



Super profit tax: taxpayers will bear the burden

Bob Briton

It has got mining companies squealing like stuck pigs, this “dagger at the heart” of the nation’s prosperity as Opposition leader Tony Abbott describes it. The Gold Coast’s richest man, mining magnate Clive Palmer, has flown off the handle and called Treasurer Wayne Swan a Communist. So is the Rudd government’s “uniform resource rent tax” – the widely discussed 40 percent Resource Super Profit Tax (RSPT) – a progressive development? Is it designed to secure for the Australian community a greater share of the benefit of the non-renewable resources now flowing out of the country along with the bulk of the staggering profits of transnational mining corporations? No is the short answer.

The proposal is part of the federal government’s proposed “stronger, fairer, simpler” tax plan (see page 5). It is one of a few of the 138 recommendations contained in Treasury Secretary’s Ken Henry’s review of Australia’s taxation system to be given an early launch. Undoubtedly, the super profits tax was chosen as one of the more palatable initial measures to be implemented and provides a rare opportunity for Rudd to assume a phoney Robin Hood pose. The RSPT will not choke off profits in the resource sector, send mining companies to the wall or force them to move their operations elsewhere. In fact, the new tax regime reduces the mining corporations’ exposure to risk and boosts guarantees of nice, fat super-profits.

Under the new arrangements due to come into effect in July 2012, the Commonwealth will refund to companies the royalties they are required to pay to state governments on the volume of resources extracted. The levying of royalties is a more appropriate policy if the genuine concern for legislators is the safeguarding of non-renewable resources from reckless “rip it up and sell it off” merchants. State governments have traditionally reinvested large portions of this revenue into relevant infrastructure to attract more players into the resource sector which is seen as the saviour of the de-industrialising Australian economy.

Royalties are collected regardless of an operation’s profitability and constitute a risk to operators. That risk is now being taken on by the federal government or, to be more precise, the Australian taxpayer. The government is dressing this measure up by saying that royalties are no



longer responsive to changes in the profitability of the sector in these times of resource boom; that they are lagging behind as a percentage of profits.

That is true, but the government’s answer is to pick up this tab for the mining companies and protect them from the possibility of bad markets or bad choice of site for resource development. The Commonwealth is also increasing its provision of infrastructure for the resource sector with its \$22 billion *Nation Building for the Future* package announced with last year’s federal budget.

Exploration is another risk for mining corporations and here again the federal government is being very generous. If a company is in a tax loss position the Commonwealth will provide immediate cash benefit of \$300,000 for every \$1 million spent.

And, of course, the controversial super profits tax will only kick in when operations

are deemed to have exceeded normal levels of profitability after all the usual clever accounting is completed. For all that we are still hearing dire warnings about the ruination of the mining industry. WA Premier Barnett and Queensland Labor Premier Bligh are vocal in support of mining corporations. The loss of 60,000 jobs is threatened.

We have heard it all before. When the Hawke/Keating governments moved to introduce the nine percent superannuation guarantee back in the early ’90s we were warned that employers would put shut up shop, put their money in the bank and do nothing rather than sink with their unviable enterprises. In those days 100,000 jobs were said to be at risk. Off the record the bosses knew the super contributions by employers would largely be made up by a foregone wage increase. That is exactly what happened and the profits share of the economy continued to swell. They would have been happier with a

smaller super levy and they campaigned hard to get it with a hysterical scare campaign. The miners are pulling the same stunt again – publicly predicting doom while privately counting their blessings.

The federal government has no intention of driving the current batch of transnationals out of Australia in order to attract a less greedy batch. It does not want to move in and develop these resources directly in a more responsible manner on behalf of the Australian people.

It does not want to slow down the fast lane of the two speed economy. “We would never agree with that argument, and indeed our tax package does no such thing,” Treasurer Swan told the media last week. A serious attempt to wrest control of the resources of the country for the benefit of the Australian people and protection of the environment will not be carried out by governments like Kevin Rudd’s or the Coalition “alternative”. ✘

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The Guardian

Issue 1454

May 12, 2010

The urgent need to protect marine environment

The Australian Marine Conservation Society has rightly expressed grave concern at plans to move the damaged coal carrier the Shen Neng 1 into a declared marine park in Hervey Bay. Authorities plan to move the stricken vessel into the Great Sandy Marine Park, adjacent to the World Heritage listed Fraser Island, to undertake the hazardous process of unloading coal from the vessel.

The Conservation Society said in a statement that it is a "baffling decision" given the alternative of returning the vessel to port in Gladstone to conduct the unloading operation.

Moving the vessel to Hervey Bay risks damage to a protected marine park which is a sanctuary and haven for humpback whales, dugongs and dolphins. Furthermore, reports have indicated the Shen Neng 1 is taking on sea water, raising the spectre that the vessel could ultimately sink.

The government's decision to extend the Vessel Tracking System throughout the Great Barrier Reef in response to the shocking grounding of the 100,000 tonnes coal ship on the reef over Easter, is an important step in ensuring the reef is better protected from shipping. Since the grounding, over two thousand Marine Conservation Society supporters have written to the Transport Minister calling for the introduction of this measure, a reflection of public concern. The government's decision represents a victory for the many people who care about the reef's future and, most importantly, a victory for the protection of the precious and fragile World Heritage Great Barrier Reef.

But the extension of the Vessel Tracking System must be complemented by the introduction of compulsory vessel pilotage throughout the reef and an overall review of how the growth in shipping is being managed in one of the natural wonders of the world. It is a concern that government appears to be ruling out making ship's pilots compulsory for all large shipping passing through the Great Barrier Reef. The Conservation Society points out that human error has been to blame for most of the recent shipping incidents in the reef and it is just plain common sense that pilots be required to navigate shipping through the it.

The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral reef, home to threatened species and one of the wonders of the natural world. It is the only organism on Earth that is visible from space. It is also of huge economic importance for tourism and fisheries with a value to the Australian economy of over \$5 billion a year.

Furthermore, maritime traffic passing through the reef is increasing and set to increase further as a result of the coal export boom and the emergent LNG industry. In light of this expansion, this incident underlines the need for urgent improvements in the protection of the Great Barrier Reef from shipping.

The Australian Marine Conservation Society is calling on the federal and Queensland state governments, working with their agencies, to:

- Introduce compulsory pilotage for shipping passing through the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- Extend the existing Vessel Tracking System to cover the entire area of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and ensure that vessel traffic is adequately monitored and shipping channels patrolled.
- Increase fines for shipping leaving authorised safe shipping channels through the Great Barrier Reef.
- Ensure that shipping companies not the tax payer meet the full costs of salvage and clean up from this and other shipping accidents.
- Undertake an inquiry into this incident. This should establish how it happened and review how shipping is managed within the Great Barrier Reef marine park, including investigating alternative routes for shipping that fully minimize risk to the World Heritage values of the reef.
- Undertake a strategic assessment of the environmental risks to the Great Barrier Reef of shipping and port developments associated with the growth in resources exports.

There has been some success. In the aftermath of the incident, the Queensland government has acted to increase fines for ships spilling oil at sea and the federal government has agreed to extend Vessel Tracking throughout the reef, but must still persuade the International Maritime Organisation to accept their proposal. Nevertheless, the job of protecting the reef from shipping is not fully done.

PRESS FUND

Many Australian mass media newspapers are in financial trouble because of rising costs of production. Advertising revenues, which keep most of them afloat, are now falling because of competition from internet publications, particularly those that carry advertising. *The Guardian* is published in both forms, because the traditional "hard copy" newspaper is still the dominant form of news publication. However, *The Guardian* carries virtually no advertising, and when the Press Fund only receives one contribution, the alarm bells should start ringing because the Press Fund helps to fund day-to-day production costs. We are way behind where we should be to meet our annual target, so we really need you to send in a contribution for the next edition – and for preferably future issues, on a long-term basis. Don't delay, please! Many thanks to this week's solo contributor, namely:

"Round Figure" \$10 Progressive total: \$1,680

Asylum seekers myth buster 2010

FACT 1:

Australia did have a 29% increase in people seeking asylum in 2009 but we are not alone in this at all contrary to the misinformation the Liberal Party is spreading today. All these countries had bigger increases: Belgium (40%), Finland (47%), New Zealand (36%), Denmark (59%), Hungary (50%) and Poland (47%).

