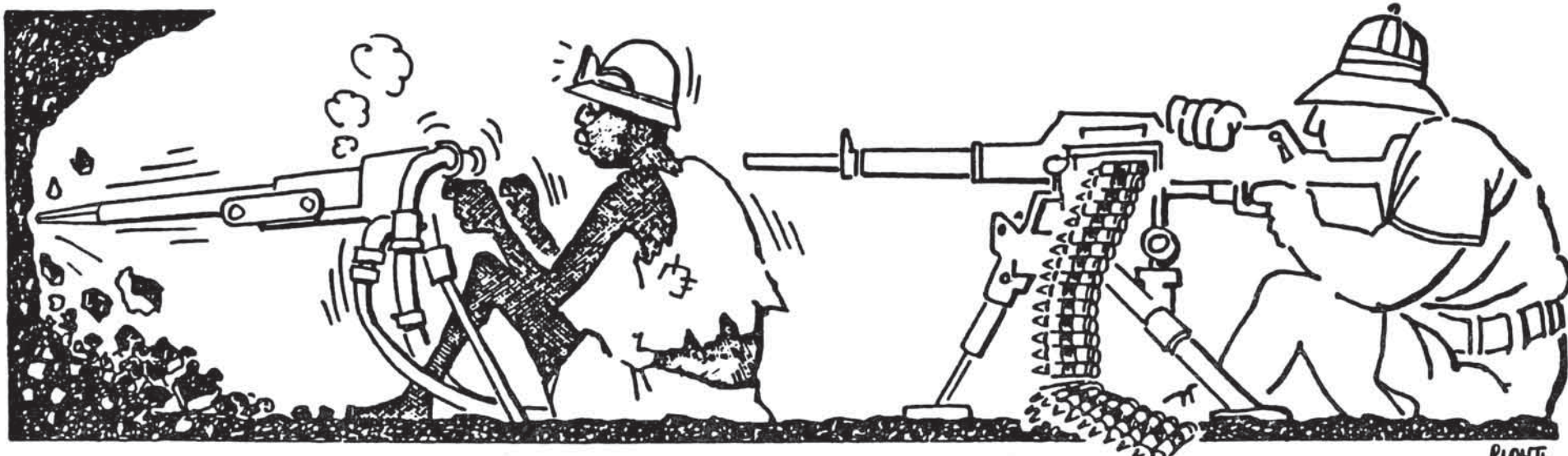
AETFA SA would ask why Timor-Leste should only receive 70% or 80% of the revenues given that 100% of the resources belongs to them? It would be much fairer for the Australian government to offer 90% of the revenues to Timor-Leste and offer a high percentage of staff positions in the refinery industry to go to East Timorese engineers, geologists, technicians.

Don Rothwell, an expert in international maritime law at the Australian National University has said that the opportunity for a gas processing industry was "worth more to Timor than to Australia" – especially because of the dire struggle for independence against incredible odds.

Surely Australian leaders could show some compassion and fairness to our struggling neighbour that faces so many challenges as it seeks to be an economically viable nation instead of continuing the mean-minded treatment of a people who have been our loyal friends".

**Andrew (Andy) Alcock**  
Information Officer – AETFA SA Inc

## From the Archives

Apartheid – South Africa – *The Guardian*, October 1989



# The educational-equivalent of an arms race

The latest My School data exposes the gross inequities in Malcolm Turnbull's education funding system. The data reveals how four elite Sydney schools alone have spent just under \$200 million on capital works between 2014 and 2016, while public schools continue to suffer funding cuts under Turnbull's education funding plan.

"Malcolm Turnbull is fuelling the educational-equivalent of an arms race for private schools," said Correna Haythorpe, president of the Australian Education Union.

"Elite private schools spending tens of millions on wellness centres, rowing tanks, ballet studios and libraries that look like Scottish castles.

"Private schools are diverting millions in recurrent funding to capital works because in many cases they are getting more than they are entitled to. Malcolm Turnbull's new funding plan makes this worse.

"The Turnbull government is giving private schools a separate \$1.9 billion capital fund while public schools get nothing which is a huge problem in NSW with public school enrolments expected to grow by 21 percent by 2031.

"Turnbull has reignited the school funding wars by giving private schools 80 percent of their public funding entitlement, leaving public schools

with only 20 percent of the recurrent funding they require."

In NSW, enrolments in public schools are expected to grow by 21% by 2031. Schools need the infrastructure and resources to support an increasing population.

"Public schools serve their local communities and should be funded to provide quality learning environments. We need strong leaders who support their communities by investing in public school education.

"The Australian Education Union is calling on our state and federal governments to work together to reduce educational inequity. We call for a new capital funding stream for public schools in the May budget. All students deserve safe, comfortable learning facilities," said Haythorpe.

In February the AEU's Federal Conference condemned the inequitable funding policies of the government that will deliver billions extra to private schools while leaving public schools under-resourced. Conference delegates in Melbourne unanimously agreed that the Turnbull government's \$1.9 billion cut in recurrent funding for public schools should be reversed and a dedicated capital works funding program be established.

President Haythorpe said that front page revelations in the media about the hundreds

of millions of dollars that overfunded private schools were used to build libraries that look like castles, ballet centres and orchestra pits illustrated how unequal school funding was.

"The Turnbull government is pouring billions into private schools for capital works and not spending a cent on buildings in public schools," said Ms Haythorpe.

"Funding should be spent where it is needed most and with public school enrolments rising fast, that is in the public sector."

NSW Teachers Federation president Maurie Mulheron said enrolments in NSW public schools are expected to increase by 23 percent over the next 10-12 years.

"Despite the urgent need to invest in public school infrastructure to address burgeoning enrolment growth in public schools, and to deal with the existing massive maintenance backlog, the federal government has instead pursued a capital funding program that will accelerate the achievement gaps between the advantaged and the disadvantaged.

"By funding existing wealthy private schools the Turnbull government is ignoring the capital funding needs of public schools.

"This year's federal budget must provide significant and ongoing capital funding for public schools," said Mulheron. ✪



## Cut off from the world - Why?

### Statement: Supporters for Justice for Julian Assange

**WikiLeaks publisher and whistleblower Julian Assange is currently confined to a small room in Ecuador's embassy in London. He is blocked from the internet, use of the telephone or from even having visitors, so is effectively cut off from the rest of the world.**

Assange cannot leave the embassy, where he has been holed up for six years as a political refugee.

The British government threatens to arrest him if he leaves and to extradite him to the United States. The US wants to prosecute Assange as a "hostile non-state actor" who will be charged with espionage, or treason, for "leaking" information since 2010 of American war crimes in the Middle East and elsewhere. He faces life or a possible death

sentence if brought before a court in the United States.

The UK and the US have been pressuring Ecuador to hand over Assange: WikiLeaks' recent challenging of the official UK government narrative on the alleged poisoning of a Russian double agent in Britain has provided Ecuador's new president a pretext to completely shut down Assange's contacts with the outside world, on grounds of interfering in the affairs of other countries that are "friends" of Ecuador's.

It also conveniently stymies Assange's chances to appeal a recent British court ruling that upholds an arrest warrant for charges against the Swedish government brought against, but had since dropped.

Why are the media silent? Where are the human rights organisations?

The attack on Julian Assange and his enforced silence is an attack on press freedom and the right to free speech, an attack that affects us all!

Julian Assange has done what true journalist should do. He has spoken the truth to power – and by revealing that truth to the world called to account those who seek to manipulate and control our lives,

While his revelations have rocked the world, the consequences he and his organisation have since suffered have been met with silence. Especially appalling, given Assange is an Australian, is that this includes the Australian media.

Julian Assange has basically

been "disappeared" by the corporate-state media internationally. Human rights organisations and many on the progressive or "left" side of politics have also failed to make any significant protests.

