Govt’s substance abuse disorder

Anna Pha

The government describes it as an initiative to help job seekers overcome drug and alcohol problems. In reality, it will become a barrier to securing work. In reality, the bill before Parliament this week is yet another step in the government’s war on the unemployed. The outcome will be increased stigmatisation, marginalisation and poverty for those who require support.

The Social Welfare Reform Bill seeks to trial mandatory drug and alcohol testing of new unemployed Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients.

“This trial is focused entirely on helping job seekers overcome drug problems and receive the help they need to get on a path towards securing a job and building a better future for themselves and their families,” Human Services Minister Alan Tudge claims.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead of providing the assistance that the already marginalised unemployed need, the government is determined to hit them with colossal and cruel cuts to their payments, put them onto humiliating cashless cards or even deny them an income.

Under the legislation to undergo mandatory drug testing becomes a condition for job seekers to receive the Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance (non-student). Five thousand new job seekers from three designated regions will be summoned to Centrelink offices for a drug testing. If they fail to attend, their payments will be cancelled immediately.

Those who test positive to the initial drug test will then receive 80 percent of their payment through a cashless card, restricting where and what they spend their income on. They will be subject to further random tests during the trial period, the first of which will occur within 25 working days of the initial positive test.

A cashless card is not a solution to drug dependency. It makes a mockery of the government’s claims to be helping job seekers.

Anyone testing positive to more than one drug test in the 24-month period will be referred to a contracted medical professional for assessment. If the medical professional recommends the keeping and destroying of records relating to samples for use in drug tests.

Drug addiction is a chronic relapsing, severe medical condition that can be addressed through coer- cion and punitive measures. Similar overseas programs in New Zealand, UK and parts of the USA failed and were eventually abandoned. There is not an iota of scientific evidence that such methods are successful. The evidence says it will undermine their recovery and do more harm.

Almost one thousand health care professionals have signed an open letter to the Prime Minister, the Opposition leader and members of Parliament, opposing the government’s plans for mandatory drug and alcohol testing of job seekers.

The letter, “Help Not Harm: An Open Letter from the Front Lines of Addiction” says “Doctors, nurses, addiction specialists and health advocates stand shoulder to shoulder, united against the government’s plans to punish Australians struggling with severe alcohol and drug problems.

“We do not and cannot support policies that will push people suffering from difficult alcohol and drug problems further into the margins. If we had been consulted, we could have said that people cannot be punished into recovery. Using drug testing to coerce people into treatment treats drug and alcohol problems as some sort of personal failing – not the serious health problem it is...”

“Parliament should take immediate steps to redirect public funding away from harmful and expensive drug testing trials and expand non-punitive referral pathways to treatment services,” the letter concluded.

Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia are chronically underfunded and overstretched.

“The assumption that people with substance abuse disorders will change their behaviour to meet new compliance arrangements is not evidence-based. Many people with substance abuse issues are therefore at very high risk of losing their welfare payment as a result of these changes. This will compound their existing health issues and disadvantage,” the ACND said.

In particular, someone experiencing an acute mental health episode that was triggered by their drug or alcohol use would be at high risk of losing their income, and hence at severe risk of poverty and homelessness.

The trial is set to run for two years commencing in January 2018 in three locations. The working class, largely immigrant Canterbury-Bankstown area in western Sydney and Logan City in Queensland have so far been announced as two of the locations.

As John Falzon, CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, said, “You don’t build people up by putting them down. You don’t create jobs by punishing people experiencing unemployment and exclusion.

“For those relying on income support, this is an ideological distraction from the real issue, which is lack of decent paid work available. This is where the government should be focusing their efforts.”

The Senate can still block the bill, it ultimately lies in the hands of the cross-benchers, who should be lobbied now.
Road transport safety

The Transport Workers’ Union has criticised a move to abolish a sugar industry code of conduct saying it will allow working families and small businesses to be exploited by wealthy companies.

The TWU said owner drivers and transport operators will be affected if the code is scrapped, which involves mandatory arbitration in disputes between farmers and wealthy mills.

“The knock-on effect of abolishing this code will be devastating for communities whose livelihoods depend on the sugar industry. This will not just affect sugar farmers but also their employees, their transport contractors, owner drivers and other small businesses linked to this industry. The code allows fairness and equity in an industry dominated by wealthy mills at the top of the supply chain.

“Removing it allows their dominance to prevail entirely over the community. This is about sustainability for family businesses and rural communities,” said TWU national secretary Tony Sheldon.

“The transport industry is all too aware of what happens when regulation is removed and the wealthy end of the market it allowed to dictate. Last year the federal government abolished an independent tribunal which was investigating the affect of low rates on safety in transport.

“Since then we have seen an increase in deaths among transport workers and other road users from truck crashes.

“Wealthy retailers and manufacturers are financially squeezing the industry and more people are dying as a result. I would appeal against any rash move to abolish this code which keeps clients in the sugar industry in check,” Sheldon added.

A disallowance motion to abolish the code, which just came into effect in April, is expected to go before the Senate for a vote this week.

Since the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal was torn down last year, fatal crashes involving articulated trucks have increased by over 7%, according to the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics. Safe work Australia data shows that 40% of all workplace deaths involved transport workers.

This is up from one in three transport workers last year and one in four in 2015.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits etc … It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the pre-condition of large scale industry.

Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy

Sydney

VIGIL DEMANDING THAT THE USA STOP THE BLOCKADE ON CUBA

12:30pm Sunday September 17
Sydney Town Hall

Also to stop the subversion of funds against Cuba and return Guantánamo to the Cuban people

Something to say?
Write to the Editor!

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

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PRESS FUND

Just as predicted, the postal survey on marriage equality (you can’t call it a plebiscite) has ushered in a spray of vile anti-gay verbal abuse in support of a “no” vote. On social media, gay people have been accused of paedophilia among other things, and an advertising campaign maintains that marriage equality means religious freedom and will destroy sacred institutions. Religious freedom is certainly not threatened by marriage equality, but because the toxic anti-LGBTI campaigns which the Turnbull government’s moral cowardice and opportunism have unleashed, our sacred institutions of equality and natural justice are. We’re campaigning for a “yes” vote, and we’d like your support by way of Press Fund contributions for the next issue. Many thanks to this week’s contributors, as follows: G Dittrix $10, WM $10, “Bough Red” $5, “Round Figure” $10, E Seymour $25, CR $20

This week’s total: $80
Progressive total: $4,810

Guardian

Issue 1793
September 6, 2017

Water: Harsh reality, real solutions

Despite denial of innocence by the major irrigators, the major reasons for the Murray-Darling crisis were undoubtedly over-allocation of water for irrigation projects, in particular the “water guzzling” cultivation of rice and cotton (the main target of the Plan, combined with long periods of drought).

And it is no good just blaming the weather, as some commentators have done. In hard times we can reduce water consumption, but there is nothing we can do about the rain. The solution does not lie in the construction of more dams, given that the existing dams and other water diversion systems have been a significant factor in the environmental deterioration of the river system.

The Murray-Darling Plan is based on the assumption that climate change is a reality. It also accepts as accurate scientific predictions of a decline in average rainfall within the Murray Darling catchments.

There are certainly long-term prospects for the adoption of agricultural and industrial activities by means of which Australia could play its part in modifying the impact of climate change on rainfall. They include a dramatic reduction in the nation’s per capita emission of greenhouse gases, as well as the preservation of “carbon sinks” such as existing forests, and large-scale reforestation, particularly in degraded areas.

In the immediate term the Murray-Darling system must achieve an overall reduction in the agricultural water allocations, by restricting our agricultural activities to those most appropriate to our climate, soil types and material conditions, and by phasing out the broad-acre irrigation cultivation (which results in maximum loss of water through evaporation), particularly of rice and cotton, whose growth requires huge quantities of water.