FACT 2:

Under the Howard Government in 2000 there were 13,000 people who sought asylum, more than twice what we received in 2009.

FACT 3:

Australia is one of only two countries in the industrialised world to have an offshore detention centre with Christmas Island (Italy being the other). This is the most draconian way of detaining people in the developed world.

FACT 4:

Refugee and humanitarian entrants make up just 6.6% of the places in our overall immigration program. The lowest it's been in 35 years.

FACT 5:

The top seven countries people sought asylum from in Australia in 2009 are the most dangerous countries on earth due to their poor human rights records, lack of freedom and security from persecution. They were Afghanistan (940), Sri Lanka (553), Zimbabwe (344), Iran (303), Iraq (288), Pakistan (256)

FACT 6:

Countries that received more asylum seekers than Australia include such "giants" as: Norway (17,230), Belgium (17,190), Greece (15,930), Austria (15,830), Netherlands (14,910), Switzerland (14,490), Poland (10,590), Turkey (7,830).

FACT 7:

Afghanistan was the single largest source country of people making asylum applications in industrialised countries. The 940 applications lodged in Australia by Afghans made up only 3.5% of the international total of 26,803. Afghans were four times more likely to lodge an application in Norway than in Australia.

FACT 8:

Australia is not being flooded by people seeking asylum by boat. Our numbers are a drop in the ocean when you view them in light of the 286,680 applications received in Europe and the 82,270 applications for asylum received in North America in 2009.

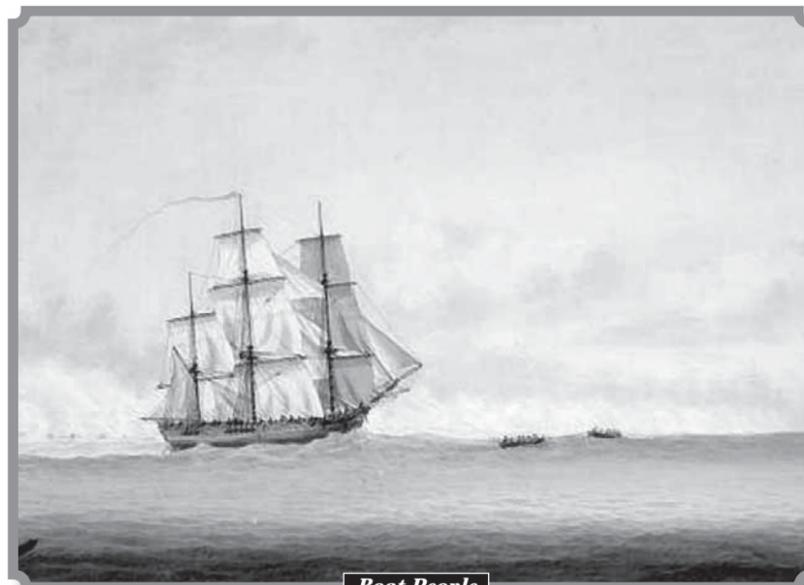
FACT 9:

The industrialised countries with the largest number of asylum applications in 2009 were the United States (49,020), France (41,980), Canada (33,250), United Kingdom (29,840), Germany (27,650) and Sweden (24,190) in comparison Australia had just 6,170 of which only one third actually came by boat.

FACT 10:

In 2009, Australia received 6,170 asylum applications, just 1.6% of the 377,160 applications received across 44 industrialised nations making us 21st on a per capita basis.

Source for all facts: Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries 2009, UNHCR. Asylum Seeker Resource Centre



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The new Aboriginal Congress

A light on the hill, or a just another talk shop?

Peter Mac

Last week the Rudd government launched the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (NCAFP). That organisation will be very different indeed from its predecessor, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), which was directly elected by Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, had its own budget for works, social services and employment programs, and at one stage had 35,000 participants in 270 Community Development Employment Projects.

ATSIC authorised construction of 500 new houses and provided accommodation for 6,800 people in new or upgraded dwellings, established 25 legal services with 95 offices, supported 22 radio stations and established 195 art, craft and language centres in remote locations.

The Commission also sought to reconnect family members torn apart by "stolen generation" policies, and took the issue of discrimination against Aboriginal people to the United Nations, earning it the Howard government's undying hatred.

In 1996 that government slashed the ATSIC budget by \$470 million, causing the collapse of community service programs dealing with family violence and substance abuse. In 2003 the government accused members of the Commission of bureaucracy and corruption. Rather than dealing with those issues with a view to strengthening ATSIC's role and performance, Howard transferred most of the Commission's funding and staff to a new department, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS). ATSIC itself shrank to an administrative shell, with its 18-member board forced to assume a humiliating and impotent advisory role.

In 2004 the then government abolished ATSIC and its 35 regional councils, replacing it with the government-appointed and largely ineffectual National Indigenous Council.

The Howard government made no attempt to establish another authority to provide ATSIC's range of services. But then, neither has the Rudd government.

A curious "curate's egg"

The NCAFP will, according to the *Australian* newspaper's Patricia Karvelas, "... aim to become a think tank, creating visionary leadership on issues affecting aboriginal people". According to the *Koori Mail*, Sam Jeffries, the NCAFP co-chair, described it grandly as "an historic movement" that would lead, influence and monitor the development of indigenous public policy".

However, as the *Koori Mail* noted rather crisply, NCAFP will be "a new representative body, albeit with no service delivery role", i.e. with no legal counselling, housing, media, cultural or social service services.

Mind you, Dr Kerry Arabena, the other co-chairperson, doesn't see any problem. "It's not a service delivery body; it's a representative body chosen by the people," she commented cheerfully, implying that the two concepts are mutually exclusive.

Selected individuals, and nominated delegates from peak organisations and sectoral interests advocating particular issues, will elect the NCAFP national executive. All decisions of the congress will be vetted by an ethics council.

An interim ethics council and eight-member board nominated by the government is currently hand-picking 120 delegates for the first congress in November.

The government has contributed \$29 million to establish the NCAFP. However, it has refused to commit to funding its long-term operations. Moreover, one of the most astonishing and disturbing aspects of the new organisation is that it has been established as an officially incorporated private company!

Dr Arabena certainly approves of that decision. "I'm very interested that we are using private company law to fulfil our public citizenship potential - that's really important; we're using private law to fulfil a public outcome," she exclaimed in a gush of bourgeois excitement.

The government could have established the NCAFP as a public body like the ABC, but instead chose the business world (which brought us the global financial crisis) for its

ATSIC was abolished because of its political successes, not because of its failures.

Indigenous children play in a flooded billabong - Jawoyn Country, Arnhem Land.



organisation, and presumably for its ethical standards.

An unpromising future

The NCAFP may well fulfil the crucial role of providing a loud and clear voice for Aboriginal people, and its advent has been widely welcomed among them. However, that's the limit of its activities.

The elimination of any service provision in its operations implies that Aboriginal people are incapable of running their own affairs. The requirement for a special ethics committee, which can override the decisions of the congress delegates and which is not required for other bodies established by government, may be seen as implying that Aboriginal people are less trustworthy than other Australians.

The decision to register the NCAFP as a private business reveals the Rudd government's adoration for, and subservience to the corporate world. The government's failure to commit to long term funding for the NCAFP also indicates that it intends

to absolve itself from long-term involvement in the organisation's future operations.

That would not be possible if the NCAFP was a public body, so rather than trying to privatise it later, which would probably involve a major political battle, the government has simply established the organisation as a private company in the first place. That leaves the government with no particular responsibility to the NACFP

in its formulation of policy affecting Indigenous Australians.

ATSIC was abolished because of its political successes, not because of its failures. Will its successor, the National Council of Australia's First Peoples become "the light on the hill" for Aboriginal people, or just a palliative, an interesting but ineffectual talk shop? No prizes for guessing the correct answer. ✪

Burqa ban would breach religious rights

A call by South Australian Senator, Cory Bernardi, to ban the wearing of burqas in Australia, is of great concern to a peak, non-profit, legal body, which promotes access to justice, the Australian Lawyers Alliance.