What makes Julian Assange's enforced silence and the marginalisation of other dissident journalists doubly significant at this stage is that there is an unmistakable drift to war at the moment, led by the insistent provocation of China and Russia by the United States, accompanied by a chorus of compliant media.

Why do the Australian government, the Opposition parties and even the journalists' union choose to ignore the injustice visited upon Julian Assange?

The United Nations has declared that Julian Assange is

being held in arbitrary and illegal detention, because of the actions of the Swedish and British government and the threat of his extradition to the United States.

The silence of Australian political parties in the face of this ruling demonstrates the pervasive and corrupting influence of American power on Australia's political culture and the subservience of Australian politicians to US machinations.

They dare not even protect Australian citizens from jeopardy at the hands our great and powerful "allies".

We must speak up! The people must inform each other when the elites conspire to silence dissent, or prevent the speaking of truth to power! ✪

## Wages plan

**The ACTU has released a six-point plan to ensure pay rises for all working people. This plan would ensure an immediate pay increase for the 2.3 million workers whose pay is set by awards and empowering 3.7 million working people who have collective agreements with the tools they need to negotiate fair pay rises now and into the future.**

The plan includes increasing the minimum wage to a living wage, making our bargaining system fair, ensuring awards minimums improve over time, restoring penalty rates, guaranteeing equal pay for women and ending wage theft.

Wage and superannuation theft is also dragging down wages as employers have to compete with those employers who routinely break the law.

### End wage theft

Wage theft is a drag on wages. Too many employers are having to compete with businesses who are not even abiding by legal

minimums. Our workplace laws need to change so working people can quickly and easily recover wages and superannuation that is stolen and there are strong disincentives for employers to break the law and powers for workplace representatives to ensure vulnerable workers aren't being ripped off.

### A Living Wage

Australians need a living wage. No full-time worker should live in poverty and right now too many are. A living wage would immediately benefit all workers currently on the minimum wage, and will flow through the awards system, benefiting around 2.3 million workers who are award reliant.

### Awards should improve over time

There are currently 2.3 million workers covered under the 122 awards, the number of people depending on awards is increasing. Yet awards have not moved with community

standards or with market rates. This has created a widening gap between wages in collective agreements and award wages.

### Free and fair bargaining

Our bargaining rules are out of balance. They give too much power to employers making it far too hard for working people to negotiate their share of profits and productivity gains. Our laws should ensure there is balance in the system so working people can negotiate fair pay rises by ensuring workers can withdraw their labour and can access an independent umpire. Enterprise-only bargaining is failing to deliver for the new economy, working people need more options, such as sector wide bargaining to make bargaining fair and efficient.

### Restoring penalty rates

Penalty rates must be restored to pre-July 2017 levels, and the law should be changed to stop business imposing any further cuts to workers' pay.

### Equal pay for women

Our workplace laws have been unable to move the gender pay gap. We need to establish a Pay Equity Panel that is dedicated to achieving equal pay for women. Women earn 15.3 percent less than men over their working lives and this has barely changed over the last 20 years. The gap persists through all stages of work and into retirement, when women can expect 47 percent less retirement savings. Many will retire in poverty.

"Australia needs a pay rise and we have a plan that will deliver," said ACTU secretary Sally McManus. "Our plan will deliver an immediate wage increase for 2.3 million working people and restore the fair go for the lowest paid. The plan will also ensure that working people are not waiting for the non-existent 'trickle-down effect' to occur. Profits are up and productivity is up, but wages are not. The only way to ensure working people get their fair share in pay rises is to ensure they have the power they need to negotiate them. ✪



# Deniers' climate policy diktat

Peter Mac

Last week the Council of Australian governments (COAG) failed to agree on the best means of meeting the nation's demand for electrical energy. It's a crucially important national issue. The 2015 Paris climate change agreement commits signatory nations to preventing a two-degree global temperature rise this century in order to avoid a climate change "tipping point" which would result in catastrophic environmental changes for the planet.

To achieve this we must reduce the emission of carbon-bearing greenhouse gases, which trap the sun's heat within the atmosphere and the ocean. As a signatory, Australia is committed to reducing our carbon emissions by at least 26 percent (compared to our 2005 emission levels) by 2030.

Carbon dioxide is emitted from transport and heavy industry, but the biggest contribution comes from energy generation. The best way to reduce carbon emissions is to derive our electrical power from renewable energy generators, which produce virtually no carbon emissions, and to couple the generators with energy storage facilities for periods when available solar and wind power is inadequate to meet demand.

Because of the Paris agreement the federal government has a key interest in carbon emissions. But energy generation is the responsibility of state governments, so a decision on energy generation has to have the unanimous agreement of the federal, state and Territories (ACT and NT) governments.

The Turnbull government wanted the states and the Territories to accept the national energy guarantee (NEG) policy, which has the stated aim of ensuring that Australia's electrical energy is reliable, relatively cheap and meets Australia's commitment to the Paris agreement.

However, the governments of the Labor states and the ACT rejected the proposal, deferring a decision on adoption of the policy until August.

The current policy would have locked in a low carbon emissions reduction target, abolished incentives for the development of renewable energy generation, extended the operating life of the old coal-fired power stations and retarded the development of renewable energy. It's doubtful whether the emission target could be upgraded later under the policy.

## Underlying motives

The Turnbull government pays lip service to reducing carbon emissions, but its primary objective is to stay in power.

To avoid an inner-party split over energy generation, the government must satisfy the self-styled Monash Forum, the newly-formed



group of backbench coalition members who support the coal industry at all costs and might cross the floor in Parliament if their demands are not met.

Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, a notorious climate change denier, committed Australia to the Paris climate agreement with great reluctance in 2015, but he now leads the Monash Forum.

Private investors are no longer interested in coal. The Monash Forum has therefore dumped conservative orthodoxy, maintaining that if the owners of old or disused coal-fired power stations won't sell them to other firms willing to continue operating them, the government must compulsorily acquire and run them prior to building at least one new high-efficiency coal-fired plant.

The Paris agreement seeks to reduce global emissions as quickly as possible. Falling renewable energy prices are making it easier for states to reduce their overall emission level, justifying a further reduction in emissions as part of the NEG target.

Moreover, the capacity of new renewable energy projects already exceeds the NEG's renewable energy emission reduction target, and rooftop solar panels are being installed 50 percent faster than anticipated by the NEG model.

However, to appease the Monash Forum, the Turnbull government has decreed that under the NEG policy it will not claim any emission reduction level above the 26-28 percent target currently stipulated under the Paris agreement, even if we have actually exceeded it. Particularly deep reductions by some states will simply go towards the national target, rather than being added to it.

If Australia looks like reaching its target before 2030 because of the strong environmental policies of progressive jurisdictions like the ACT, other jurisdictions will almost certainly stop trying to reduce their emissions.

The current policy would thereby rob governments of the incentive to make the maximum effort to reduce the national energy carbon emission level. However, energy minister Josh Frydenberg is refusing to renegotiate the national energy target or redesign the NEG.

The policy will also reduce the likelihood of Australia meeting its overall Paris agreement target of 26-28 percent emission reductions, because that relates to the whole economy. If the energy sector reduces its emissions by only 26-28 percent, transport and heavy industry will also have to achieve the same reduction by 2030, an extremely difficult objective.

## Autumn turns to summer

Climate change is already here and very dangerous. Australia's hot season now begins in spring and extends well into autumn. New record high temperatures are set every few years.

The Bureau of Meteorology predicts that the current hot spell will last into May, followed by a relatively warm winter, paradoxically with heavy frosts. The CSIRO says this will damage wheat, canola and barley crops.