This cuts across the vested interests of major agricultural irrigation corporations, who have been the most vocal opponents of the Plan. Their complaints have centred on the impact of implication of the Plan for rural communities, and on rising food prices – but not on their corporate profit levels.

To date, rescuing the Murray-Darling Basin has enjoyed support from a wide spectrum of political organisations. The 2007 Water Act was formulated under the Howard government. The Plan itself had the nominal support of the ALP government, the Greens and two federal Independent MPs. It had widespread support from Indigenous communities and many small farmers. However, given the monumental influence that major corporations have historically exerted over Labor and conservative Coalition governments, the Plan has been a political football between the two major parties.

The Plan only provides broad outlines of the allocation targets (the “sustainable diversions limits”). Responsibility for implementation of the Plan was left with the various states, which between 2012 and 2019 were to produce their own water resource plans.

Failure to continue to implement the Plan will ruin the environment of the Murray-Darling system which is home to a world heritage site and 30,000 wetlands, providing habitat for 95 threatened Inundation-species of flora and fauna. It would also ruin much of Australia’s agricultural production, changing the nation’s status from food exporter to importer.

The Plan will require modification, for example to allow for existing differences in water use efficiency between different users. However, it is crucial for the government to maintain the overall water allocation cuts with the recommendations converted into law, and if necessary strengthen the provisions to protect the river environment.

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University funding cuts threaten our future

From the archives

Peter Mac

The Turnbull government’s plan to strip $1.2 billion from tertiary education funding over the next four years has led university authorities to seek drastic changes to staff employment conditions, which would make it much easier for them to sack or exploit staff members.

Many universities want to abolish university disciplinary committees that deal with disputes over redundancy or allegations of staff misconduct or unsatisfactory performance.

The universities argue that such cases can be referred to the Fair Work Commission, but the Commission couldn’t handle every dispute from every tertiary institution in Australia. Many cases also involve ethical issues, which should be dealt with by academic peers, not by a court.

Sarah Roberts, industrial coordinator of the National Tertiary Education Union, commented: “Allegations of serious misconduct, especially in relation to academic matters, should be tested by academics. Academics in the field are best placed to say whether or not it is plagiarism (for example) as opposed to management making a unilateral decision.”

The university authorities deny they intend to abolish the committees as a means of silencing or removing staff.

Deakin University Vice-chancellor Jan Van Hollander said: “The committee process required a significant investment in preparation, which created unnecessary delay and caused anxiety for staff and managers.

“The new streamlined processes allow for a swifter independent review and are a sensible compromise that strikes a balance between timelines and ensuring protection for staff.”

But under a recent Deakin University agreement a single reviewer would replace the disciplinary committees, and senior management could review academic work allocations and redundancy decisions.

Melbourne University’s deputy provost Richard James argued that review and appeals committees should be replaced with a single comprehensive discipline and grievance procedure, He declared “We want to simplify without removing any protections or rigour.”

But abolition of the committees opens up the possibility of university authorities using the decision of university disciplinary committees, and senior management could review academic work allocations and redundancy decisions.

Murdoch University will spend less time searching for alternative activity for staff it declares redundant. Employees will lose the right to appeal discipline decisions and retain their positions, except in cases of serious misconduct.

Murdoch academics are now denied the right to spend 75 percent of their time on teaching and 25 percent on research, an arrangement that benefits staff and contributes to national development, but which sometimes compels universities to hire extra employees.

False arguments facilitate cuts

The federal government’s cuts to tertiary education funding underlie the decision of universities to terminate agreements. The cuts will hit students as well as staff members.

The government regards universities as businesses, and students as their customers. Universities are expected to make a profit and maximise it. But up-front student fees cannot cover the cost of running a university. Government funding is therefore necessary, but is bitterly resented by conservative governments.

The “solution” has been the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), under which payment of high student fees may be deferred until after a student graduates and gains employment.

But the government has increased the HECS rates and decreased the debt repayment threshold. Graduating students now face massive debts which threaten their ability to purchase a home or meet other major vital expenses, and which may never be paid off.

The Whitlam government introduced no-fee university education, which operated for several years. However, HECS designer Bruce Chapman argues that the cost of education should be borne by students who benefit directly from it, as opposed to others with lower qualifications.

That approach treats education as a commodity, not a human right. If Chapman’s argument was implemented and carried to its logical conclusion, parents would have to pay for the education of their children beyond the basic school certificate level, because they would benefit from it later, as opposed to those whose education proceeded no further.

Extending the argument, Medicare should also be dropped, because sick people benefit from it, whereas others have to pay the Medicare levy even though they’re healthy.

Chapman also claims that Marx opposed the idea of free tertiary education because he said it benefited the upper classes. But when Marx was writing, university education was almost exclusively the prerogative of the rich — and rich men at that — and there was virtually no possibility of working people ever gaining a university degree.

Marx never approved of this state of affairs, which was later attacked by George Bernard Shaw because it failed to realise the nation’s intellectual potential. As he noted, tertiary education benefits the nation, not just graduates, by contributing to its economic and cultural development.

Seeking to justify its funding cuts, the Turnbull government has welcomed simplistic claims by economists that many universities could improve their finances by increasing their productivity, as measured by their number of publications and student enrolments.

But umbrella group Universities Australia is opposing the cuts, and has pointed out that they would cause severe setbacks for the development of STEM courses (science, technology, engineering and maths) which are crucial for future national development.

If the Senate rejects the cuts, the government will probably introduce cost-cutting measures that don’t require new legislation. However, a double dissolution of parliament may occur if the High Court rules that some government MPs are not entitled to their positions because of their dual nationality.

The government would almost certainly lose a subsequent election. So the careless or duplicitous approach of government MPs regarding their nationality may bring a new lease of life for Australia’s vitally important tertiary education system and a better deal for our students and tertiary education staff members!

The Socialist, July 1984

Politics in the Pub Perth

Changing the rules, changing the system!

6-8 pm
Wednesday September 6
43 Below Bar and Restaurant
43 Barrack St Perth CBD opposite Town Hall.

Our economic system is weighted in favour of big business. In order to fight the exploitation of working people we have to rewrite the rules to change that system. How do we do that?

Come and discuss this issue with Meredith Himmatt, Secretary of UnionsWA, Melanie Booth, CPSU/PSU Organiser, and Paul Ledingham, WAPOU Industrial officer as they report back from the ACTU NextGen Conference and the ACTU Change the Rules campaign.

The evening will be convivial, pub food and drink at reasonable prices.

Free entry
Hosted and chaired by the CPA
For more information 0419812872 facebook.com/PiPPerth
One Nation vendetta against ABC and SBS

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has condemned the politically motivated and petty attack on the ABC and SBS by Pauline Hanson and her One National colleagues, while praising MPs and Senators who have thrown their support behind the national broadcasters.

One Nation has indicated it will support the Turnbull government’s media reforms in Parliament in return for a range of destructive changes being imposed on the ABC and SBS.

The proposed changes confirmed by Communications Minister Mitch Fifield include:

- Forcing ABC and SBS to publicise the wages of staff earning more than $200,000 per annum.
- Amending the ABC Act to require news and information to be “fair” and “balanced”.
- Instituting an inquiry into whether ABC and SBS is appropriate competing with their commercial counterparts.

The deal already appears to be in jeopardy, based on the support shown for the ABC and SBS by Labor, the Greens and the Nick Xenophon Team.

One Nation’s push to force the ABC and SBS to publish wages data has nothing to do with greater transparency. This is simply pay-back for reporting the ABC and SBS to report without fear or favour.

There is simply no need to change the ABC Act, other than pursuing One Nation’s agenda, given that ABC content must already be accurate and impartial. Independent review after independent review has concluded that the ABC’s reporting is already fair and balanced.