The Alliance believes such a move is a breach of religious freedom and is a prime example of why Australia needs better human rights protections.

"We have only just heard the federal government give its justification for not introducing a federal human rights Act, at this time, despite overwhelming public support to the contrary and here we have a prime example of why the opposite is true," Alliance director, Greg Barns, said.

"The government has said that introducing a federal human rights Act would somehow divide the community when really, what it would do is unite it," Mr Barns said.

He said everyone should have the right to express their religious beliefs, not just politicians who were known to parade their faith before the media to shore up votes with the politically dominant Christian culture.

Senator Cory Bernardi's call to ban the burqa, following a robbery

in a Sydney car park by a man wearing a burqa and sunglasses, was poorly considered and would only inflame religious divisions and create pockets of community fear.

"What's next - the banning of sunglasses, scarves, bicycle helmets or the kaftan?" Mr Barns queried.

"Politicians should also be mindful that the Victorian *Racial and Tolerance Act* states: 'A person must not, on the ground of the religious belief or activity of another person or class of persons, engage in conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of, that other person or class of persons.'

"So such a move might be considered religious vilification if it went ahead," he said.

Mr Barns noted that on his blog site, Bernardi also commented that banning the burqa would strengthen women's rights, but this is not necessarily the case. "Some women may confine themselves more to their homes because they don't want to go against the conventions of their religion," Mr Barns said.

"This will only lead to more social exclusion for these women, rather than empowering them through social connections in their communities." ✪

Pete's Corner



Australian Education Union lifts moratorium on NAPLAN tests

The federal executive of the Australian Education Union (AEU) has resolved to lift the moratorium on the administration of the NAPLAN tests. AEU federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said the decision followed an offer by the Education Minister Julia Gillard to form a working party of educational experts, including representatives of the AEU, to provide advice on the use of student performance data and other indicators of school effectiveness.

That advice and the further development of the My School

website by ACARA will be in line with the commitments of the federal government which include "an opposition to the misuse of student performance data including simplistic league tables".

"The working party will provide a way to advance and address the profession's educational concerns relating to the misuse of student test data including school league tables," Mr Gavrielatos said.

"It will also provide an opportunity for teachers and principals to engage in a genuine dialogue with the government on a sound

approach to school accountability and improving results.

"Our focus has always been on trying to ensure that data is not misused in ways that are damaging to students and schools.

"Across the country public school teachers have shown their willingness to take action to protect their students and that is something that should be applauded. In many cases it has been totally misrepresented as an opposition to accountability and transparency which is regrettable." ✪

Unions call on PM to protect rights of refugees

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has joined the Australian Council of Trade Unions Apheda, education, nursing, rail, media, plumbing, finance, textile and other unions calling on Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to honour Australia's international obligations to protect the rights of those most vulnerable in our global community.

The letter which has been also distributed to all members of parliament warns governments should not exploit fear and xenophobia through the dehumanisation of refugees.

It is also critical of the Rudd government recent policy change to suspend the processing of all new asylum claims by Afghan and Sri Lankan nationals.

"In devising this approach to deter 'boat people', the government has successfully alienated thousands of people seeking refuge from persecution, and forsaken

Australia's 'fair go' spirit," the letter, signed by MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin, warned.

The unions also condemn the reopening of the isolated Curtin detention facility in Western Australia and the using of refugees as pawns in an election game.

"Australia is failing in its obligations as a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1976 Protocol to not discriminate in the treatment of refugees on the basis of race, religion or country of origin (Article 3)," the 20 unions and organisations stated.

Seafarers honoured

Meanwhile the Mr Crumlin has written to delegates of the *Oceanic Viking* and *Front Puffin* personally congratulating them on their "bravery, courage and compassion" in assisting the rescue of refugees off Ashmore Reef in April 2009.

The delegates won a special commendation at the ACTU union awards last week.

"I personally asked that you, as Australian seafarers, be nominated to the ACTU for the annual union awards in recognition of the extraordinary and important work you perform beyond the call of duty as Australian seafarers in this the IMO Year of the Seafarer," Paddy Crumlin wrote.

"Again, comrades, congratulations for helping Australian seafarers get the recognition and honour we all so well deserve for the job we do," he wrote.

The crew of the FPSO *Front Puffin*, whose harrowing personal stories about the rescue of 34 critically injured refugees off Ashmore Reef on April 16 was the cover story of the *Maritime Workers' Journal*, and also featured in *The Australian* in July. ✪

Time to overhaul childcare funding

A new Australian Treasury Working Paper on childcare availability, quality and affordability strengthens arguments for a complete overhaul of childcare funding in Australia, according to the childcare workers' union, Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU).

Sue Lines, LHMU assistant national secretary said, "For many families the Australian childcare system fails the test on affordability, quality and availability."

This Treasury Working Paper confirms childcare is a key determinant of whether women return to work after having children. It shows that every

1% lift in gross childcare price cut mothers' employment rates by 0.3% and cut their hours worked by 0.7%.

"As the Working Paper says, this debunks the widely-held view in Australia's literature that women's labour supply is not responsive to the childcare environment, especially in respect to the cost of care."

The research also points to a crisis in affordability for many Australian families. To resolve this crisis the union said that the funding system must be overhauled.

"The current system is a 'dog's breakfast' which encourages profiteering by unscrupulous operators and effectively works against sustainable

and quality childcare," said Ms Lines. "There is strong evidence of the inflationary effect of the current funding model where increases in direct funding to parents act as a green light for operators to increase fees.

"The Council of Australian Governments reforms announced last year are an important first step on bringing quality up to scratch but the government's job is only half done.

"To succeed these reforms must be accompanied by parallel changes to the overall childcare system. What's needed is a deep, roots and branches, review of the funding system, not more tinkering around the edges.

"At stake is essential infrastructure, with a critical role in the economy and in the lives of working Australians."

The LHMU has called on the federal government to take the inevitable next step in childcare reform by acting to fix the funding crisis. ✪



Tasmanians being denied vital training

Tasmanians are missing out on vocational training and education due to a chronic lack of funding and resources, according to the results of a new survey released last week.

The survey of teachers working in the Tasmania Polytechnic, Tasmanian Skills Institute and Drysdale show there are not enough places to meet rising student demand. Australian Education Union (AEU) federal TAFE secretary Pat Forward said over half the teachers reported that they had to turn away students and four out of ten said there were waiting lists in their department.

The survey results will be released today at the Tasmanian launch of a national campaign for better TAFE funding. Ms Forward said the training shortfall was a serious impediment to reducing unemployment, tackling skills shortages, meeting future

workforce demand and ensuring all Tasmanians could get the skills and education they needed.

"You would think the federal government and the Tasmanian government would understand how critical it is to have a high-quality, well-funded training system," she said.

The president of the TAFE division in Tasmania, Hugh Fielding said the survey results showed the Tasmania Tomorrow reforms failed the basic test of providing an adequate level of training and education.

"It is time to stop the experiment and return to what we know delivers for Tasmanians and that is TAFE," he said. "A well-funded TAFE system that delivers high quality training and education is what Tasmanians want and it is time for the government to deliver that." ✪

Telstra workers take action

On May 5 Telstra workers gathered for a mass meeting and protest rally outside Telstra's main telephone shop in Melbourne. Community, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) members in regional centres throughout Victoria were connected to the mass meeting by landlines.

Telstra workers had voted unanimously to continue their campaign of strikes, bans and other disruptions in order to win a new enterprise agreement.

The major issue in the dispute is the discriminatory pay increases on offer to workers on the union agreement, compared to workers on an earlier non-union contract who do the same work.

"Our members are angry about this discrimination and they are even angrier because of Telstra's recent announcement of 900 more job cuts," said Len Cooper, Victorian secretary of the CEPU.

Marching through the CBD in Melbourne, Telstra workers demanded equal pay with the non-union members in Telstra. They also demanded that Telstra management start to treat its unionised employees with dignity and respect.