Bushfires now occur in spring and autumn, threatening rural areas and the suburbs of major cities. Large areas of the landmass have been in drought for more than 18

months. Cattle are being hand-fed and there have been significant losses in livestock. Some 50 percent of the Great Barrier Reef is dead or dying because of rising water temperatures and thirty percent will probably never recover.

Overseas, snow is melting in Alaska 60 times faster than 150 years ago. The flow of the Gulf Stream, which moderates temperatures in Western Europe, has decreased by 15 percent over 70 years. If the permafrost melts in northern Scandinavia and Russia, methane emission effects will be horrific, and it's beginning to thaw already.

Every country is responsible for reducing its per capita emission level. But Australia's responsibility is particularly heavy because it's one of the biggest producers of coal and gas, and the combustion of coal accounts for the planet's largest volume of carbon emissions.

Harnessing Australia's abundant solar, wind and geothermal energy sources would stimulate the economy. We could lead the world in renewable energy technology, but the government's energy policies are retarding the transition from carbon-emitting fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

The federal coalition is also splintering over the issue of energy generation. The cabinet favours the Snowy 2 "pumped hydro" plan, which involves pumping dam water up to a higher level so it can be released to generate hydro power during high demand periods.

However, if that scheme uses normal energy from the national electricity grid to pump the water, as is highly likely, the facility won't reduce emissions at all; it will simply reinforce the carbon status quo.

The Monash Forum claims to have the support of 30 coalition MPs. The high-efficiency coal-fired stations which the group wants constructed can reduce the current level of carbon emissions, but by nowhere near as much as renewable energy plants can. Moreover, they're expensive to operate, and energy prices would soar if this technology was adopted.

Federal Treasurer Scott Morrison favours gas-fired power generation, which results in relatively low rates of carbon dioxide emissions. But methane is a far more dangerous

greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, and the extraction process inevitably results in the accidental emission of methane, particularly during coal seam gas mining, which is also notorious for contaminating groundwater.

Conservative MP Andrew Hastie supports the development of a nuclear power industry. Nuclear power generation produces little greenhouse gas emissions, but mining, transporting and processing uranium ore certainly do. There have been catastrophic failures of nuclear plants in Chernobyl and Fukushima, and nuclear waste has to be stored for thousands of years. Nuclear plants also consume huge quantities of fresh water, (a very limited resource in Australia), and melt-downs may occur during earthquakes or tsunamis.

What unites the coalition's fossil fuel factions is that none appears the least bit concerned about climate change and they all ignore renewable energy's great potential for economic and scientific development.

Abbott recently stated: "... electricity is ... an absolute essential service ... it is up to the government to ... keep that essential service going."

Energy should certainly be nationalised, but controlled by a left-progressive government, with a view to reducing carbon emissions to zero as rapidly as possible, rather than preserving the coal industry's dominance in energy generation.

But the nationwide sale of energy infrastructure and the political priorities of conservative governments have prevented a swift, orderly transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. And if the current NEG policy is accepted, the use of coal, gas and petroleum will be perpetuated.

Protagonists of fossil fuels ignore the terrible future for the environment and humanity if we continue to use these minerals for energy generation. But fossil fuels are not the only things that must be dumped to save the planet. Australia's coalition federal government also has to go.

And the Australian people may question whether their best interests are served by a chaotic political-economic system based on insatiable greed and savage, profit-obsessed competition between duplicitous, irresponsible factions of mega-capital. ☛

**If Australia looks like reaching its target before 2030 because of the strong environmental policies of progressive jurisdictions like the ACT, other jurisdictions will almost certainly stop trying to reduce their emissions.**



# Resist the US drive to war



Wayne Sontar

The United States' latest National Defence Strategy, released in the last three months (January 2018), signals an historic shift in how the USA justifies its endless wars. It also shows how the US state is handling the growing crisis of US imperialism.

Gone is the so-called "war against terrorism" that has served as a rationale for US militarism over nearly two decades. In future, the "primary focus of US national security" will be "great power competition" with "revisionist powers" (Russia and China) and dealing with rogue states (Iran and North Korea).

The USA's ruling class interests see these powers' growing economic and military strength as threatening US's "pre-eminent military power" in the world. As emerging powers, they challenge the "New World Order" as unilaterally declared by the United States after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They raise a very real prospect of "revising" the USA's self-ordained status as the world's "first, last and only truly global empire" (Brzezinski 1996).

Its ruling interests understand that the USA's ability to project state power through military domination is the basis of its "security and prosperity" and global "access to markets". It is key to the US holding in place its "partners and allies" who, under its tutelage, can get to share in the benefits of its hegemony.

The National Defence Strategy demands a massive increase in military expenditure and modernisation of US nuclear warfare capability to wage a "winnable" nuclear war. It effectively outlines a plan for war with Russia and China, or short of that the ability to impose regimes upon them that comply with US interests. This is seen as the way to shore up its otherwise declining economic pre-eminence.

The missile attack on Syria on April 14 was not to punish the Syrian government for allegedly using chemicals in its war against the US-proxy forces it has fought over the last seven years. This was merely a trigger, a false flag these proxy forces provided to enable an action the USA and its French and British sidekicks had already planned.

This action was aimed at Russia.

## Australia is an unswerving ally of the United States: It joins most US wars and has been up to its neck in war crimes throughout the Middle east and elsewhere.

The failure so far of the USA's criminal war for regime change in Syria has resulted, not in a restructure of the region to suit American imperial interests, but in strengthening Russia's role as a viable counter to US hegemony. It has also strengthened Iranian interests in the region, when one of the key aims of the war was to strengthen the hand of US's regional lieutenants, Israel and Saudi Arabia, over their competitors.

The United States, through its proxies, already holds the resource rich eastern half of Syria. This allows it to reward its cronies and to also maintain pressure for regime change; at the same time it has achieved a *de facto* dismemberment of Syria. For Syrian forces to retake this territory, without Russian and US forces coming into direct conflict with each other is highly unlikely.

The United States and its old imperial allies undertook the April 14 action in a way that on this occasion avoided uncontrollable escalation. But it has asserted the imperial interests' ongoing intention to remain in the Middle East. It signals a ratcheting up of the pressure on Russia (and by extension China), not only in the Middle East but as part of a global strategy of confrontation and intimidation.

Already the US establishment is calling for more from its president.

### The path to nuclear war

The aggressive military posture – a constant in US global policy – combined with the relentless draining away of its post-Cold War ascendancy means the world is entering the most critical phase of the US-declared "New World Order".

Already the "project for a new American

century" is being eclipsed. The building blocks of a new world economy are emerging: witness the shift away from the US dollar as a universal currency and the emergence of communist China's Belt Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to create an international partnership to build intercontinental fast rail transport systems, transcontinental sustainable energy grids and to develop the concept of "ecological civilisation".

The United States, whose most powerful industries have served to enforce its global military domination and are preoccupied with shoring up the receding fossil fuel based economy, has already lost the race in developing the technologies and industry base for a more sustainable, civilian based economy. It will largely be a follower, not a leader in an emerging, more sustainable and equitable world economy.

This can only make the military option more attractive for the US ruling class and make the physical destruction (or capture – regime change, colour revolution) of its rivals look more necessary.

These are the options of a system in crisis and the course of US development under its current hegemony of interests – namely, wars abroad and austerity at home. Its victims, not only the millions abroad whose societies have been destroyed by US militarism, but also the billions whose existences would be snuffed out by nuclear war.

It also makes victims of its own citizens, whose civil infrastructure is crumbling, whose society is becoming more unequal and living standards are declining and who suffer imprisonment and violence on a scale most other advanced societies could not tolerate.

Australia's role in the US progression

towards worldwide conflict is a most pathetic one. Australian governments have committed Australian forces to the support of imperial ventures since its earliest days as a set of British colonies.

Australia is an unswerving ally of the United States: It joins most US wars and has been up to its neck in war crimes throughout the Middle east and elsewhere.