What has not been fair and balanced is the continued attacks on the independence of our national broadcasters. Australians want and need the ABC and SBS to report without fear or favour. They want politicians on all sides to be held to account and they want trust-worthy facts about the issues that affect their lives.

One Nation is also pretending to stand up for regional Australia, by trying to claim credit for the new editorial jobs that were announced by ABC management months ago. The ABC has a long and proud history of providing quality news and other programming to all Australians, no matter where they live or who they vote for.

We are pleased to see there is already strong opposition in the Parliament to this One Nation deal, with the ALP, the Greens and Nick Xenophon all indicating they will stand up for the independence of ABC and SBS. Their continuing support is critical in thwarting this attack. ABC and SBS should never be used as bargaining chips.”

The Australian Education Union (AEU) has urged the federal government to stop wasting taxpayer money by funding the Teach for Australia Program.

Haythorpe said the program’s extremely poor track record and its costs have seen the program’s extremely poor track record.

The Turnbull government has already spent $34.65 million on the Teach for Australia Program in the last five years of experience leave the profession.”

Haythorpe noted. “Once again the Turnbull government is ignoring the evidence of what works in education and wasting taxpayers money.”

Haythorpe said that the government’s failure to implement an adequate workforce strategy has left a huge oversupply of teachers in some areas and shortages in others. Data provided by the federal Education Department shows $34.65 million was spent by the government on the first five cohorts of Teach for Australia, yet only 124 graduates are still teaching in March this year – and only 37 remain in their original school.

“Disadvantaged schools need increased resources to close the gap, not expensive and ineffective programs like Teach for Australia,” Haythorpe noted. “Once again the Turnbull government is ignoring the evidence of what works in education and wasting taxpayers money.”

Education Minister Senator Birmingham invested another $20 million in this program in December last year before the evaluation was completed.

“It is clear this program is not working. It is astounding that the government is choosing to fund this failing program at the same time as slashing the original Gonski needs-based funding agreements that were delivering targeted resources to our schools and making a difference to the lives of our students.”

The union says the program is part of the government’s failing strategy on initial teacher education that has seen entry standards plummet. The percentage of students commencing courses with an ATAR of under 50 almost doubled between 2013 to 2016 from 7.3 percent to 14.3 percent.

“We need minimum entry standards for teacher education programs to ensure that every single entrant has a proven track record of academic achievement. It’s time for the government to focus on how to attract and retain students entering teaching courses, rather than directing taxpayer money into a program that is not getting results,” said Haythorpe.

The Maritime Union of Australia Sydney Branch rallied outside the electoral office of Malcolm Turnbull on August 22 to raise the plight of seafarers and remind the Prime Minister to dramatically lift his game.

Turnbull has been under significant pressure in recent times due to his championing of the divisive postal plebiscite on same sex marriage while a string of government MPs and Senators are being investigated by the High Court for possible breaches of Section 44 of the Constitution.

“Around 250 protesters including MUA members, nurses, constructed workers, teachers, social workers and community activists rallied to voice their disquiet over the current mess presided over by the Member for Wentworth.”

“The Hugli Spirit, the Tandara Spirit, the Alexandria Spirit, the British Fidelity, the British Loyalty, the CSL Melbourne, the CSL Portland, the CSL Brisbane, the CSL Tandara – are the vessels that have “sailed out of the horizon” while Turnbull has been prime minister.

The crowd included unemployed seafarers and members from Sydney, Port Kembla and Newcastle who chanted: ‘The workers’ union will never be defeated.”

MUA rank-and-file member Dan Crumlin spoke about the personal cost of being an unemployed seafarer.

“Two years ago I was made redundant because of the continued inaction of Malcolm Turnbull and his government,” Crumlin said.

“I have experienced the hardships that unemployment brings and the stress of supporting a young family.

“My wife had to work two jobs, it was a difficult period and there were many dark days.”

Dan’s story is not an isolated one with many seafarers being sacked in recent years.

While the Abbott-Turnbull regime is determined to demolish the union movement with the introduction of anti-worker legislation, unemployed seafarer Kerry Farrell fired back and demonstrated the humanitarian spirit of MUA members.

“I was part of the John Hunter vessel. The crew on that ship donated thousands of dollars to the hospital in the port on Newcastle,” Farrell said.

“I find it hard to believe that those patients, doctors and nurses would call us union thugs.”

RTBU member Nyssa Parsons spoke about the current attacks on transport workers and the privatisation of public assets.

The ABC cuts the condition of people working on track, while the NSW Transport Minister wants to sell off our buses and cut 1,200 jobs,” Parsons said.

Sydney Branch secretary Paul McAleen ended the rally by declaring that the MUA would continue to fight for seafarers and defend the rights of workers.

“It has not been through complacency that we have won our rights; it has been through defiance,” McAleen said.

“Defiance is uniquely working class. The only reason this government has legislated our rights away is because they know if we were to fulfil them, we would defeat them.”

First ever satellite TV broadcast – established between ABC and BBC – to originate in Australia. An ABC outside broadcast van at Carramar OTC Earth Station WA, 1966.

MUA raises the plight of seafarers

Program an expensive failure

The Australian Education Union (AEU) has urged the federal government to stop wasting taxpayer money by funding the Teach for Australia Program.

Haythorpe said the program was an expensive failure and was not succeeding in retaining teachers in areas of high disadvantage.

“The federal government continues to pour taxpayer money into this program despite its poor outcomes. Our teachers must have access to proper training rather than being dropped in the deep end and without sufficient experience or support,” said Ms Haythorpe.

“This evaluation report reveals the program’s extremely poor track record. Within three years of becoming qualified teachers over half the participants have left the profession and less than one third are teaching in schools with above average levels of student disadvantage.

This is a serious warning sign that the program is not working. Only around 10 percent of overall teachers with less than five years of experience leave the profession.”

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Housing: service or bubble?

Rob Gowland

Housing is an essential service. Everyone has the right to shelter. Under capitalism, however, housing is not an essential service but just another profit-making opportunity. The decision on what to build and where to build it should be the product of an all-round and in-depth examination of community needs, transport facilities, availability of ancillary services (education, health, recreation), impact on the natural environment and more.

Under capitalism, the needs of the community – for green-space, ready access to jobs, recreation facilities, etc – are set against the “right” of property developers to make the maximum profit from the land they have purchased. While town planners, councils and community groups might desire the retention of bushland and open space, or to provide houses with space around them for children and pets, property developers are motivated to maximise their profits by squeezing as many dwellings as possible on to every block of land.

When I visited the State Planning authority in Moscow at the end of the ’80s, they were in the process of shifting their views on high-rise living. In fact, from keen proponents of housing people in tower blocks they had become severe critics of the practice. Their research had shown, they said, that people needed to live in blocks of less than seven – preferably five – storesys in order to maintain contact with the natural environment. Put simply, at more than seven storeys, the living conditions and state funding. Public schools would be independent of government subsidies including HECS to the private sector. The process of privatising education began at the tertiary level, then TAFE, with the introduction of fees and the extension of government subsidies including HECS to the private sector. The aim of the federal government’s current “education revolution” is to put public and private schools on an identical footing in relation to government, hiring of staff, determination of salaries and working conditions and state funding. Public schools would be independent, free to charge fees and state governments will be able to sell them to private corporations. A similar process is taking place in the public hospital system. The government is working towards an “output” (procedures and tests carried out) model as the basis of funding which could be extended to all hospitals – public and private. Health reforms are also setting up public hospitals to fail and mechanisms are being put in place to measure performance. Their “failure” will be addressed by privatisation. The privatisation process, so far by stealth, is becoming increasingly more open when schools or hospitals are sold off. The promoters of this agenda provide the “justification” for the state to withdraw from these areas.
Ukraine’s Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko has spoken to Ben Chacko about the Institute of National Memory and the wave of destruction engulfing his country.