Telstra workers handed out leaflets to the public warning them "to look before they buy" and asking for their support by sending a "postcard" to the Telstra CEO David Thodey. ✪

cpasa.blogspot.com

Official blog of the CPA South Australia

The Henry Review Prescription for unfettered plunder

Anna Pha

The Henry Review sets out a blueprint for the far-reaching transformation of the taxation system and changes to the provision of social welfare in Australia. The Rudd government commissioned the review, chaired by Treasury head Dr Ken Henry, two years ago. It was asked to carry out a comprehensive “root and branch” review of Australia’s tax and transfer (welfare) systems that would “position Australia to deal with the demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges of the 21st century.” The review panel’s 900 plus-page report and its 138 recommendations are a neo-liberal prescription for the unfettered plunder of Australia’s non-renewable resources and to make Australia more attractive to foreign investment.

The government, after sitting on the report for more than four months, released it on May 2, just nine days before the federal budget. At the same time Rudd announced a few budgetary measures in response to the review relating to the resources sector, superannuation and company taxation. “The perspective in this Report is necessarily long term. Economic, social and environmental change over the next 40 years is expected to have a profound impact on the tax and transfer system, but will evolve gradually,” the Review notes.

“Transfer system” are the latest buzz words for social welfare. It refers to aged, disability, sickness, family, unemployed, student and other benefits and allowances. Thus the scope of the review is far more wide ranging than just a tax review. It defines the future role of government in regard to its responsibility for the welfare and well-being of society, with measures to be phased in gradually and a hint of what will follow. It also provides for considerable corporate welfare through proposed tax reforms.

The main thrust of the review is to promote economic growth and to make Australia more attractive to foreign and domestic investors and increase the amount of capital investment in Australia – in particular in the non-renewable resource sector. Towards these ends it focuses on:

1. Boosting national savings and investments

Income tax paid on savings in superannuation funds to be reduced as an incentive to increase personal contributions. (It also seeks to have compulsory employer contributions taxed as part of the wage – a proposal the Rudd government has wasted no time rejecting.)

Personal (not related to business activities) income from interest on savings, capital gains, net residential rental income and interest expenses related to listed shares to be taxed at a lower rate than income from labour (wages, salaries, fees) with a 40 percent savings income discount.

2. Attracting foreign investment

Company tax to be reduced to 25 percent to be more competitive



Students from poorer backgrounds will be disadvantaged.

with other OECD countries. It also raises the possibility of a new “business level expenditure tax” to replace company tax on profits. This would not tax profits that were reinvested.

3. Increasing workforce participation

There would be more stringent means testing and targeting of welfare benefits and low incomes to drive welfare recipients into the workforce.

The childcare benefit and childcare rebate would be combined into a single payment to parents or the childcare centre. The rate would depend

on “super profits” over and above a certain level. (See page 1)

Workers whose incomes are above the tax-free threshold and only other source of income is from interest could opt for an automatic tax return from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) with allowance for work-related expenses based on an occupational basis. This could make life simpler for the ATO as well as

1980s and continued under Howard and Costello, towards a flat tax scale. The only progressive element is the raising of the tax-free threshold. This is not as generous as it first appears, as personal tax concessions and rebates are to be abolished.

The main thrust of the review is to promote economic growth and to make Australia more attractive to foreign and domestic investors

on parental income, up to 90 percent of costs for lowest income earners.

The new tax structure with its relatively high tax-free threshold would enable low-income earners to move from welfare payments to the workforce without a loss in income.

4. Raising productivity (meaning rate of profit)

There are a number of measures to boost the profitability of small business and encourage entrepreneurs, including provisions to write off smaller capital investments immediately.

Simpler tax system

It sets out to create a far more simple tax system, concentrating on four bases of taxation – personal; company; resource and land tax; and consumption. Welfare payments would not be taxed.

1. Personal tax

All welfare payments (“transfers”) and personal income up to \$25,000 to be tax free. Income above the tax-free threshold up to \$180,000 would be taxed at a flat rate of 35 percent, and above that at 45 percent. This continues a regressive trend commenced by the Hawke-Keating government in the

workers, reducing the necessity for detailed record keeping and returns and use of accountants.

Superannuation would be made more attractive. Proposed measures include the abolition of tax on contributions in funds and a halving of the tax on fund earnings to 7.5 percent.

2. Company tax

As already indicated company taxation would be reduced in the short to medium term to 25 percent. The reduction in company taxation is a first step with further reductions and the possible elimination of the taxation of company profits in the future and their replacement by a narrower and smaller tax. Rudd, as a first step, announced reductions to 28 percent.

3. Land and resources taxes

At present state governments charge a royalties tax on non-renewable resources based on production. Henry wants to abolish this tax and replace it by a uniform rental tax of 40 percent imposed by the federal government. This tax would be based on net profits after certain additional deductions. The Rudd government has acted on this recommendation, but the 40 percent will only kick in

on “super profits” over and above a certain level. (See page 1)

With the abolition of stamp duties and other state taxes, the Review proposes a broad land tax covering all land, but at marginal rates so that family homes on lower valued land would pay no tax. Most farmland, where it has a low value per square metre, would fall below the threshold.

Rudd moved quickly, with an election in the wings, to reassure the electorate that he would not tax the family home.

4. Private consumption

It was not within the terms of reference of the Review to address the amount of GST, but it did raise the idea of extending the GST to all consumption – at present education, health services, medications, fresh food products and government payments are exempt.

Abolition of certain taxes

Part of the simplification process would be to abolish tax rebates and concessions such as low income, senior Australians, mature age worker, pensioners, employment termination payment, education tax refund, medical expenses tax offset, etc. This would simplify the taxation of income. These would be incorporated in personal income tax scales.

The Review calls for the abolition of a multitude of other taxes over time, including: payroll tax; insurance tax; property transfer taxes; stamp duties on purchase of cars; luxury car tax; tax on superannuation contributions in fund; income taxes on all government pensions, benefits and allowances; and fuel and vehicle registration taxes if replaced by road user charges.

Where these taxes are collected by states they could be replaced by a broad-based cash flow tax paid by business and collected by the federal government. This continues a trend where the federal government collects taxes and allocates money to states.

In addition to the four basic taxes, the Review provides for the retention of specific taxes on tobacco (increase the tax), alcohol (tax based on alcoholic content), gambling and an emissions trading scheme that have a social objective such as changing behaviour, reducing costs to others or environmental protection. It also

supports congestion taxes and other payments by road users, a step that would pave the way for privatisation of all roads.

Welfare payments

The review proposes three levels of welfare payments:

- **pension category** – for people not expected to support themselves through work (age, disability, full-time carer, etc).
- **participation category** – a lower pension rate for people of working age expected to support themselves in paid work now or in the near future.
- **student assistance category** – an even lower payment for people engaged in full-time study, who would supplement their pension with paid work or by taking out a loan, a measure that disadvantages students from poorer backgrounds.

Assets tests would be abolished, but in their place deemed income from them (whether received or not) would be included in the means test.

Changes to other income support payments include reducing benefits received by families to just one payment based on the age of the children – larger payment for older children. Parents would be expected to look for work when the youngest child turns four – at present the age is six. Rudd has rejected this age change.

With aged care the Review leaves open to a Productivity Commission study for the specifics, but raises the question of some form of compulsory levy on all personal taxpayers or insurance so that in the long term people fund their own aged care.

It seeks to wind back the taxation of incomes, and instead shift the focus to indirect taxes, self-provision in the longer term and user pays.

The corporate giants in the mining sector have a lot to gain from the Review which sets the scene for the unfettered plunder of our non-renewable resources, with no planning or consideration of the future or environment. The financial sector is laughing, with the prospects of billions more in workers’ savings to gamble with. There is little joy in it for workers and welfare recipients – just work harder and longer and struggle on inadequate incomes.

More articles examining the economic and political aspects of this issue will appear in future issues of *The Guardian*. ☺

Global opposition against US-financed state terrorism in the Philippines

E San Juan, Jr

After the terrible catastrophes in Haiti and Chile earlier this year, the ongoing Philippine social “earthquakes” may seem trite, though they impact on close to a hundred million Filipinos. Its tremors are being registered by three million Filipino residents in the US and a million in Canada. Apart from the paltry statistic that the majority in the US’s longest neocolony, the Philippines, subsists on less than \$2 a day, and ten percent of the population live abroad as low-paid migrant workers around the planet, one of the worst massacres in recent history occurred in Maguindanao, a strife-torn province in the southern Philippines.