It joins in provocative military patrols and exercises with the US navy off the coasts of China and North Korea.

It hosts US military and intelligence bases, most notably Pine Gap, through which United States carries out global surveillance and provides the logistics by which the U.S. prosecutes its global wars.

Most prophetically the present government aspires to become one of the world's "top 10" arms exports, selling to other "partners" that come under US hegemony. It has already been selling arms to Saudi Arabia to help its dirty war against the Yemeni people.

The Australian people must not let ourselves be part of this! We must make our governments understand we don't accept Australia's participation or consent in these mad US schemes. We need to demand that:

- We give no further support for US wars; and call for the US/NATO forces to get out of the Middle East!
- We break Australia's links with US imperialism – close Pine Gap and other US bases in Australia!
- We stand with the American people in demanding our governments adopt policies for the people, not programs for war! ✪



# Israel's racist rage

David Sheen

The fortunes of the African refugee community targeted by the Israeli government for deportation have swung wildly. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu first announced a United Nations-backed deal to resettle some of them in the West, but then quickly retracted the plan after right-wing Israelis complained that the deal was too generous to asylum seekers.

"I listened closely to many comments about the agreement. As a result, after re-evaluating the advantages and disadvantages, I decided to cancel the deal," Netanyahu wrote on his Facebook page. "Despite the growing legal and international limitations, we will continue to act with determination to exhaust all possibilities at our disposal to remove the infiltrators," he added.

Last November, it was reported that the Netanyahu government secured agreements with unnamed African nations for the latter to take in many of the approximately 40,000 refugees remaining in Israel, ostensibly in exchange for a fee of \$5,000 per head.

But Netanyahu's plans for expedited deportation were quashed after protests by refugee rights activists in Israel and abroad shamed those countries, now known to be Rwanda and Uganda, into disclaiming the scheme.

Unable to deliver on his promise to quickly expel all the Africans, Netanyahu grudgingly agreed to a plan brokered by the UN refugee agency UNHCR which, if carried out, would have seen thousands of the refugees resettled in Western nations in the coming years.

But Germany and Italy, two of the countries cited by Netanyahu as committed to take in asylum seekers from Israel, quickly denied having ever agreed to accept refugees under the scheme.

## Opposition to expulsion

Abandoned on all sides within hours of announcing the agreement, Netanyahu walked back the deal, first in part, then in whole, suspending it, and then cancelling it altogether.

Although the deal would have provided political cover for Netanyahu's planned expulsion of the refugees, his political camp vigorously opposed it because it also committed Israel to allowing around 20,000 Africans – mainly women and children – to remain in Israel for another five years and to help them move to parts of the country other than South Tel Aviv, where most of the community is concentrated.

Although a January poll showed that 66 percent of Israeli Jews support Netanyahu's efforts to expel the refugees to Africa, a recent survey found that positions are reversed in those very areas where residents were more likely to actually encounter any of them.

A March poll revealed that in the greater Tel Aviv area, opposition to the expulsion reached 68 percent, and in the long-neglected neighbourhoods of South Tel Aviv with the largest African populations, it hit 71 percent.

On February 24 and again on March 24, some 20,000 people gathered in Tel Aviv to demonstrate in solidarity with the refugee community demanding that the Israeli government cancel plans to deport them, and instead work to improve the lives of all residents of the city's dilapidated southern district.

Protesters have criticised the Israeli government for having one of the lowest refugee acceptance rates in the world – less than 0.5 percent.

But Netanyahu has claimed that the non-Jewish refugees – about half Christian and half Muslim – pose a threat to Israel's "national identity."



African asylum seekers protest in front of the Israeli Supreme Court, in Jerusalem, Israel.

In that sense Israel regards them similarly to how it has viewed indigenous Palestinians since its founding, when it expelled 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and barred them from returning because they are not Jews.

And local racists have long laboured to shore up support for Netanyahu's anti-African policies, and to demand that even crueller measures be taken against them.

## "Mortal threat"

Shlomo Maslawi, representing Netanyahu's ruling Likud Party on the Tel Aviv city council, told Israeli TV that he would oppose Netanyahu's now retracted plan, even though it included promises to invest in the overburdened neighbourhoods of South Tel Aviv, until "the Eritreans are gone, down to the last Eritrean – only then will there be rehabilitation."

In recent weeks, as refugee rights advocates across the country and around the world stepped up their protests, forcing the African governments conspiring with Israel to deny their involvement, Netanyahu lashed out at the refugees, smearing them as a mortal threat.

If he had not built a high-tech fence on Israel's southern border five years ago, Netanyahu told an audience in March, the number of Africans in the country would be significantly higher, a condition he deemed "much worse" than "severe attacks by Sinai terrorists."

Coming under rare criticism from some of Israel's staunchest American defenders, other government officials also doubled down to defend the mass deportations to African states.

Interior minister Aryeh Deri told Israeli army radio that to take these asylum seekers, mainly from Eritrea and Sudan, and expel them to Rwanda and Uganda, would merely mean returning them "to their natural place."

Avraham Neguise, currently Israel's only Black legislator, a Jew of Ethiopian origin, also spoke out in support of the deportation to Rwanda and Uganda, telling Israel's i24 TV, "Well, they came from Africa, and they're going back to Africa."

Yitzhak Yosef, one of Israel's two national chief rabbis, also heaped scorn on the Africans in a sermon last month, in which he called

Black people "monkeys" and the Hebrew equivalent of the N-word.

His fellow chief rabbi, Yisrael Lau, had already used that Hebrew version of the N-word to describe Black people, on his very first day in office.

## Vigilante violence

These and many other incidents of anti-African incitement have ramped up racism against the refugees. The rage against asylum seekers has grown into a political force capable even of pressuring Netanyahu to cancel Israel's international agreements.

But the most frightening effects of increased anti-Black sentiment are reserved for the refugees themselves.

Vigilante violence against African refugees has become increasingly common in recent years.

In 2012, an Israeli firebombed a day-care for the young children of African refugees, and in 2014, an Israeli man was indicted for stabbing an Eritrean baby in the head.

According to prosecutors, the man later stated: "I attacked Black terrorists, there was a Black baby, they said that a Black baby, Blacks in general, are terrorists." The firebomber received only community service, while the stabber was sent for psychiatric treatment.

Since that time, in separate incidents, two refugees – Haftom Zarhum from Eritrea and Babikir Ali Adham-Uvdo from Sudan – were beaten to death in public places by Israeli mobs.

The charges against Adham-Uvdo's killers were reduced from murder.

One of the killers is a minor whose sentence for "intentional injury" to Adham-Uvdo is yet to be determined. The adult assailant received a maximum jail sentence of 10 years for manslaughter in a plea bargain, although he will probably be released in just a few years.

An Israeli court is currently offering Zarhum's killers community service.

## Coerced to self-deport

This anti-African incitement, coupled with the news that African refugees, including some recently expelled from Israel, have experienced torture, extortion and detention in Libya, where

open-air slave markets have been documented, is taking a toll not only on adults, but on Israeli youth, as well.

In February one refugee confessed that a group of Israeli schoolchildren had approached him on a public bus and asked him, "How much can we sell you for?"

With the Rwanda-Uganda deal shelved in shame, and the UN deal for resettlement in the West now derailed by Netanyahu himself, the fate of the 40,000 African refugees left in Israel is once again unclear.

In lieu of the UN deal, Netanyahu is now reportedly pressuring coalition partners to reopen the Holot internment camp that it closed down only last month in anticipation of the planned expulsions.

Starting in December 2013, Israel rounded up thousands of African men into this detention centre, in order to pressure them to self-deport.

By Netanyahu's count, the government was able to coerce more than 20,000 to leave Israel in this way – a third of the African refugee community.