Clashes over the removal of statues to Confederacy leaders in the United States have dominated headlines over the past month. The politics of this new iconoclasm is hotly debated on the left: should statues of racists, tyrants and oppressors be torn down on principle, or should countries have to look their past, however ugly, in the eye? Who decides which statues are unacceptable, and on what grounds?

The battles in the US are more complicated than that: many statues do not date from the civil war but were erected in the era of the Jim Crow laws as a conscious symbol of the subjugation of Black people; their current role as active rallying points for white supremacists and fascists strengthens the left case for tearing them down.

But while our ears are full of the sound and fury of US culture wars, a far more thorough wave of destruction has taken place in Ukraine.

And there it’s the fascists who are attacking monuments to the country’s past.

Volodymyr Vitrychovych, head of Ukraine’s Institute of National Memory, reported last month that 1,520 statues of Lenin had been removed – every public statue of the Russian revolutionary leader in the land, along with 1,069 “other Soviet monuments.”

“The destruction of Lenin’s monuments became the ‘idée fixe’ of the regime,” Petro Symonenko, leader of the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU), tells me.

Symonenko is unconvinced that tearing down statues is necessarily positive even when the statues are of racists, as is the case in the United States, though he does worry that it is not merely a southern problem in the US:

“In New York there is a monument to General Philip Sheridan, who wanted to kill all the butchering and exterminating the Native Americans, who said he only met ‘good Indians among the corpses of Indians.’”

But the Ukrainian context is different.

The “Maidan” uprising of 2014 was hailed by the US and EU as democratic, despite the fact that the president it overthrew, Viktor Yanukovych, was elected.

The new government in Kiev was backed from the start by openly fascist paramilitaries, and its aggressive Ukrainian nationalism and attacks on trade unions and left-wingers (most notoriously the 42 burned alive in Odessa’s House of Trade Unions on May 2, 2014) sparked a revolt in the country’s mainly Russian-speaking east, causing a war that continues to this day.

Criminal

The Communist Party were no fans of Yanukovych’s corruption-riddled administration, but the violence and brutality of the new order is much worse: “A band of thieves has been replaced by a band of robbers,” Symonenko remarks bitterly.

“The regime relies on ultra-right forces and criminal organisations” (such as the fascist Svoboda and Right Sector parties, or the neo-Nazi Azov and Aidan paramilitary battalions). “So-called ‘professional patriots’.

“They are not the only fascist forces. “Their patriotism consists only of destroying, plundering, sowing hatred between peoples, even the physical destruction of dissenters.”

Ukraine’s right take as their political inspiration Stepan Bandera’s Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the thinking of Dmitri Dontsov, who acknowledged his intellectual debt to Hitler and Mussolini.

“Street violence and vandalism were part of Maidan from the beginning. In Kiev, after the armed coup in February 2014, a mob led by neo-Nazis barbarously destroyed a monument to Lenin.

“A journalist from one of the TV channels showed me a fragment of the granite, asking with a smirk: ‘Do you know what this is?’ I answered: ‘These are the splinters of Ukraine.’

“To my great regret I was right. The Crimea is gone. The Donbass is blazing in the fire of civil war. And right across Ukraine there is a ‘cold’ civil war: a war between the ideologists of Hitler and the Nazi collaborators of the OUN and the anti-fascists, whose heads have always been the communists.”

The destruction of statues of Lenin, alongside that of monuments to Red Army soldiers and Jewish and Polish victims of the OUN, is part of the “de-communisation” process that has seen a concerted effort to ban the KPU, the renaming of any streets with names deemed pro-Soviet, and the criminalisation of positive references to the Soviet Union in print.

Kiev’s attacks on freedom of expression have been condemned internationally, including by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and Amnesty International.

National memory

Massaging this process is the Institute of National Memory, founded under former president Viktor Yuschenko in 2006 but since 2014 “the regime’s main tool in falsifying history and promoting neo-Nazism as state ideology,” in Symonenko’s words.

“People call it the institute of national unconsciousness – absence of memory,” he says. “Its task is to reshape public consciousness, to erase everything connected with the heroic victories of the Soviet Ukrainian people.

“These people, together with other peoples within the USSR, liberated Europe from fascism, restored a country destroyed by the Nazi invaders.”

He compares the institute to Heinrich Himmeler’s Ahnenerbe, which sought to create myths about the origins and ancient past of the German race.

It too prattles about the “exclusive” of the Ukrainian nation; “its superiority” and tries to assert that Ukrainians are pure-blood Aryans.

Symonenko notes that pseudo-science and pseudo-archaeology is back in a big way:

“It’s not by chance that the media spreads nonsense about the Ukrainian origin of Jesus Christ, or that the Ukrainian nation is “older than the pyramids,” he sighs.

The institute has also worked hard to portray Russia as an eternal “enemy and aggressor” against Ukraine, despite the countries’ histories being so intertwined that both trace their states back to the Kievan Rus federation. It has eroded practically every day. Monuments to the country’s past.

The UPA’s involvement in the Holocaust has been a particular embarrassment to the Soviet government which, as Symonenko notes, has “tried to destroy memorials to both Polish and Jewish victims of its ethnic cleansing operation.

Attempts to remove tributes to the Poles who died in the Volyn massacre – the UPA had promised a “shameful death” to all Poles in Ukraine – caused protests earlier this year.

“The UPA’s involvement in the Holocaust has been a particular embarrassment to the country’s new rulers, explaining their eagerness to destroy memorials to both Polish and Jewish victims of its ethnic cleansing operation.

“The thugs who served with the SS, the Wehrmacht, the OUN-UPA are ‘warriors of light’ waging a ‘war of liberation’ against an evil enemy, Bolshevik Russia.”

Institute chief Viatrovych has repeatedly been accused by other academics of faking historical documents. Jeffrey Burds of the Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, says that “scholars on his staff publish document collections that are falsified.

“I know because I have seen the originals, made copies, and have compared their transcriptions to the originals.” Burds says whole sentences that might portray Ukrainian nationalist activists of the past in a bad light are removed from documents.

His criticisms are echoed by a researcher at the Kennan Institute and Holocaust Memorial Museum in the United States, Jared McBride.

“When Vitrychovych was chief archivist at the SHU [Ukraine’s security service], he created a digital archive open to Ukrainian citizens and foreigners.

“He and his team made sure to exclude any documents from the archive that may cast a negative light on the OUN-UPA, including their involvement in the Holocaust and other war crimes,” he told Josh Cohen of the publication Foreign Policy last year.

History rewrite

Because Ukraine’s history is being so thoroughly rewritten, it is not merely statues of Lenin which are being torn down.

“Monuments to Soviet soldiers are deselected practically every day. Monuments and plaques to heroes of the resistance, partisans, state and party leaders who made a huge contribution to victory over Hitler, are being destroyed.

“In the Dnepropetrovsk region a monument to the unknown soldier has recently been destroyed, as was another such monument in Odessa.

“In Kiev they vandalised the complex of the eternal flame in the Park of Eternal Glory to the Soldiers of World War II. They defiled the monument to the liberator of Kiev, General Nikolai Vatutin.” General Vatutin was commanding the Ukrainian front against the Nazis when he was ambushed and killed by OUN-UPA collaborators in 1944.

The OUN-UPA collaborated with the Nazis and played an active part in the Holocaust.

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“The OUN-UPA against civilians are crimes against humanity that do
not have a statute of limitations,” Symonenko contends.

“Under slogans of struggling for democracy and liberation from the totalitarian communism of Hitler’s henchmen, the ideology of neo-Nazism is being actively seeded in Ukraine. Wherever their foot went you’ll find a local Hitler Yanukovych was thrown into jail for nearly a year. And that is normal.”