The 2009 *Human Rights Report* of the US State Department released this year scored the regime of de facto president Gloria Arroyo as guilty of the “killing of civilians and journalists.” To quote the report: “Arbitrary, unlawful, and extrajudicial killings by elements of the security services and political killings ... continued to be major problems ... Members of the [State] security services committed acts of physical and psychological abuse on suspects and detainees, and there were instances of torture” (*GMA News.TV*, March 14, 2009). An unprecedented indictment, inconceivable during the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld tenure.

Rehearsal for draconian martial rule

A flagrant instance of the impunity with which the Arroyo military and police are inflicting atrocities on civilians is the case of the “Morong 43”. On February 6, 43 medical and healthcare workers were abducted and illegally detained while attending training seminars in Morong, Rizal. The event was sponsored by the prestigious Community Medicine Foundation Inc and the Council for Health and Development. Over 300 soldiers and police barged into the farmhouse of well-known professor-physician, Dr Melecia Velmonte, roughly blindfolded and handcuffed all 43 unarmed civilians and subjected them to 24-hour interrogations and all kinds of torture in Camp Capinpin, headquarters of the 202nd Infantry Brigade, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

After their lawyers filed a petition for habeas corpus, the AFP filed charges against them for illegal possession of explosives and firearms – evidences planted by the military and police. The Court of Appeals, relying on an outdated legal precedent (the 1985 “Ilagan versus Enrile” ruling) denied their right to be innocent before being proved guilty, ignoring the defective warrant of arrest and the AFP’s brutality.

Punished physically and mentally by the

“These illegal acts are being condoned or sanctioned by the highest officials of the land, from the Commander-in-chief and the AFP chief of staff”.

shock of being judged criminals, the “Morong 43” continue to be harassed and persecuted daily. A recent update names Vincent Paulino, Glenda Murillo and Dr Alex Montes as suffering the effects of torture, according to Dr Julie Caguait of the Community Health Development Foundation, and Dr Geneve Rivera, president of the Health Alliance for Democracy (report by Marya Salamat, *Bulatlat*, March 1, 2010).

Universal condemnation of the regime’s abuse has reached the imperialist heartland. US Senators Barbara Boxer and Daniel Inouye, and Representative Loretta Sanchez, as well as

officials of the US State Department, have been informed of the military abuses.

The United Methodist Church sent observers to Camp Capinpin, while the World Council of Churches and the Permanent People’s Tribunal demanded the release of the Morong 43 (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 17, 2010). Joining them are two national labour groups, the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Relations and the Asia Pacific American Labour Alliance, as well as numerous local Amnesty International chapters, BAYAN USA, and over 500 people’s organisations around the US and Canada, that support the Filipino human-rights monitor, KARAPATAN, as well as the efforts of Chair Leila de Lima of the Commission on Human Rights who vowed to conduct hearings on the case.

Criminalising civil rights

Fascist military officials manipulate the legal system to deprive citizens of fundamental human rights. Philippine Senators Jamby Madrigal and Pia Cayetano blasted the arrogant AFP officials, particularly Gen. Victor Ibrado, for criminalising membership in leftist organisations and even lawful party-list groups such as Bayan Muna.

Senator Madrigal accused the AFP of arrogant conduct, insulting the victims by awarding medals to officials guilty of blatant human-rights violations. Romeo Clamor, deputy secretary general of KARAPATAN, whose wife Dr Merry Mia-Clamor is one of those detained, noted that this outrage forms part of the regime’s failed counter-insurgency plan, Oplan Bantay Laya II, which brands progressive critics of Arroyo as fronts for the Communist Party and New People’s Army in order to label them “enemies of the state”, thus justifying their warrantless arrest, kidnapping or disappearance, and summary execution (report by Janess Ellao, *Bulatlat*, February 7, 2010; see the criticism of AFP vigilantism by Professor Michael Tan, Pinoy Kasi column, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 9, 2010).

Consequently, Arroyo’s butchers, headed by General Jorge Segovia, Colonel Aurelio Baladad, and Colonel Jaime Abawag, and their superiors refuse to be deterred. They take pride that no military personnel has so far been charged guilty for over 1,000 extrajudicial murders and forced “disappearances” since Arroyo usurped power in 2002. As Atty. Edre Olalia of the National Union of People’s Lawyers clarified the chain of accountability, Arroyo cannot leave office with impunity: “These illegal acts are being condoned or sanctioned by the highest officials of the land, from the Commander-in-chief and the AFP chief of staff”.

Apprenticeship in barbarism

The fascist militarisation of the Philippine

government started with the beginning of the Cold War, as noted by Renato Constantino in *Insight and Foresight*, 1977. Since Colonel Edward Lansdale, the notorious creator of the “Phoenix” assassination program in Vietnam in the 1960s, trained AFP officials in US CIA schemes, the AFP and state security agencies have been infamous in terrorising ordinary citizens.

Hernando Abaya, in his biography (*The Making of a Subversive*, 1984), CIA agent Joseph Smith’s account, (*Portrait of a Cold Warrior*, 1976), William Chapman (*Inside the*

Philippine Revolution, 1987), and Jose Diokno (*Anti-Americanism*, 1984), among others, have documented US interference in local politics. AFP officials now entrenched in government and their apologists in the local court system are implementing all the torture and psy-war techniques learned from the CIA and US Special Forces in Latin America, Iraq, Afghanistan: electric shock, beatings, sexual molestation, bad food, deprivation of sleep and privacy, bribes, intimidation, separating detainees, threatening their families, and so on.

This is synchronised with propaganda that the health workers are bogus, and they are members of the New People’s Army (stigmatised as “terrorist” by the Bush administration). All their Constitutional rights, as well as their basic human rights guaranteed by the United Nations Human Rights Charter and Covenants (to which the Philippine government is bound), are violated everyday.

A Filipina-American victim of the Arroyo paramilitary “death-squad,” Melissa Roxas, survived to tell her story of abduction and torture while on a medical mission to the Philippines last year. Roxas insisted that no human being should be deprived of liberty and dignity while trying to help people’s medical needs for lack of government concern. “Every day that the 43 health workers are not released,” Roxas argued, “it is one more day they have to endure pain, fear, and torture.”

Experienced observers of the Philippine situation have suggested that the “Morong 43” is just an alibi, a media distraction to cover up Arroyo’s complicity in a far more heinous crime on top of unresolved corruption scandals. After all, the 43 health care workers are still alive, but 57 murdered people cannot be brought back to life. On November 23, 2009, those 57 civilians – including 32 journalists, with most of the female victims sexually mutilated – fell to the trap of Arroyo’s favoured warlord, the Ampatuan clan of Maguindanao. By fake ballots and control of the electoral machinery in their fiefdom, the Ampatuans delivered the crucial thousands of votes that allowed Arroyo’s victory in the 2004 elections.

On December 2, 2009, in a special press release, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights Philip Alston, and Frank La Rue, UN Rapporteur on freedom of expression, both condemned “the pre-meditated killing of political opponents” – a “tragedy of the first order.”

They urged Arroyo to go “beyond a criminal law response” and take measures to prevent “election-related violence.” Last March 6, in London a joint forum of Amnesty International, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the National Union of Journalists in Great Britain and Ireland, together with the Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines, held a commemoration program on the occasion of the 100th day of seeking justice for victims of the Maguindanao massacre.

Jim Boumelha, president of IFJ, criticised in particular Arroyo’s Executive Order 546 which allowed the creation of neighbourhood-watch type armed “force multipliers” (also known as Civilian Volunteer Organisations) as responsible for the Ampatuan massacre, as well as for countless disappearances and extrajudicial murders of activists (report by Rose Eclarinal, *ABS-CBN Europe News Bureau*, March 6, 2010).

From impunity to complicity

In the eyes of most Filipinos, Arroyo is directly and indirectly implicated with this ruthless bloodletting. The think-tank CENPEG (Centre for People Empowerment in Governance) probed the origin of more than 200 private armies that Arroyo hypocritically vowed to dismantle after attempting to legitimise her martial-law exercise on December 4 (*Proclamation* 1959).