When the Israeli high court forbade the government from keeping those men incarcerated there for more than a year, the latter banned the refugees who it was compelled to release from moving back to Tel Aviv or Eilat, the two Israeli cities with the largest asylum-seeker communities at the time.

As Israel released Holot's remaining inmates in March, it informed them that the list of cities they were now forbidden from living or working in had mushroomed from two to seven, adding to the list Petah Tikva, Bnei Brak, Ashdod, Netanya and Jerusalem.

Now Netanyahu's coalition partners say they may now pass an even harsher version of the so-called Anti-Infiltration Law which they have used to criminalize refugees.

The new bill would build in measures to insulate it from being overturned by the high court.

If they follow through on their threat to neuter the court's powers, there would no longer be any legal impediment to jailing the African refugees indefinitely in Holot until they agree to self-deport to whatever destination Israel coerces them to go to.

*The Electronic Intifada* ✪

**Yitzhak Yosef, one of Israel's two national chief rabbis, also heaped scorn on the Africans in a sermon last month, in which he called Black people "monkeys" and the Hebrew equivalent of the N-word.**



# Stop fascism



Weyman Bennett\*

**A monster is haunting Europe with the growth of far-right, racist, populist and openly fascist organisations. Far-right electoral breakthroughs in Hungary, Poland, Austria and Germany show the dangers of fascism and racism going unchallenged.**

In Britain we have the Football Lads Alliance (FLA) and its offshoot the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) who were able to put 15,000 people on the streets for a march in London.

In Birmingham 2,000 marched, outnumbering counter-demonstrators. We are fighting back, but more needs to be done. April 20 was the 50th anniversary of the speech by racist Tory MP Enoch Powell in Birmingham where he predicted "rivers of blood" in the multi-racial West Midlands. It is perhaps poetic justice that Powell's old constituency, Wolverhampton South-West, is now represented by a black Labour MP Eleanor Smith.

On April 20 Midlands region of the Trades Union Congress, together with Stand Up To Racism (SUTR), took over the room in a Birmingham hotel where Powell delivered his infamous speech in a powerful rebuttal of his racist argument that people of different racial backgrounds cannot live together in harmony.

In fact, the history of the British working-class shows time and again that our unity is our strength.

Look at the examples of the battle of Cable Street, Wood Green. Look at London's West Indian Carnival. It was founded by Claudia Jones – a communist. You won't hear that on the BBC.

Today, as always, the main beneficiaries of racism are the people who run our society. Low wages are only possible where working people are divided. The growth of racism and fascism in Germany and Italy was only possible because of the failure to develop a united front, a failure

to bring together people of different political views to fight a common enemy.

In the 1970s and '80s in Britain we faced the National Front. A united political approach, linked to the flair of Rock Against Racism, led to the launch of the Anti-Nazi League, involving people of different political beliefs, but united against fascism.

The success of the ANL and RAR was based on a political strategy that emphasised mass mobilisations through united work spanning different political traditions.

There were confrontations, which were necessary to demoralise the fascists and to scare off the softer supporters from the fascist core. The NF was followed by the British National Party. In 1993 Derek Beackon became the first elected BNP councillor in Tower Hamlets. In the 1990s, in the area around the

BNP headquarters in London, there were five racist murders, including that of Stephen Lawrence.

The BNP went on to win dozens of council seats. Again it was unity that finally defeated the BNP – united campaigns, people united on the streets. Unite Against Fascism (UAF) was instrumental in that.

Last week the last BNP councillor announced that he would not be standing for re-election.

This week we have had the scandal of the treatment of people who travelled to Britain from the West Indies in response to invitations from the British government when Britain desperately needed workers.

The first arrived on the *Empire Windrush* in 1948. Many more followed, some in the 1960s at the invitation of Enoch Powell who was Minister of Health – the National Health Service needed staff.

My family was from Jamaica and answered the call to come to the "mother country."

My uncle worked as a bus driver for London Transport. My mother was a nurse working in the NHS. My father came to work in the nationalised British gas industry.

The current racist treatment of the Windrush generation follows the attempts to attack eastern European migrants and blame them for economic and social problems – racism has always been a handy tool to divide people.

The seven trillion dollars lost in the 2008 financial crisis caused huge economic and social problems and the working-class is still being made

nosedived electorally and will be wiped out in local elections on May 3, but the London march by the FLA demonstrated the potential for a large Islamophobic street movement.

Who are the FLA? They are the English Defence League Mark 2. Last October in London FLA marchers called anti-racist demonstrators "black bastards." One was called "a mongrel."

Nazi Tommy Robinson was treated like a celebrity by some marchers who took selfies with him. And the FLA message also hardened up on the march. The most right-wing speeches got the loudest applause.

FLA founder John Meighan said: "We want our country back."

Former SAS soldier Phil Campion said: "Politicians have surrendered in arrival halls and airports. The political correctness has gone too far."

## The history of the British working-class shows time and again that our unity is our strength.

to pay for the crisis.

Someone had to be blamed – not the bankers who caused the crisis. The ugly politics of divide and rule became even more evident.

The Tories continue with austerity, racism and Islamophobia. The more desperate they are, the more likely it is they will roll out more foul policies designed to shatter workers' unity and resistance.

The Tory government has consistently tried to blame migrants as "draining the NHS," whereas migrants have in fact been the backbone maintaining the service.

The far-right remains, for the moment, fragmented. Ukup has

Meighan attacked Labour's shadow home secretary Diane Abbott saying: "It's time for you and your motley crew to move over."

Since then there have been racist attacks on Abbott on FLA internet sites.

The FLA quickly split, with the founding of the breakaway Democratic FLA, which is associating itself with Ukup. Leading Ukup figures are regularly appearing at DFLA events.

The two groups staged separate marches in Birmingham, turning out 2,000 demonstrators – more people than there were counter demonstrators.

They are planning to march in London and Manchester next month as they attempt to regroup the forces of the far-right in Britain. It is vital that anti-racists turn out to oppose them.

The DFLA and Veterans Against Terrorism plan to gather at Speakers' Corner in London on Sunday May 6. The FLA intends to march in Manchester on Saturday May 19. Stand Up To Racism and Unite Against Fascism have called mobilisations against both demonstrations.

The openly racist right is in flux, but groups have been teaming up to target towns such as Rotherham and Rochdale where police and the authorities have failed victims of child sexual exploitation.

They want to promote the racist idea that sexism and child abuse is specific to Muslim men. Around 80 people joined their latest event in Rochdale in Greater Manchester last week. Many politicians, including this government, are nurturing the far-right by pandering to their argument that immigration is a source of problems, not of benefits to society.

We need a specific broad united front against fascism.

We also need a wider formation that confronts racism against refugees, Muslims and migrants and also takes action against state racism and killings by the police.

This is why Stand Up To Racism is so important and why it has to take on the racism of mainstream politicians and media.

There has been a long and honourable tradition of socialists, trade unions and the left together with black-and-white groups opposing racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

There is no room for complacency. These forces are reorganising and gathering again to attack our society. \*Weyman Bennett is co-convenor of Stand Up To Racism. He has been active in anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigning for 30 years.

Morning Star ✪



## Iran

# General strike continues

Steve Sweeney

**Iranian communists last week urged the government to end repression against the country's poor as a general strike swept across Kurdish towns and cities. The Tudeh Party of Iran (TPI) called for investment to develop agriculture and industry in the border areas of Kurdistan and western Azerbaijan where poverty remains high and unemployment levels have hit 40 percent.**

Strikes which started five days ago spread to a number of cities in the Kurdish area, including Marivan, Baneh, Javanrood, Sardasht and Piranshahr. At the source of the discontent is the closing of the Iranian borders which affects the Kolbari traders who smuggle goods in and out of the country.