The KPU – which at the last pre-coup elections in 2012 won 32 seats and more than 2.6 million votes (over 13 percent) – is now banned by a ministerial decree it considers unconstitutional from having a parliamentary presence. In July, a court postponed a final decision on whether to ban the KPU outright pending a ruling from the Constitutional Court on whether the de-communisation laws were in accordance with the constitution. But Symonenko is not optimistic that the Constitutional Court will do the right thing.

This court is completely controlled by President Poroshenko,” he says, “and he has said his ‘main achievement’ is that the KPU is not allowed to participate in parliamentary elections.”

It’s true Poroshenko cannot claim to have achieved much else. The CIA says Ukraine’s mortality rate is the second-highest in the world after Lesotho’s. Average wages have collapsed since 2014 while the cost of basics such as energy and food have soared.

Much of the case against Yanukovych was made by justifiable charges that his government was corrupt – but Symonenko says that while most Ukrainians are now poorer, “the capital of officials of all ranks grows like mushrooms after rain.” Corruption and embezzlement permeate all spheres of public life. The cynicism and bandoery of the authorities is gobsmacking.

“The first six months of 2017, eight employees at the Justice Ministry each received more than 23 million hryvnia (£690,000) in ‘premiums.’ That’s $60-$300,000 a month when the average monthly wage is $250. And the cherry on the cake? According to your audit company Ernst & Young, Ukraine is the most corrupt and fraudulent country in Europe.”

But he insists the communists will “fight on to victory,” whatever challenges are thrown in its way. “The de-communisation laws prohibit not just Soviet but international communist symbols, like the hammer and sickle. They equate those who profess communist ideology to criminals and terrorists.

“Over the three years since the coup, more than 400 criminal cases have been fabricated against communists, including myself.” He says that among the most poignant was the case of Alla Aleksandrovskaya, first secretary of the KPU’s Kharkiv committee, who was thrown into jail for nearly five months, despite being unwell and in her late sixties, for proposing to the city council that it appeal to the president in favour of elected local governors.

In June, KPU lawyers were able to have verdicts overturned against Viktor Ryhevol and Alexander Toymiyhal, two party members jailed on charges of “violating Ukraine’s territorial integrity” for allegedly participating in counting votes held in the self-declared Lugansk People’s Republic.

The case is not a one-off: “The Communist Party will continue to fight for every comrade who is persecuted.” He ends with an appeal to the readers of “your well-known and respected British newspaper” to “Support our struggle.”

“These people, together with other peoples within the USSR, liberated Europe from fascism, restored a country destroyed by the Nazi invaders.”
Perfect mix for perfect storm

Houston’s system of bayous and reservoirs was built to drain a tabletop that crone to heavy rains. But its Depression-era design is no match for the stresses brought by explosive development and ever-wetter storms.

Nearly any city could be overwhelmed by the more than two meters of rain that Hurricane Harvey dumped, but Houston is unique in its regular massive floods and inability to cope with them. This is the third 100-year-or-more type of flood in three years.

Experts blame too many people, too much concrete, insufficient upstream storage, not enough green space for water drainage and, especially, too little regulation. “Houston is the most flood-prone city in the United States,” said Rice University environmental engineering professor Phil Bedient. “No one is even a close second – not even New Orleans, because at least they have pumps there.”

The entire system is designed to clear out only 12 to 13 inches of rain per 24-hour period, said Jim Blackburn, an environmental law professor at the University of Texas at Austin. “That’s so obsolete it’s just unbelievable.”

Also, Houston’s Harris County has the least-est, least-regulated drainage policy and system in the entire country, Bedient said. Here’s how the system is supposed to work: The county that encompasses Houston has 500 miles of bayous and channels and more than 300 storm-water holding basins, which are designed to fill up during intense downpours and drain slowly as high waters recede.

Water is supposed to flow west to east through bayous, which are tidal creeks that often have concrete improvements to make water flow and are connected to the Galveston Bay. When big rains come, officials also activate two normally dry reservoirs, closing the floodgates to collect the water and keep it from overwhelming the downtown area.

But the main bayou through downtown Houston, Buffalo Bayou, “is pretty much still a dirt mud channel like you would have seen 100 years ago, just a little cleaned out,” said US Geological Survey hydrologist Jeff East, who is based in Houston.

And because the coastal plain is so flat, only sloping about a foot per mile, the water doesn’t flow out of the bayous fast, Bedient said.

Also, some of the bayous, such as Brays, can only handle 10-year storms, he said. Harris County didn’t leave enough right-of-way space to expand its bayous, Bedient said. And widening projects have been slow and inadequate.

Because of big early 20th-century floods, Houston designed two dry emergency reservoirs that are only activated in heavy rain, Addicks and Barker, both formed by earthen dams. Addicks is 18.8 kilometers long with a maximum elevation of nearly 37 meters. Barker is 22 kilometers long and has a maximum elevation of 34 meters.

Normally the floodgates are open and the two areas are dry parkland with sports fields and biking paths. They were essentially dry on August 25, the day Harvey struck, East said.

By the middle of the next day, the floodgates were closed and water levels were starting to rise, East said.

Now the reservoirs are overflowing.

Officials are being forced to release some of the water from these reservoirs and backing up into wealthy subdivisions. But those releases could worsen the extreme flooding downstream in Houston.

More reservoirs are needed, Blackburn and Bedient said. In fact, another reservoir had been planned for Houston’s western prairies, but development killed that, they said.

Blackburn said studies show those prairies can absorb as much as 11 inches of rain per hour. But he said he’s heard officials allowed subdivision after subdivision to expand outward. Houston’s storm drain and pipe system is minimal compared with that of other cities and at most can take one and a half inches of rain, Bedient said.

But mostly the problem comes down to haphazard development in a county that is weather zoning, leaving lots of concrete where water doesn’t drain, and little green space to absorb it, Bedient said.

Climate truth Trump rejects

Blake Skylar

What do federal scientists do when the presidential administration ignores facts – and actively works against – their climate research? They leak a draft copy of their study before President Trump can hide the results. In an era where the debate on global warming is downplayed or utterly denied, the report is a sobering reminder that it is a very real danger and had not been leaked on August 7 to The New York Times, it might not have reached the public.

Though the report itself does not contain wholly new information, its release is important that it shows that scientists will not let truth be buried by climate change deniers. One would be remiss, however, in assuming that the report itself is not significant. On the contrary, it confirms that human activity is increasing temperatures worldwide, and that the end result could be catastrophic, according to the scientists from 13 federal agencies who penned the study. “Evidence for a changing climate abounds, from the top of the atmosphere to the depths of the oceans,” the report declared. “Thousands of studies conducted by tens of thousands of scientists around the world have documented changes in surface, atmospheric, and oceanic temperatures; melting glaciers; disappearing snow cover; shrinking sea ice; rising sea level; and an increase in atmospheric water vapour. Many lines of evidence demonstrate that human activities are now the dominant cause of the observed changes in the climate.”

The information provided is heightened in importance not only because the effects of climate change are worsening every day, but because President Trump’s position on the issue is at odds with that of nearly every other country on the planet, most of which are part of the 2015 Paris climate agreement. Trump remarked that the Paris accord had “no tangible ben- efit,” despite its goal of capping global warming at no more than two degrees above pre-industrial levels through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Of course, one must remember that Trump has employed a man who is focused on actively pre- venting curbs in emissions. Indeed, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) director Scott Pruitt’s regu- latory moves are based on the utter rejection of climate change science. Those moves strive not to reinforce clean energy, but to undercut it outright through the pursuit of draining and mining on federal lands, along with other activities that champion fossil fuels and dispense with efforts to help the planet.