CENPEG traced it to Arroyo’s own support for political dynasties and their coercive instrumentalities: “It is an open secret that President Arroyo coddled a local dynasty into a monster. The Ampatuans’ private armies were augmented not only to make sure that votes went to preferred candidates and political parties but



De facto president of the Philippines Gloria Arroyo.

also to pit lawless elements against rebels who threatened the clan’s local hegemony.

“Military soldiers, policemen and paramilitary units became part of the Ampatuans’ private armies. Civilian volunteer organisations (CVOs), said to be illegally formed, were armed as ‘force multipliers’ under Arroyo’s Executive Order 546, thus providing the pretext for their use not only by the Ampatuans but also by other local kingpins.”

The Brussels-based International Crisis Group concurred in its 18-page report that Arroyo “bears overwhelming responsibility for creating the conditions that led to the bloody massacre” (report by John Berthelsen, *Asia Sentinel*, December 22, 2009). It concluded that “Political patronage by successive governments in Manila, most notably by the Arroyo administration, allowed the Ampatuans to amass great wealth and unchecked power.

“Judging from the initial cavalier treatment of the Ampatuans by Arroyo’s advisers, and the failure of the AFP to apprehend all 183 suspects (one of them is Saudi Mokamad, head of the government’s 1507th Mobile Police Group) and the officious bureaucratic process of the investigations and trial, the consensus is that none of the private armies will be disbanded, nor will the collusion between political dynasties of oligarchs, military, local bureaucrats, compradors and transnational corporate interests, that have spawned the Abu Sayyaf and other bandit groups, be diminished. It is even doubtful if any of the Ampatuans will be fully held accountable by the lopsided, heavily politicised justice system that tolerates the torture of the “Morong 43”.

Patronage over the neocolony

Last December 8, Representatives Howard Berman and Chris Smith introduced a concurrent Resolution in the US Congress condemning the senseless killing and called on the Arroyo regime to combat corruption and terrorism. This is like the proverbial appeal to the butcher to take care of the flock in the slaughter-house.

But it is a symptom of ruling-class disenchantment at Arroyo’s gangsterism. Alarmed by the pattern of extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances of activists such as Jonas Burgos, and the torture of Melissa Roxas, the US Congress voted to withhold US\$2 million of the 2009 military aid to the Arroyo regime for failure to implement human rights stipulations attached to the Foreign Military Financing Act.

The Senate Committee on Appropriations headed by Senator Inouye is being pressured

anced



by various constituencies to cut off the use of American tax-payers' money to finance Arroyo's fascist measures to nourish her Bonapartist ambitions.

The Ampatuan trial will drag on until a compromise is reached with the incoming administration (assuming Arroyo does not grab emergency powers, declare a failure of elections due to defective automated poll machines, or stage bombings in line with the Marcos dictatorship's formula for legitimising martial despotism).

The Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) will be modified to permit substantial US Special Forces, Balikatan Military Exercises, and other unconscionable practices to continue. It all depends on whether the US will be able to accommodate the Moro insurgents, or else shift their attention to Indonesia and Malaysia. Meanwhile, the war on terror will maintain the Abu Sayyaf as the scapegoat and pretext for continuing intervention in the Philippines.

A dialectical-materialist analysis of the conjuncture of all the trends noted above spells the further disintegration of the neocolonial oligarchic status quo due to internal splits, the loss of US hegemonic sway with its gradual economic decline, and the resurgence of nationalist-democratic influence on the middle strata, indigenous communities, and other sectors allied to peasant and proletarian mobilisations.

Seismic alternatives to "Shock and Awe"

However, new developments might alter the balance of political forces. With the February 3 murder of a Filipino civilian, Gregan Cardeno's, employed by the US military in Camp Ranao, Marawi City, where the Philippine Army 103rd Brigade is based, and the electoral circus heating up to an obscene climax, the plight of the Morong 43 might be overshadowed – unless mass rallies and protests can connect it with the Ampatuan massacre.

Surely, there will be the usual count of bodies in hotly contested electoral spots. Armed confrontations might heat up in regions where mining, plantations, and logging businesses flourish. The issue of the VFA, as well as fear of new corruption inquiries, will force Arroyo to stifle any media expose of the maltreatment and sodomisation of Cardeno by US soldiers.

It's not all quiet in the "western" front. Mobilisation of OFWs in North America is going on parallel to those in Hong Kong, Europe and the Middle East. Not all such initiatives are enlightened, but most are symptomatic of neocolonial malaise. For example, a petition

by concerned Filipino Americans concerning electoral fraud and violence was presented to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton last March 10, with the request that a US delegation be sent to the Philippines.

The model of Senator Richard Lugar's observer team to the dictator Marcos' 1986 "snap elections" was invoked. This is rather foolish and misplaced. What business tycoon Loida Nicolas Lewis and others should be persuading the Obama administration to do is to investigate and publicise to the US public the barbaric acts of their clients, Arroyo and her military minions. They should also demand the scrapping of the VFA which allows covert disastrous US military operations within Camp Navarro, Zamboanga City, for example, and allows US forces to engage in actual combat operations killing and wounding civilians under the guise of humanitarian and training exercises.

The VFA violates not only the Philippine Constitution but flagrantly nullifies Philippine sovereignty. Countless Filipino lives have been sacrificed to service US imperial adventures since the slaughter of 1.4 million Filipinos in the Filipino-American War (1899-1913) with its inauguration of "waterboarding." Not least of these global interventions are the genocidal "disaster-capitalist" wars against oppressed peoples in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Colombia, and elsewhere. Many of the victims of US drone bombings are women and children in villages in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, and other countries.

One of the victims of the US-Arroyo war on global terror is the Filipino woman named Dom-an, widow of Jose Pepe Riberl Manegdeg III, assassinated by paramilitary agents on November 28, 2005. In her public testimony, Dom-an played her bamboo flute before an audience at the Frontline 5th Dublin International Platform for Human Rights Defenders and denounced the Arroyo regime for its brutal persecution and murder of human rights activists and progressives, what she called the haunting "scars of Marcosian Martial Law" (SPHP Global Network, February 2010).

Revitalising a militant spirit of solidarity, Sister Mary Soledad Perpnan, chair of the Third World Movement against the Exploitation of Women, recently urged a gathering in MetroManila: "For the sake of gender security and nationwide peace, the urgent call is to put an end to US military presence and intervention. The time is to act now!"

E San Juan Jr directs the Philippines Cultural Studies Centre. *Political Affairs* ✪

Let us commemorate 65 years of the Victory!

Joint statement of Communist and Workers' Parties

On May 9 we commemorate 65 years of the victory over Nazi-fascism, the most violent and brutal expression of the monopoly capital's domination, in a capitalist system living in a deep crisis, which led mankind to one of the worse catastrophes of its history, with the barbarity of concentration camps and the Second World War's procession of death and destruction for the peoples.

The Communists were in the frontline from the very first moment, mobilising and organising workers and peoples in the resistance. The anti-fascist struggle was marked by the firm and determined action of the Communists, to which millions gave their lives.

The heroic contribution of the USSR, of its Red Army, of its people, who suffered around 27 million deaths, was decisive for the victory over the fascist hordes.

It was with the Victory in 1945 and the formation of the socialist camp that millions of men and women undertook their emancipation, freeing themselves from exploitation, oppression and colonialism, with the working class movement winning enormous social and political victories, in a progressive path never before attained in the history of mankind.

In the current situation, in a time of capitalism's deep crisis in which the imperialist offensive is hitting so seriously the toiling masses, mankind is again facing great danger resulting from imperialism's deepening contradictions, from the arms' race, from the reinforcement of aggressive military alliances and from the attempt to forcefully impose the brutal increase of exploitation, precariousness in labour relations, dismissals and unemployment, poverty and the negation of the most basic necessities for millions of human beings.

We therefore appeal to the commemoration of the 65 years of the victory over

Nazi-fascism as an important action of struggle for peace against the monumental falsification of history and anti-Communism, which, as history proves, is always anti-democratic.

That, by trying to place fascism and Communism on an equal footing and erase the Communists' decisive role in the people's liberation from the yoke of Nazi-fascism, seeks to bring to justice, to make illegal and to suppress, not just the action of the Communists but of all democrats who oppose capitalist domination and exploitation, with the purpose of pursuing and repressing all of those who, in any way, resist and fight in an organised manner against monopolies and imperialism.