Iranian authorities have traditionally turned a blind eye to the practice which has become a means of earning a living for a significant number of Kurds in the border area.

Kolbars are mainly from the impoverished rural areas or the disenfranchised urban poor who find themselves forced into this often hazardous occupation due to high unemployment levels. A Sardasht representative told the Iranian parliament that 80,000 Kolbars have become unemployed because of the border closures.

Mass protests gathered at the Iranian border and shops across the region shut down in protest at decades

of neglect and oppression of Kurds by the Iranian government.

TPI spokesman Navid Shomali told the *Morning Star*: "The regime, instead of allocating investment towards industrial, agricultural and educational development to provide employment for the people of the border provinces, especially Kurdistan, has adopted a security approach to deal with this issue.

"The arresting and killing of the Kolbars and the confiscation of their horses or mules along with all their goods in effect only enforces yet more poverty and hardship."

He said the Iranian government must provide solutions that deal with the issues of social security and high unemployment instead of creating a "repressive police climate."

Closing the borders to the Kolbars and their traditional way of trading would only serve to deepen the appalling levels of poverty in the region, he said.

The TPI supports the struggle of the Kurdish people for a better future and against "the corrupt and inhumane policies of the theocratic regime in Iran."

It said the struggle for democracy and peace in Iran also encompasses a federal model in which the people of Kurdistan would be in charge of their own economic, cultural and local government affairs.

*Morning Star* ✪



## Demand for election probe

**Russian communists have asked for a probe into alleged violations allowing people to vote twice in March's presidential election.**

Communist Party of the Russian Federation general secretary Gennady Zyuganov has called for the prosecutor general's office to launch wide-ranging investigations, branding previous assessments by Russia's Central Election Commission "inadequate."

Mr Zyuganov explained that a mobile voting system had allowed for "mass double-voting" with Russians able to cast a vote at ballot stations in their place of residence and then vote again at a ballot station of their choice.

After voting closed, commission head Ella Pamfilova reported that violations had halved compared to previous elections due to the installation of CCTV in polling stations, although a small number had their votes annulled due to violations it had uncovered.

Mr Zyuganov wrote: "As the Central Election Commission has given an obviously inadequate appraisal of this problem, I think that only law enforcement agencies coordinated by the prosecutor general's office can reveal the possible criminal conspiracy seeking mass double-voting, as well as single incidents in which citizens repeatedly expressed their political will."

The election was won convincingly by incumbent Vladimir Putin, who is due to be officially sworn in on May 7, with Communist Party candidate Pavel Grudinin finishing second with 11.7 percent of the vote.

Mr Grudinin's vote was the lowest ever for a Communist candidate in Russia.

He predicted he would achieve at least 15 percent in the poll and blamed a slanderous media campaign launched by Russian authorities for the poor showing.

*Morning Star* ✪

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## Global Briefs

**Bangladesh:** On April 10 unions commemorated the fifth anniversary of the Rana Plaza fire disaster, one of the worst industrial accidents in Bangladesh. Global trade unions and labour rights organisations called on all companies to take responsibility for workers making their products by signing the renewed Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety. The 2018 Transition Accord takes over the work of the current Accord in May and ensures factory safety is improved. Bangladesh is the second largest exporter of clothing in the world employing 4 million people, roughly 80 percent of whom are women, working in over 4,000 factories. Abysmal working conditions and low wages are a recurrent theme with garment factory workers whose attempts to set up unions encounter resistance across the region, many losing their job or facing suspension by managements that fear union intervention.

**Myanmar:** On April 9 the Myanmar Fisheries Federation held discussions with relevant departments and organisations to ensure more protection for fishery workers abroad. The government is hopeful that enactment of a marine fisheries law will better protect citizens who are working in foreign fisheries, especially in Thailand, from exploitation by employers. A total of 41,125 Myanmar fishermen are working in Thailand, another 45,400 are employed in fishery-related industries, and 58,741 in marine product factories. Workers in the Thai fishing industry are working in notoriously unsafe conditions, forced to work long hours and at risk of human trafficking.

**Japan:** In April workers appear headed for their biggest wage increase in two decades as companies led by the logistics and retail sectors compete for a slice of the country's ever-shrinking workforce. Businesses have lifted wages by an average of 2.41% This raise, made up of base pay and automatic, seniority-based pay, topped last year's average increase by 0.35 percentage point, the first such growth in three years. In value terms, monthly pay rose by an average of AU\$90 also the highest since 1998. However, despite this, wages continue to fall in real terms due to rising food and oil prices. The government has urged a 3 percent raise from companies to boost pay for the past five years. Many companies are switching away from a seniority-based wage structure and raising starting salaries. Competition for workers is particularly fierce in the technology sector, with graduates migrating overseas to work.

**India:** In April, in response to a legal action by the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations, the Supreme Court of India ordered the governments of Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala to make repayments of long standing wages owed to tea workers within 60 days. The debt has been unresolved since tea plantation owners began abandoning the estates over 15 years ago without paying any wages, retirement or any other benefits to over 300,000 workers and their families, leading to widespread poverty in the community.



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## Bad neighbour

**China's ever-growing success with its foreign policy via "aid and trade" is showing up the huge evolving failure of both our major parties adherence to "rules based order" backed up by US power. Julia Gillard agreed in 2011 to a US request to increase Australia's military spending to 2% GDP or \$1 trillion over next 20 years. Tony Abbott's white paper then listed how we would spend this enormous bucketload of money – a lot of it on French submarines and US strike fighters – supposedly to increase Australia's defence capability and support for US rolling wars.**

There is bipartisan support for the above which is now excluded from a budget review, while Liberal and Labor argue for domestic cuts to fix a budget deficit "crisis" by reducing the national and foreign aid budget – including for Medicare,

schools useful infrastructure etc, at home, as well as aid for our poorer neighbours, including Vanuatu.

Julie Bishop and PM Turnbull are now so worried about China's successful foreign aid diplomacy, they are banging on even more about "rules-based international order" – which appears to benefit only a select number of corporations and a US budget dominated by its military industrial complex (and backed up by those same submarines and fighter jets). Increasingly our foreign policy seems to be a "follow the US", rather than making any sense domestically or economically. Even Trump wanted "out" from the horrendously expensive strike fighter jets deal.

As China has now amply shown, you can get a lot more strategic influence simply by helping poorer countries such as Vanuatu (and even more broadly in the Asia Pacific region), with a lot less money spent a lot more wisely. In this regard, the list of "good" funding to Vanuatu by China stands in stark contrast to Australia's military over-spend and which does not include shared prosperity and development – neither for the average Australian, nor for poorer countries.

Australia now finds itself in a position of attacking our main trading partner for assisting countries in Asia and Pacific region, when we have elected to vacate that space and

having invited the US to forward bases in Darwin. Australian voters are pretty smart at picking up when their money is being trashed and their needs subjugated to those of a foreign power (and it isn't China) – and if the US experience at the ballot box holds, both major parties should be held to account at the next election.

**Dr C Costa  
Medical Association for  
the Prevention of War**

## Lest we forget Timor

**I have watched with interest the media reaction to the Australian Cricket Team's ball tampering episode in South Africa. The reaction of our PM Malcolm Turnbull interested me even more. He was very loud in his criticism of our cheating cricketers. He did so because he detests cheating and unfair play and upholds the rule of law!**

Of course, this incident occurred not long after the International Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague announced its decision on the maritime boundary between Australia and Timor-Leste in the Timor Sea. The Turnbull government suffered an ignominious defeat.

I have not seen any challenge in the main stream media to the PM about his attitude to cheating at

cricket compared with the behaviour of his government to bully and attempt to cheat Timor-Leste, the poorest nation in SE Asia, out of its oil and gas resources in its half of the Timor Sea.