With those kinds of activities running rampant in this presidential administration, the scientists who authored the report found it unlikely that it would have been published in a way that was not altered, with vital information being suppressed. Even now, after the leak, it remains to be seen how Trump will process the report in an official capacity – if at all. But because the National Climate Assessment, which this report is part of, is legally man- dated, the Trump administration could face lawsuits if the President decides to go that route.

While Trump denounces climate change as “a total con job,” this report delivers the science-based facts, free of political manipulation or censorship. One of those facts is that even if the output of heat-trap- ping gases were to stop tomorrow, the world would warm another half degree. Stanford University scien- tist Chris Field, who reviewed the report for the National Academy of Sciences, said that even a few tenths of a degree in warming can have a serious impact on human civiliza- tion and the environment, noting that “every increment in warming is an increase in risk.”

The report goes on to predict that there will be downpours and more frequent heat waves before the White House will accept the facts presented in this progressive environmental policies.

The current situation will pro- vide an acid test of whether the Trump administration is open to an evidence-based science approach about climate change,” said Michael Oppenheimer, a professor of geo- sciences and international affairs at Princeton University. “Or is the administration so much in the thrall of fossil fuel interests that they are fixated on hiding the reality from the public.”

Local politicians are simply unwilling to insist in the local code that developers, who are among their biggest campaign donors, create no adverse effects, said Ed Browne, chair of the non-profit Residents Against Flooding. “We work with developers and whatever developers want they get,” Browne said. His group sued Houston last year in fed- eral court, demanding more holding ponds and better drainage.

There are also more people. Since the pre- vious record flood, inflicted by Tropical Storm Allison in 2001, Houston’s population has grown more than 23 percent, said Sam Brody, a Texas A&M professor in Galveston who studies coastal flooding.

If that’s not bad enough, Houston is get- ting heavier rains with global warming because warmer air holds more water. Since 1986, extreme downpours – the kind truthed in double-digit inches – have occurred twice as often as in the previous 30 years.

Add everything up, and we're looking at a perfect mix for the perfect storm,” Bedient said. “And that’s why we flood so often.”

People’s World
Cop held over plot to kill top left wingers

Ben Chacko

One of two unnamed individuals arrested in Germany for possession of weaponry and a “kill list” of prominent left wingers was a police officer, the Morning Star understands. Federal prosecutors carried out searches of the suspects’ homes in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

The pair were seized after arousing suspicion by buying ammunition for weapons they had obtained legally and had been discussing “refugee and migration policy,” which they claimed would lead to the “collapse of public order,” via online chat groups.

Authorities said they saw “an opportunity to hold and kill representatives of the left-wing political spectrum.” Die Linke MP Martina Renner slammed “agitation against the left” and has asked authorities to say how long they have been in possession of the kill list and whether the individuals on it have been told.

Berlin politician Oliver Hoeflinghoff, a former Pirate Party activist who is now in Die Linke, said: “After Nazi groups in the armed forces they now have criminals in the police. Surprised? No.” An army lieutenant was arrested in the spring for terrorist activities, suspected of planning a false flag attack which would be blamed on Syrian refugees.

The Greens’ Monika Herrmann has called on Interior Minister Thomas de Maizieres to explain how he will deal with “right-wing forces in the police and the army.” Stefan Huth, editor of the German socialist newspaper Junge Welt, told the Morning Star that compiling lists of left-wingers to attack had a long history on the far right and that federal investigators had to get involved because of suspected links between fascists and local police forces.

“It is not the first time,” he said, pointing to similar concerns over a probe into riot attacks in Saxony last year. Criminologist Tobias Singelstein has voiced fears that there is “a touch of the deep state” in the latest case and said a serious investigation into right-wing terror should be a priority. “It is the Nazi scene, but on the police, the lawyers, the politicians.”

Huth warned that authorities were using a false equivalence between fascist and anti-fascist movements to clamp down on the left, with an independent website, linksraten-indymedia.de, “having been banned – a ban ‘justified by lies.’”

Morning Star

Leftists’ scepticism of the royal family

Keith Flett

Last week marked the 20th anniversary of the death of Princess Diana. The media are making a good deal of it. At the time Diana was dubbed “the People’s Princess” and the newly elected Labour government under Tony Blair made much of the changing times.

Tony Benn’s diary for the period makes interesting reading. He noted on August 31 that he had refused interview requests because “there is nothing whatsoever to be said.” The following day he notes “there is nothing whatsoever to be said.”

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There was a scene in which England was the original world leader in anti-royalist sentiment. On January 30, 1649 King Charles I lost his head and a period of parliamentary government, the commonwealth, began. Oliver Cromwell was established.

Official British society still struggles to come to terms with his period, as can easily be seen by a visit to the churches which parliamentary forces visited, which often contain little or no reference to the period.

The monarchy was restored in 1660 but the “glorious revolution” in 1688 laid the basis for the system still in place today, a constitutional monarchy, where the king or queen has a role but policy is determined not by “God” via the monarch but by Parliament. After the French revolution there was a new tradition of anti-monarchism arise.

There was less objection to the monarchy in such a desperate deal, more to the cost of the royal family, the royal hangers-on and the privilege of the aristocracy in general.

William Cobbett’s attacks on Old Corruption in the 1820s and 1830s set the tone for a popular mood that “royal fankydom” needed to be reined in.

The revolutions of 1848 posed again the issue of monarchy or popular government across Europe. The left-wing Chartist, George Julian Harney, published the Red Republican in the period around 1850, in which famously the first English translation of the Communist Manifesto appeared.

Harney set the tone for another left-wing tradition. For a socialist society, the monarchy would have to go, but this was only part of a much wider change in power relations that was required not the key bit of it. The second half of the 19th century saw a combination of the traditions of Cobbett and Harney.

Morning Star

Myanmar: On August 29 nearly 400 Rohingya Muslims were alleged to have been killed in a massacre by Myanmar’s security forces and Buddhist vigilantes. The government of Myanmar has repeatedly downplayed the extent of the ethnic cleansing.

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Bhutan: Tensions in the Doklam (Donglang) tri-junction stand-off between China and India began in June when India sent hundreds of soldiers to block Chinese construction workers and border guards from extending a road running south across the plateau from Tibet. The tensions eased on August 29 with China and India announcing that they had agreed to withdraw their troops from a remote, 10,000-foot plateau near where their borders intersect with Bhutan’s. China said Indian troops had withdrawn from the remote area in the eastern Himalayas. Hua Chunying, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, said Chinese troops would continue to patrol the Doklam region. “China will continue to exercise sovereign rights to protect territorial sovereignty in accordance with the rules of the historical boundary,” the spokesperson said.

Bangladesh: On August 16, in Hizal Haiti, Gazipur more than 50 garment workers were injured when they were attacked by hired criminals during a peaceful protest organised by IndustriALL Global Union affiliate, the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF). One of their activists was also kidnapped and released hours later.

The workers, employed by the Korean-owned Haesong company, were protesting in support of their demands for the payment of their wages. The workers were also kidnapped and released hours later.

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Andrew E Rayment
Workers and unions in the industry were to be subjected to a new, fascistic regime designed to prevent collective bargaining, end pattern bargaining and remove trade unions from the picture. While the government originally claimed that it was setting up the Commission to deal with corruption in the unions, the Commission did not find any such evidence. On the other hand there was (and is) employer tax evasion, phoenix companies, the failure of companies to pay workers’ entitlements and poor training in the industry. Despite this, the report recommended the building and construction unions for special treatment.

**Cuba renews land reform**

In 2004, the then Howard government released the $60 million Building Industry Royal Commission’s report. It would come as no surprise to those following the anti-union Royal Commission of this current government that Cole’s report was a blueprint for an ongoing attack on workers’ and trade union rights.

It was also a highly political document reflecting the extreme right agenda of the Howard government and its Workplace Relations Minister, Tony Abbott.