For us Communists, evoking the 65 years of the victory is to reaffirm our deep belief in the struggle for social emancipation, in the justice of our values and liberating ideals; it is to reaffirm our determination to fight the causes and the forces which were at the root of the fascist horror.

It is to reaffirm our unshakeable confidence that the future does not belong to those who oppress and exploit, but to the workers and peoples who resist and fight for mankind's emancipation from the shackles of the exploitation of man by man and for a society in which the workers fully enjoy the wealth they produce, social progress, peace and welfare. The future belongs not to capitalism, but to socialism and Communism. ✪



Israel's repression of its Palestinian citizens unites us in struggle

Ameer Makhoul

Last month, when I travelled from Haifa to the land border between Jordan and Israel, the Israeli border police prevented me from leaving my country. The police handed me an order issued by the Israeli Minister of the Interior Eli Yishai prohibiting me to leave Israel for two months. The travel ban imposed on me is part of an increased campaign to intimidate and to spread fear among Palestinian civil society. The repression is meant to divide us, but it has had the opposite effect. We Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza and the diaspora are only more determined and united to claim our rights and to build a nation where we can live in freedom and have equal rights.

The Israeli Minister of the Interior holds the opinion that my travel outside the country "poses a serious threat to the security of the state", according to article 6 of the 1948 emergency regulations. I am the director of Ittijah, Union of Arab Community-Based Associations and the chairman of the Popular Committee for the Defence of Political Freedoms, which is a sub-committee of the High Monitoring Committee of Arabs in Israel. All three bodies unite Palestinian Arabs in Israel and we jointly decided not to appeal my travel ban at the Israeli high court.

Any meeting in the Arab world or with any Arab person anywhere in the world arouses the suspicion of the authorities. The accusations against me are made on the basis of secret evidence that I am not allowed to see, and the high court merely acts as an extension of the Israeli General

Security Services (GSS), or the Shin Bet. Israel does not need to prove that there is reason for suspicion; instead, I have to prove that there is no need for their suspicion. The Israeli legal system is far from fair for Palestinians.

Israel is intimidating Ittijah and the Popular Committee for the Defence of Political Freedoms because we are reasserting our community's stake in the Palestinian struggle. Twenty years ago few considered the Palestinians in Israel as a part of the Palestinian people or the Palestinian cause. During the Oslo process of the 1990s, we were considered an internal problem for Israel to deal with, but our networking, advocacy and lobbying has changed this. Israel is increasingly repressing us to divide Palestinians from each other and isolate us from the outside world.

The repression and persecution of Palestinians in Israel is not new. Since 1948 Israel imposed a policy of control under the guise of security. In 2007, Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin introduced a new policy targeting the whole Palestinian community

The authorities repress and persecute Palestinians while they prohibit foreign solidarity activists, organisations and journalists from visiting the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

as a security risk to thwart democratic efforts such as the issuing by Palestinian civil society in Israel visions of a state for all its citizens.

Repression has increased dramatically since then and more than 1,000 Palestinian youths in Israel



A border crossing between Israel and Jordan.

were interrogated by the Shin Bet after the Gaza massacre of winter 2008-09. Leaders of the Palestinian civil society, like myself, are under attack. Sheikh Raed Salah, the leader of the Islamic movement, is being persecuted for his involvement in the

protesters from the aggression of Israeli forces in the West Bank village of Bilin. MK Said Nafa was stripped of parliamentary immunity because of his visit to Syria, while former MK Azmi Bishara found himself in an imposed exile for three years for the same reason. One year ago, the Shin Bet ordered me to come to their offices and they interrogated me for one day in an attempt to silence my protest of the Israeli massacre in Gaza.

Israel applies a multi-track approach to attack our struggle: the authorities repress and persecute Palestinians while they prohibit foreign solidarity activists, organisations and journalists from visiting the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Additionally, right-wing groups within Israel commit public violence against Palestinian families in places like Acre and Jaffa, with total impunity. One week ago the right-wing group Im Tirtzu published posters inciting

violence against individual members of Adalah, the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights.

Palestinian civil society protests Israel's repressive policies of intimidation but at the same time resolves to continue our struggle. We have achieved unity, and it is important for us to protect this. We will not allow Israel to isolate members or parts of our community. We have become more influential in the Arab media and we will use this influence. We have built our international networks and we call on them to support us. The attacks that are meant to divide us have had the complete opposite effect. Injustice unites us; we are all together in this struggle.

Ameer Makhoul is director of Ittijah and chairman of the Popular Committee for the Defence of the Political Freedoms.

The Electronic Intifada ☪

Swedish women appeal to Michelle Obama on behalf of Adriana and Olga

Dear Mrs Michelle Obama, We, women in Sweden, appeal to you to take up the cause of two women who, for over ten years, have been denied the opportunity to visit their husbands imprisoned in the United States. Two Cuban women, Adriana Pérez and Olga Salanueva, time and time again have been denied visas to visit their husbands, Gerardo Hernández and René González.

These men were unjustly sentenced to double life sentence and 15 years imprisonment, respectively, for gathering information in the US about terrorist operations in Florida directed against their country. They belong to the group known around the world as The Cuban Five, political prisoners in the United States. Their efforts contributed to the saving of many lives in both Cuba and the United States.

US authorities have claimed their denial of these two women's repeated visa applications with the

assertion that they would constitute a threat to the national security of the United States. But neither of them has ever been accused of anything. The hollowness of the reasoning for the visa denials is made clear by the shifting reasons given each time.

Most recently, in December of 2009, the Department of Homeland Security turned down Olga Salanuevas application for the eighth time. Without any explanation, she was prevented from visiting her husband, René González. When he was arrested in September 1998, they were living with their two daughters, entirely legally, in Miami, where their youngest daughter, who, like her father, is a US citizen, was born. When her husband was arrested, Olga was, as well. The purpose was to pressure René into confessing to crimes he had never committed.

After three months she was deported to Cuba without her two-year-old daughter. She was granted

a visa in March 2002, but it was revoked before she had a chance to use it. For more than ten years US authorities have cruelly punished her in spite of the fact that she has committed no crime.

Adriana Pérez was also granted a visa in 2002, in July, and travelled to the US to visit her husband, Gerardo Hernández. But when she arrived in Houston she was taken into custody at the airport and was photographed, fingerprinted, interrogated for 11 hours, denied access to an attorney and Cuban diplomats and was then sent back to Cuba. With premeditated ruthlessness she was given hope, only to be humiliated and denied her long awaited meeting with her husband. Adriana last had her application denied in July of 2009, on her twenty-first wedding anniversary.

Denying family members the possibility of visiting prisoners is an unworthy extra penalty for all involved and contradicts international standards for humane

treatment. Those standards include the right of prisoners to have contact with their families and receive visitors. We are amazed by this cruelty toward two honorable women who have committed no crime and want only to visit their husbands.

Olga Salanueva's and Adriana Pérez' visa applications are supported by a significant number of religious, judicial and human rights organizations – from the world-wide Council of Churches to the United States' own Council of Christian Churches, Cuba's Council of Churches, the Association of American Jurists, Amnesty International, a long list of Nobel Prize winners (for Literature or the Peace Prize), members of parliaments, bishops, priests, jurists, authors, human rights activists and intellectuals around the world. They have also been received by parliaments and governments in many countries that support their struggle; most recently, in February of this year, by the EU Parliament.

Dear Mrs Michelle Obama, we appeal to you to do what you can to get visas for Olga Salanueva and Adriana Pérez so they can visit their husbands, and thereby lessen the shadow that has fallen over the United States because of the cruel treatment of The Five and their families.

- Member of the EU Parliament Eva-Britt Svensson (v)
- Former EU Commissioner Anita Gradin
- Members of the Swedish Parliament: Anne Ludvigsson, Bodil Ceballos, Siv Holma, Helena Bargholtz, Liselotte Olsson, Amineh Kakabaveh, Marianne Berg
- Bishop Eva Brunne, Stockholm
- Opposition leader Ann-Margarethe Livh, Stockholm municipality
- Women for Peace, Bibbi Steinertz,
- Swedish Women's Leftwing Union, Majlis Fridén ☪

Greece: massive class response to plutocracy

KKE (Communist Party) denounces the provocations that sought to strike a blow at the people's struggle for the death of three innocent people

On May 5 the nationwide strike of All Workers Militant Front (PAME) froze every productive activity in the country. Factories, construction sites and stores, ports and airports, universities and schools were paralysed.