It could also be mentioned that during the 24 years of illegal occupation East Timor by the Indonesian military (TNI), our leaders, LNP and the ALP, supported the aggressor and acted as an apologist for the fascist Indonesian dictatorship of General Suharto. They also hid the truth about what was happening and tried to cover up massacres when it was obvious that genocide was occurring and that the independence and the human and democratic rights of the East Timorese were being trampled on.

This was a shocking way to treat any people, but to do so to a people who suffered mightily for Australia in the struggle against Japanese fascism during WW2 was extremely shoddy.

Australia invaded East Timor, then governed by the fascist Portuguese dictatorship which was an ally of the Axis, but a non-combatant nation. The Japanese military invaded Timor to remove the Australians and because of the East Timorese magnificent support to the Australians: they lost 70,000 out of a population of 500,000 during the war. Australia lost 40,000 out of 7 million. Most of the Timorese who died

were executed by the Japanese military because their villages had supported Australian soldiers.

As it turns out Australia has made at least \$5 billion out of Timor-Leste's resources as the international legal battle has been occurring. I am wondering if our very moral PM will see the need to pay back Timor-Leste the money his government has taken from resources that belong to the East Timorese.

Just recently, the Israeli Defence Force murdered 18 and wounded 1,400 unarmed Palestinian citizens in cold blood because they were protesting the illegal occupation of their land. In addition, the TNI murdered three West Papuans and arrested scores for daring to demand their independence. There has not been a syllable of protest from the Turnbull government against those who committed these crimes against humanity even though Australia is a member of the UN Human Rights Council!

So, our PM who claims that his government upholds the rule of law and the principles of democracy, human rights and fair play falls short on all counts.

Is it any wonder our cricketers cheated when they had such poor role models!

**Andrew (Andy) Alcock  
SA**

# Culture

by  
Rob Gowland

# Life

# Who stands to gain?

**When investigating a serious crime such as attempted murder, it is customary to seek answers to the question "Who would benefit from the death of this person?" In other words, identify the motive.**

In the case of former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia, the person who stands to benefit most from the effects of the nerve agent they have allegedly been given, would seem to be British PM Theresa May. Even though neither of the Skripals died, May has nevertheless already used the case to ramp up the Cold War, to significantly dent Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's lead in the polls and to distract the British public from her fumbled attempts to thwart the Brexit negotiations.

Theresa May was struggling to re-establish her image as leader after an embarrassing performance (marred by equally embarrassing technical snafus) at the Tory Party Conference. Jeremy Corbyn was way out in front. She needed a miracle. And then, ever so fortuitously, a Russian double agent who had not been active for years was poisoned – allegedly – with what Theresa's police triumphantly declared to have been a "Soviet-era nerve agent".

The case has also enabled the Trump Administration in the US to mend fences with its NATO partners in a well-orchestrated show of "solidarity". Chinese newsagency Xinhua noted that "since Trump took office, his 'America First' policy was frequently at odds with his European partners. He called NATO 'obsolete', opposed the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), withdrew from the Paris Agreement on climate change, threatened to scrap the Iranian nuclear deal and announced moving the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem."

In recent years, there has been increasing complaints and dissatisfaction with the USA in Europe. German social-democratic politician Rolf Mutzenich said in his article "End of Transatlanticism"? that Trump is not an accident of American history, but the result of years of arrogance and the self-righteous hubris of Western journalists interviewing Russians in the street in Moscow met with bemused disbelief: why would Russia's intelligence services

want to create an international incident that had no benefits for the Kremlin in order to knock off a retired agent of no significance to anyone and his daughter, a Russian citizen who was visiting her father in London at the time? Only Britain, not Russia, stood to gain from this affair. And has Russia's Intelligence Community nothing more up-to-date to use than a Soviet-era chemical agent? Surely not?

For her part, Theresa May leapt at the chance to impersonate Margaret Thatcher during the Falklands War: she expelled a score or so of Russian diplomats and she abused Corbyn implying that his election as PM – were it to happen – would see Britain overrun with Russian assassins. All nonsense of course, but she had nothing else and she was desperate. Besides, right-wingers like Theresa May have only contempt for ordinary people and believe "you can tell 'em anything" – and get away with it.

A diplomatic blitz among Britain's NATO allies saw over 20 countries leap to "show solidarity" with Britain by also expelling Russian diplomats (the USA expelled over 60). Helped by a very co-operative tabloid media, this story has been blown up from a classic tabloid beat-up into a full-blown international incident. Israel rushed in to condemn "Russia's attempted murder". Donald Trump was a little more guarded – he wants to know what the hell it's all about, but then he'll stand solidly with his British ally. Yulia Skripal is a Russian citizen.

But Britain has refused to co-operate with Russia in investigating the Skripals' alleged poisoning with a nerve agent. Britain has refused to share details of the case or provide any evidence to Moscow. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said the UK's refusal to share information with Russia is a "blatant violation" of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which states that the country suspected of being the place of origin of a toxic agent is to be contacted first. But since the main purpose of this incident for the UK is propaganda, it would not suit the British government to actually let Russia get involved at this stage, would it?

Meanwhile, the Kremlin says President Putin is "extremely concerned" over the UK's



Theresa May meeting with Vladimir Putin in China, 2016.

"destructive, provocative" stance in the Skripal case. Confronted by the UK's intransigence, Russia has had to open its own investigation into Yulia's poisoning (she is a Russian citizen, after all). The Russian Investigative Committee will also look into the suspected murder in London of ex-Aeroflot official and businessman Nikolay Glushkov.

Glushkov, a former business partner of deceased Russian tycoon Boris Berezovsky, had been living in the British capital since being granted political asylum in 2010. Last year, he was sentenced to eight years in absentia in Russia for major theft from Russian carrier Aeroflot. Sergey Lavrov noted that Britain

had failed to inform Russia of Glushkov's death, despite being obliged to do so.

"The probe will be carried out in accordance with the requirements of Russian legislation and international law," the Investigative Committee said, adding that it's ready for "collaborative work" with the British side on both cases.

Referring to British claims of Russian involvement in the poisoning of the Skripals, Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov expressed the view that "sooner or later the British side would have to present some kind of comprehensible evidence."

Don't hold your breath Dmitry. ☛



## Film Review by Eric A Gordon

# Baja

During Christmas break, four 22-year-olds from the possibly fictional city of Santa Teresa, California (though a section of San José does also bear that name) depart on a Mexican road trip seemingly bound for disaster (the expression “What could go wrong?” comes to mind). On their way down to Cabo San Lucas on the southern tip of Baja California, careening along in Bryan’s parents’ half-million-dollar RV as monstrous as a city bus, they run into criminals and prostitutes, gangsters and thieves, drunks, hustlers, visionary appearances in the sky, and a local curandero shaman.

Each of the attractive four – two young men and two young women, carries their share of burdens, but it’s a cute romantic comedy, so it all ends with everyone and everything unexpectedly redeemed by a series of miraculous cartoon-like events. Maybe they’ve learned a little something about life; or maybe they’ve just turned their magical experience to profitable advantage. “Montezuma’s revenge” is nowhere in sight.

Everyone has their own agenda: The much put-upon nerdy Bryan (Jake Thomas) just wants to please his über-bourgeois parents by driving the Colossus down to Cabo by New Year’s Day so they can drive it back, and maybe get a little loco in Mexico to loosen up (and get laid).

His friend Todd (Chris Brochu) has just about run out his trust fund and is looking for a little adventure (and to get laid). Todd persuades their two friends to travel with them: Lisa Bolanos (Arienne Mandi), a Latina obsessed with the late Mexican diva Lorena de los Ríos and suffering at home with a demanding sickly mother.

Lisa wants to see if she can track down her absent father (José



Zúñiga) in Baja. And there’s Jessica (Michelle DeShon) a filmmaking student with an assignment to come up with an extraordinary film short over the school break, who figures the whales off Baja would make an exciting project.