The report proposed the creation of a new regulatory body, the Australian Building and Construction Commission, to oversee industrial relations in the industry. The Commission was to be an army of investigative and prosecution powers.

**Greenpeace**

On this day, exactly 40 years ago, activists in inflatable zodiacs took on a whaling ship in Albany, Western Australia. And they won. Known back then as the “Whale and Dolphin Coalition”, they blocked the Cheynes Beach whaling station for three weeks, drawing global media attention to the issue of commercial whaling.

These courageous Aussies put everything on the line, venturing up to 30 miles offshore on the line, venturing up to 30 miles offshore from the whaling station, to a whale watching town. In November 1978, Australia harpooned its last whale. This long blockade was the first-ever Greenpeace action in Australia – and it was the beginning of the end of our country’s whaling industry.

That handful of brave activists has, over the years, grown into hundreds of thousands of people. It’s truly amazing what can be achieved when masses of people unite to make the world a better place. With a presence in 55 countries, we’re able to take action in some of the most remote corners of the world – bearing witness to environmental crimes that would otherwise go undetected and unchallenged. Here are just some of the ways that supporters have powered Greenpeace around the globe:

- Protest against French nuclear testing in the South Pacific;
- Opening an office in Russia in 1989;
- Achieving the declaration of a world park in Antarctica in 1991;
- Standing with the Munduruku people of the Amazon to stop the Tapajós megadam;
- Deploying volunteer firefighters in Indonesia;
- Commissioning the first “Greenfreeze” of free of ozone depleting and significant global warming chemicals;
- Making the 2000 Sydney Olympics the first Green Games;
- Shutting down the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station in Australia;
- Forcing Lego to end a 50 year and multimillion dollar partnership with Shell;
- Preserving more than twenty great ocean leaders, including Adidas, Zara and the North Face to commit to Detoxing their clothes.

People power has always been central to Greenpeace. I’m so humbled to be part of an organisation that I love and admire. 2017 marks my tenth year of working for Greenpeace, and I’m inspired daily by the work I see happening around me. But I do long for the day we are no longer needed.

The ultimate vision of Greenpeace is to create a peaceful, just and healthy planet for all – a world where environmental activism is a thing of the past. We’re working towards a future where caring for the planet and its biodiversity is at the core of how humans approach this blue globe we call home.

But we’re in a race against time to realise that vision. The climate crisis is the most urgent issue of our time. And the legacy of what we do today will affect generations to come.

I hope that when my children grow up, they will remember Greenpeace as one of the reasons the Great Australian Bight was never turned into an oil field, and the Australian coal export industry is a thing of the past. I hope future generations will look back and see we overcame every obstacle we faced.

I have no doubt that together, we will have the willpower, courage and knowledge to take on the climate destroyers and the planet-wreckers and bring them to their knees – once and for all.

Here’s to the world we want.

David Ritter
CEO of Greenpeace Australia Pacific

Cuba’s Council of Ministers recently announced changes to regulations introduced in 2008 that gave citizens usage rights to land, the purpose then and now being to bolster domestic food production.

The expectation in 2008 was that many of the 500,000 workers about to leave state employment would become farmers. The Cuban state owns 80 percent of the island’s farmland. The precariousness of Cuba’s economy, now in recession, prompted both the original plan and the recent modifications. Cuba struggles to secure foreign investment, hard currency, and to grow its economy. The socialist state also has the obligation of guaranteeing employment, income, social services, education, and food for all its citizens.

The US economic blockade grinds away, however, as new US travel restrictions will cut tourism income. Chaos in Venezuela has, meanwhile, upended Cuba’s beneficial trade and oil-supply relations with that country. Exports of nickel, a big money-maker for the state, are down. Cuba is now spending more on imported food than it did in 2008. Many would agree that the survival of Cuban socialism rests in part on a secure, sustainable food supply.

Indeed, during the first five years of economic collapse associated with the fall of the Soviet Bloc, the average adult Cuban lost 12 pounds of body weight. In 2008, Cuba was importing 70 percent of its food and yet half its arable land was idle. Responding, the government offered 4,737,010 acres of land to 220,000 private individuals and cooperatives under terms of long-term use. It encouraged the expansion of agricultural cooperatives. The state encouraged individual farmers to sell food directly to consumers and promoted local decision-making, in regard to production and marketing.

Now, nine years later, the government has fine-tuned those reforms. Cuba’s land ownership and co-operative sector are now being restricted to cooperatives. Individuals can count on owning land parcels for 20 years instead of 10 years, as previously. Renewal for another 20 years is assured. Cooperatives are no longer confined to 25 years but may use land indefinitely. The government is offering larger minimum-sized tracts than before.

Individual farmers gain additional usage time if they restore soil productivity or remove the invasive marabú plant. No longer may land holders live away from their acreage. The new regulations seem to favour crop production over cattle raising, which expanded after 2008. Individual farmers may use idle land on cattle ranches in order to raise and feed young stock.

The new policies maintain state ownership of land; transferring land granted for agricultural use to someone else is still not allowed. Land may not be used for fraudulent purposes or profiteering. Farmers may use larger portions of their land for buildings and other improvements, beyond the limit for agriculture income will be increasing and penalties exist for leaving land idle.

What problems gave rise to these alterations? As of 2009, a number of parties still holding land they received earlier was down to 163,000 farmers or cooperatives; they were farming only 79 percent of the 3.8 million acres under their control. More land was being used for cattle raising than for food crops. Reports of bureaucratic impediments to land transfers were circulating. Access to credit and supplies was difficult.

Presently, 151,000 farmers or cooperatives are working 2,965,000 acres of land under usufruct arrangements. That’s 1.77 million fewer acres than were handed over in 2008. Some 70,000 would-be farmers are gone. Importantly, almost half of Cuba’s potential farm land is still lying fallow. In essence, domestic food production is in the doldrums.

According to reporter Marc Frank, Cuba now imports 60 percent of the food its people require, almost as much as in 2008. The annual cost is US$2 billion. Over many years, there’s been no substantial improvement in the domestic production of cereal grains, dairy products, beans, and certain meats.

Extraterrestrial circumstances include: years of drought plaguing much of Cuba, the woody marabú weed spreading throughout the island, land often being located at great distances from water and population centres, and little enthusiasm for farming on the part of many younger Cubans who are highly educated and citified. Importantly, only 25 percent of Cuban soils are classified as productive or very productive, while 50 percent of Cuba’s soil ranks as poorly productive. Residual harmful effects of sugar monoculture have taken a toll.

Cuba responded to post-Soviet-era shortages by introducing organic and low-input farming methods. Non-traditional approaches may again come to the rescue of soil fertility via a well-developed agro-ecological movement. So-called conservation agriculture, now on the horizon, calls for leaving soils undisturbed, covering soil with organic materials, and diversifying crops.

Agroecologist Professor Miguel Altieri of the University of California believes that, “[i]f all peasant farms and cooperatives adopted diversified agroecological designs, Cuba would be able to produce enough to feed its population, supply food to the tourist industry, and even export some food to help generate foreign currency.”

Whether or not Cuban government and society, besieged by the United States and dwarfed by capitalist world power, can mount sufficient focus and determination to realise this potential remains to be seen.

**Culture Life**

by WT Whitney

Australia/NZ 34th Southern Cross work-study Brigade, 2016-2017. Brigade members and ICAP staff moving nutrient rich soil into raised bed gardens at agricultural cooperative near Camilo, Cuba.

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In China imposed economic sanctions on the USA...

Michel Chossudovsky

US Defence Secretary “Mad Dog” Mattis confirmed at a Press conference that the “North Korea threat to US will be met with ‘massive military response’” while cautioning that “We are not looking for the anni-
hilation of North Korea – we have many options.”

Mattis stated that President Trump wanted to be briefed on each of the many military options:

- “Any threat to the United States or its terri-

- tories, including Guam, or our allies will be met

- with a massive military response, a response

- both effective and overwhelming.”

Vice President Pence intimated at the press conference that the immediate objective was to freeze trade with North Korea, namely a policy of economic isolation. He warned that the United States “was considering stop-

- ping trade with any nation doing business with

- North Korea”.

This sanctions regime is essentially direct-

- ed against China.

China is now on the books is to completely freeze trade with North Korea, 90% of which is with China. But at the same time, will China remain immune to these threats? While Beijing

- controls 90% of the trade with North Korea, the

- People’s Republic of China is America’s largest trading partner. According to CNN (September 3, 2017):

“China carried out, that option could mean a halt

- to US trade with China, which has sup-

- ported economic sanctions on North Korea but

- remains the key economic partner for the rogue

- nation.”

This statement borders on ridicule. Sanctions directed against China would imme-

- diately backlash against America: what would

- happen if China decided to curtail its trade with

- the USA?

China is not dependent on US imports. Quite the opposite. America is an import led economy with a weak industrial and manufac-

- turing base, heavily dependent on imports from the

- PRC.

Imagine what would happen if China fol-

- lowing Washington’s threats decided from one day to the next to significantly curtail its “Made in China” commodity exports to the USA.

It would be absolutely devastating, disrupt-

- ing the consumer economy, an economic and

- financial chaos.

“Made in China” is the backbone of the US retail trade which irrefutably sustains household consumption in virtually all major commodity categories from clothing, footwear,

- hardware, electronics, toys, jewellery, house-

- hold fixtures, food, TV sets, mobile phones, etc.

In June, Washington threatened Beijing with a sanctions regime, in response to China’s increased bilateral commodity trade with North Korea. Initially, the US sanctions were not intended to be against the Chinese government: selected Chinese banks and trading companies involved in the trade with North Korea’s com-

- modity trade would be potential targets of US reprisals.

According to US sources, trade in goods and services with China totalled an estimated $648.2 billion in 2016.

The import of commodities from China (in excess of $462 billion) is conducive through the interplay of wholesale and retail mark ups (which contribute to value added) to a sub-

- stantive increase in America’s GDP, without the need for commodity production. Without

- Chinese imports, the GDP rate of growth would be substantially lower.

What we are referring to is Import Led Growth. US businesses no longer need to pro-

- duce, they subcontract with a Chinese partner.

And why is this occurring? Because America’s manufacturing industries (in many sectors of production) have in the course of the last 40 years been closed down and relocated offshore (through subcontracting), to cheap labour locations in developing countries.

America’s economy is not only linked to industrial assembly, China increasingly

- constitutes a competitor and major exporter in a variety of high technology sectors.

In summary, this kind of economic blackmail on the part of the Trump administration against China does not work. It fails flat.

In turn, America is threatening both Russia and China militarily including the pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons. How will Russia and China respond to US threats?

While US sanctions against Russia have largely backlashed on the European Union, it is not excluded (although unlikely) that China could at some future date respond to US threats by imposing economic sanctions against the USA.

In the short run, the USA cannot relinquish its imports of Chinese manufactured goods. It would be economic suicide.

Chinese policy makers are fully aware that the US economy is heavily dependent on “Made in China”.

And with an internal market of more than 1.3 billion people, coupled with a global export market, these veiled US threats will not be taken seriously by Beijing.

The import of commodities from China (in excess of $462 billion) is conducive through the interplay of wholesale and retail mark ups (which contribute to value added) to a substantive increase in America’s GDP, without the need for commodity production. Without Chinese imports, the GDP rate of growth would be substantially lower. What we are referring to is Import Led Growth. US businesses no longer need to produce, they subcontract with a Chinese partner. And why is this occurring? Because America’s manufacturing industries (in many sectors of production) have in the course of the last 40 years been closed down and relocated offshore (through subcontracting), to cheap labour locations in developing countries. America’s economy is not only linked to industrial assembly, China increasingly constitutes a competitor and major exporter in a variety of high technology sectors. In summary, this kind of economic blackmail on the part of the Trump administration against China does not work. It fails flat. In turn, America is threatening both Russia and China militarily including the pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons. How will Russia and China respond to US threats? While US sanctions against Russia have largely backlashed on the European Union, it is not excluded (although unlikely) that China could at some future date respond to US threats by imposing economic sanctions against the USA. In the short run, the USA cannot relinquish its imports of Chinese manufactured goods. It would be economic suicide. Chinese policy makers are fully aware that the US economy is heavily dependent on “Made in China”. And with an internal market of more than 1.3 billion people, coupled with a global export market, these veiled US threats will not be taken seriously by Beijing. globalresearch.ca

The Guardian

September 7

WOMEN FLEETING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: ARE GOVERNMENT POLICIES WORKING?

• Christine Bird, Coordinator of Crossroad Community Care

• Dr Bron Herps, Director of School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney

Every Thursday 6:30 pm

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The Story of Kian

The killing of a grade 11 student in Caloocan City during Duterte’s war on drugs is shocking the Philippines, Iris Gonzales writes.

Church bells rang at exactly 8pm and will ring again tomorrow night, and every other night thereafter. And at 8:24pm, every night, there will be a minute of silence.

It was at that hour that Kián Loyd Delos Santos, 17, a grade 11 student, was last seen alive before policemen killed him in a drug operation in Caloocan City, in the north-eastern part of Metro Manila.

A CCTV footage showed Delos Santos was dragged by two men at 8:24 on August 16 before he was found dead.

He was among the 82 people killed by police on the night of August 16, and is among the more than 7,000 victims of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines, according to Human Rights Watch. The extrajudicial killings started when President Rodrigo Duterte launched a war on drugs last year.

Delos Santos had been bloody, with bodies after bodies strewn grotesquely in the streets of Metro Manila almost every night.

Authorities tell the same story over and over – the victims fought back and so they had to shoot them; but families and relatives of victims say otherwise.

In the case of Kián, at least four eyewitnesses said the 11th grader and son of an overseas Filipino worker who supports presidential candidate Datin Grace Poe was murdered. He was given a gun and was told to run, witnesses said.

The autopsy results support this theory. He was shot in the back three times, with no indications that he fought back.

Caloocan City Bishop Pablo David condemned the killing.

“I don’t believe the police story that Kián Loyd, the grade 11 boy, died because he fought back and engaged three policemen in a shoot-out using a calibre 45,” he said in an interview published by The Philippine Star.

“The CCTV footage showed he was already in their custody. How could he fight back? I am therefore glad that the mayor took the initiative to come up with an independent investigation,” David also said.

On a rainy Monday night on August 21, people went out to the People Power Monument in Quezon City to condemn the death of Kián and others before him.

The rally coincided with the 34th death anniversary of former senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr, a man who stood against the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos.

Human rights group Hustisia (Justice) said the Philippines has become a nation of orphans and grieving parents because of Duerte’s drug war in the country.

“We call for justice for Kián Loyd Delos Santos, the 32 persons killed in Bulacan, and the almost every hour killing in the poor communities of Metro Manila. There should not be an ounce of doubt that we call for justice, whether they be involved in drugs or not,” said Evangeline Hernandez, chairperson of Hustisia.

“Hundreds of thousands have died, been tortured, arrested, beaten and imprisoned. Indonesia is trying to cover up a genocide, with the help of its Western allies.”

West Papuans swimming for freedom

A crucial message for the UN was delivered across Lake Geneva in a most unusual way, writes Danny Chivers.

Could you swim for 30 hours? A six-person swimming team did exactly that, relay-style, across the 69 kilometres of Lake Geneva. Could you swim for self-determination that they were denied in 1969.

Kian’s father with his son’s high school ID card

A CCTV footage showed Delos Santos was dragged by two men at 8:24 on August 16 before he was found dead.

The Philippine Star