Once they cross the border, they run into the Cervantes-reading prostitute Carmen (Zoe Corraface), the suave *guapo* (that means “handsomísimo”) gangster Jorge (Andres Londono) and his shabby drunkard American ex-pat sub-agent Burnout (Jason Spisak), and the road comedy is off and rolling. (We never see them doing anything so mundane as gassing up the RV, however.) Mark Margolis plays the curandero spiritual healer role of Don Primo.

In a director’s statement made available to the press, Tony Vidal,

who also wrote and produced, admits to loving “road trips and road trip movies. I also have a fascination with RVs, Mexico, and the transition into adulthood by people in their early 20s. All of this is dealt with in *Baja*.”

Among the most beloved Mexican actors is José Sefami, who appears here as Alejandro, the lovable manager of the serene La Perla hotel where the merry wanderers wind up. But his, like so many others, is a somewhat stereotypical role. The problem is the “gaze”: Who is making this film about whom and for whom? Vidal answers that question in this way:

“I want the audience to smile and laugh a lot while viewing *Baja*. To me, laughter is healing. I want the audience to nod in recognition

as they recognise themselves in the characters, and share in their journey.

“I want them to feel uplifted. I also want the audience to be charmed and awed by the beauty of Mexico, and to consider there may be more to Mexico, and life, than they once imagined.”

Jorge Roman, one of the leading directors of photography in Mexico with over 150 movie credits over the past 20 years, worked on this film. The Baja scenery is indeed a spectacular contrast of clean ocean water against dry, mountainous desert land. Viewers who can’t get enough of such panoramas will enjoy a vicarious revisit in *Baja*. Indeed, the cinematography may be one of the most successful elements of the film.

But do not expect to see many real Mexicans, and certainly not

their issues, problems or concerns. *Baja* offers a Mexico strictly for tourists. It’s far more telling about North American values of waste and excess, symbolised by the way-over-the-top Colossus and its owners.

Even the score, by Music Supervisor Greg Landau, who specialises in producing Latin music, and his composer nephew Camilo Landau, is a picture postcard soundtrack. The film goes out with a song called “I Love You More Than Tacos.” How much more need be said? If Taco Bell is your idea of dining (and it is for some), you’ll likely enjoy this movie tremendously. If your tastes are more refined, you’ll find *Baja* mildly amusing as a date movie but forgettable.

People’s World ☘



Sydney

### Annual Nakba Commemoration Dr Ramzy Baroud

Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine will present our annual Nakba commemoration this year which is the 70th anniversary of the Nakba.

**7 pm Wednesday May 16**  
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[coalitionforpalestine.org](http://coalitionforpalestine.org)

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Sydney

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- Emeritus Professor Frank Stilwell, Sydney University

May 3

### JEREMY CORBYN, MEDIA HARASSMENT & BRITISH POLITICS

- Dr Jake Lynch, Director, Department of Peace Studies, USYD
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# Anti-imperialist unity

Jay Tharappel

At the time when US President Trump was announcing plans to withdraw from Syria allegations emerged once again accusing the Syrian government of President Bashar al Assad of using chemical weapons against his own people, this time resulting in punishment airstrikes carried out by Israel against a Syrian military base in Homs.

Like the previous accusations last year in April and back in August 2013, the Syrian government derives no conceivable tactical benefit in using chemical weapons, and in any case Syria's chemical weapons (which the United States claimed to have totally destroyed) were only ever conceived of as strategic weapons to gain leverage against Israel which has nuclear weapons that are far deadlier by an order of magnitude.

Like the previous accusations (such as the lies about weapons of mass destruction behind the invasion of Iraq in 2003) we are being asked to rely solely on evidence provided to us from areas under the armed control of the forces fighting the government, to essentially "take their word for it" even though we have good reason to believe that the anti-Assad forces too have chemical munitions capabilities.

In February US Secretary of Defence James Mattis even admitted they had "no evidence" that the Syrian government had ever used chemical weapons, so why believe current accusations if the witness is demonstrably unreliable? The first time the UN was called into Syria was to investigate the use of chemical gas against Syrian government soldiers, leading the UN representative Carla Del Ponte to conclude that "only opponents of the regime have used Sarin gas".

The forces for peace have always rallied behind the noble cause of nuclear disarmament. However, the reality is that such causes, i.e. for the prohibition of deadly weapons, have been used as a means to strip post-colonial countries like Syria, Iraq, and Libya, of their strategic deterrent, leaving them naked in the face of imperialist hostility, and leaving Israel unchallenged in their quest to "pour concrete" into the foundations of their European colonial settler regime established on stolen Arab Palestinian land.

What cannot be denied is that the objective behind the Western inspired and instigated Syrian conflict is the overthrow of the Syrian government, with the Syrian state and its allies like Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah resisting these attempts. Never in this entire conflict (2011-present) has anyone who



Wreckage after an airstrike of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) compound in the Barzeh district, north of Damascus, Syria.

claims to espouse progressive politics convincingly made the case that the forces attempting to overthrow the Syrian government would represent any kind of progressive or democratic advance of any kind.

Yes, in the first year of the conflict (2011) there were democratic demands being shouted at the government, but what the media never tells anyone is that the government addressed those demands, and within the space of a year, changed the constitution (February 2012) thereby ending the Ba'ath party's legally enshrined "dictatorship" over executive and legislative bodies. While making major concessions to the Syrians wanting reform, the government has predictably resisted the forces attempting to take over the country militarily.

In times like these, Mao's declaration on the eve of the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 provides the most accurate historical analogy for understanding the Syrian war. Mao said in order to unite with the Guomindang government of China at that time which had been transformed into a party of the comprador capitalist class of China, but which nonetheless had an interest in national self-defence against Japan:

"When imperialism launches a war of aggression against such a country [like Syria or Yemen], all its various classes, except for some

traitors, can temporarily unite in a national war against imperialism. At such a time, the contradiction between imperialism and the country concerned becomes the principal contradiction, while all the contradictions ... within the country are temporarily relegated to a secondary and subordinate position."

The great victory of the Soviet Union and China against the fascist axis, however, not only smashed the most violent attempt at colonisation in history, but it exhausted the other colonising powers like Britain, France and the Netherlands, bringing to life a vast sea of independent post-colonial nations with a powerful ally in the Soviet Union and greater socialist bloc who would give them the means of defending their independence.

In 2007 a retired former high-ranking US General named Wesley Clark went public in a speech published by Fora TV. According to Clark, in 1991 after the first gulf war Paul Wolfowitz told him, "but one thing we did learn is that we can use our military in the region – in the Middle East – and the Soviets won't stop us. And we've got about 5 or 10 years to clean up those old Soviet regimes, Syria, Iran, Iraq – before the next great superpower comes on to challenge us".

While the Russian economy was being raided by capitalist piracy in

the 1990s, Russia retreated from the world stage, which unsurprisingly coincided with the dismantling of Yugoslavia by NATO, and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which laid the groundwork for the eventual covert wars against Libya and Syria, and the genocidal war waged by Saudi Arabia against Yemen which Australia supports by selling weapons to Saudi Arabia.

In other words, the period of "inter-imperialist conflict" ended, eventually giving way to the present period, often referred to as an era of "neo-colonialism", in which the United States plays the leading role in sabotaging the development of post-colonial countries like Syria that choose to pursue mutually beneficial relations with other rising powers.

The Anglo-American alliance is a dying empire, one which is currently lashing out at Syria for refusing the diktats of a predatory three-part alliance between NATO, the GCC (the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states: The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait and Yemen) and Israel. Every escalation against Syria is an escalation against nuclear armed Russia, and every Israeli air-raid against Syria raises the possibility of a wider war with Iran. ✪

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