In the early morning thousands of workers and young people were outside their workplaces defending the right of the workers to go on strike and against employers' intimidation. Hundreds of thousands of people protested at the demonstration organised by PAME in 68 cities throughout Greece.

At the same time, provocative groups tried to undermine the strike demonstration. Aleka Papariga, General Secretary of the CC of KKE, highlighted the importance of the organised political struggle and denounced also in her speech in parliament the efforts of the provocateurs that led to the deaths of three young people who died of suffocation after a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a bank.

The strike demonstration in Athens

In Athens the central strike demonstration of PAME took place at Omonoia Square, at the centre of Athens. Giorgos Perros, member of the Executive Secretariat of PAME delivered the main speech stressing:

"No more sacrifices for the bankers, for the industrialists, for the monopolies. We will make sacrifices so as to defend, all together and united, our rights, our life; so as to defend the life of our children, not hand them over to the most brutal exploitation bound hand and foot. We do not give up our gains.

"They lie when they argue about a rescue bailout package for the country; it is a rescue bailout package for the employers, the banks, the ship-owners, the ones who have benefited from the previous rescue bailout packages; likewise for the foreign creditors, who along with the parasites of plutocracy will plunder the wealth produced by our people for the next decades.

"They have elaborated and gradually implemented these measures for

many years. These measures are outlined in the Treaty of Maastricht, in the White Paper; they are included in all decisions of the EU Summits; they were included in the programs of PASOK and ND; likewise in the 9-point agreement between GSEE and Federation of the Greek Industrialists".

Giorgos Perros underlined: "We deserve our own Greece, which is far better than theirs, and we will struggle for it. Even if they pass these measures, we will never legitimate them in our consciousness, we will never obey the laws that impose those measures. Day by day, month by month we will gather forces to block the implementation of these measures, till the overthrow of them and their measures."

The representative of PAME closed his speech stressing: "We, the workers, the self-employed, the craftsmen, the small tradesmen, the small and medium sized farmers, the young people, we are the majority.

"We will become stronger as long as we build our front, our own alliance. And once we have built our own people's front we will not be merely strong, we will be almighty; because we will have created the body of our own state power; we will have created the tool in order to plan and produce

"No more sacrifices for the bankers, for the industrialists, for the monopolies. We will make sacrifices so as to defend, all together and united, our rights, our life ... "

according to our needs; we will have created the basic mechanism in order to stop the minority of parasites who plunder our wealth, who live off our labour in order to build our life, the life of our children and the next generation.

"This is our patriotic duty and our great responsibility, this is our one-way road" and we do not give up not matter how many sacrifices we will have to make."

Apart from the forces of PAME, forces of the All Greek Antimonopoly Rally of the self-employed and the small tradesman (PASEVE) and Students' Militant Front (MAS) also participated in the mass rally and the demonstration.

Gulf by "cutting it off with a slip valve."

President Obama, meanwhile, said there will be no bailout for BP on the oil spill. The president said his administration, in the context of a comprehensive energy bill, is supporting efforts under way on Capitol Hill to increase the Oil Pollution Act penalties "significantly above the current cap of \$75 million."

Even under current law, however, there is no cap in cases where a company is found to have been grossly negligent, to have engaged in misconduct or to have violated federal regulations.

Right-wing advocates of "small government", ironically,



Part of the nationwide strike of workers in Greece.

At the head of the march was a delegation of the CC of KKE led by Aleka Papariga.

The PAME protestors marched through the central streets of the city to the parliament, where the social democrat government has tabled the bill with the anti-labour measures seeking to pass it through under emergency procedures. It should be

In her speech at the parliament, right after the announcement of the death of three people, Aleka Papariga made the following statement:

"The working people, who suffered an unprecedented attack, the worst since 1974, are able to distinguish the systematic political struggle for the defence of their rights, for their protest, a struggle that can take many

people. People are blamed for the crisis, for everything. The responsible organised people's movement cannot be blamed for actions planned backstage. We will continue our struggles".

In addition the General Secretary of the KKE gave a resolute response to the president of the nationalist party LAOS who resorted to vile anti-communism and launched a provocative attack against the KKE.

"When the march of PAME arrived at the parliament, there was a group of members of "Xrisi Avgi" (ultra-right nationalist group), the so-called known-unknowns, who in 1994 set the Polytechnic School on fire. They were saying "burn the parliament down". We disarmed them. We denounced them, we marched with linked arms and not a single incident occurred while we were at Syntagma Square

"People have the right to create the conditions through the process of mass political struggle, for the revision till the radical change of the Constitution.

Was the parliament not changing the constitution all those years?

"Of course, we have condemned this constitution and we are telling the people that they should struggle for its change. Telling openly and clearly that the Constitution has an anti-people and anti-labour character."

International Section of the CC of KKE (Communist Party of Greece) ✪

noted that the parliamentary group of KKE utilised the parliamentary regulation asking to follow the article that requires qualified (180 MPs out of 300) and not a simple majority for the approval of the anti-people bill.

The position of KKE on the incidents

The massive and protected demonstration of PAME gave a dynamic response to the provocative action organised by several groups in order to disorient the people, to reduce the importance of the massive mobilisation, to slander KKE, to stop the dynamic of the struggles and intimidate the working people.

forms according to the conditions at each time. They can clearly tell the difference between this struggle and every plan aimed at the subversion of the struggles, every provocative action that causes the deaths of innocent victims and aids all those who want to create a scenario in order to discredit the struggles.

"People should not only defy the provocations but they should also take all the measures to protect their struggles which should start from the workplaces. They should hit where it hurts. The starting point of the battle must be the workplace and lead to a nationwide struggle.

"I should also stress the following: stop putting the blame on the

Oil spill could surge, lawmaker warns

John Wojcik

Oil gushing from the BP well off the coast of Louisiana could surge to 60,000 barrels a day if the company's plan to cap it with a four-story metal container fails, Democrat Representative Edward Markey said after he met with oil industry executives last week.

The hope is that the container would sit on top of the ruptured oil pipe like an upside down funnel and suck up much, if not all, of the oil that would otherwise continue to contaminate the Gulf of Mexico.

A BP executive said that crews were able to cap the smallest of the three leaks pouring into the

have ramped up their calls for government action. Conservative governors in the region are also demanding intervention, resources and money from the federal government in response to the oil spill disaster.

There were signs that BP was stepping up efforts to shift the blame for the spill. CEO Tony Hayward said the explosion on April 20 that caused the spill and killed 11 workers was not the fault of BP but the fault of the owners of the deep sea rig itself.

He said that BP was nevertheless taking responsibility for a cleanup that involves a number of methods in addition to the placement of a containment dome. One

of those has been the use of oil-displacement chemicals to keep the oil from reaching the vulnerable coast.

Wildlife watchdog groups are warning that the oil-dispersing chemicals carry their own environmental risks, making a toxic soup that can endanger marine creatures.

Several leaders from coastal states including California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican, and six US senators have called on President Obama to reverse his offshore drilling plan.

The fishing and shellfishing industries in the Gulf are rapidly shutting down. Boats are anchored and processing locations and plants are silent.

Many other businesses are feeling the effects.

The most immediate threat, however, is to 300,000 acres of coastal wetlands in the Mississippi Delta.

They include 10 national wildlife refuge areas where hundreds of species live. The wetlands are a natural protective barrier from hurricanes for more than two million people, and provide a living for hundreds of thousands. The latest trajectory map from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shows the oil slick moving ever closer to those wetlands.

People's World ✪

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Labor morphing into Liberals

Surely the Minister for Education Julia Gillard could spend more effort on something more useful than fighting teachers over school tests. Governments of all sorts and political inclinations seem to be in two minds about teachers: they are supposed to be responsible for everything – good levels of education, behaviour, activities – you name it.

At the same time they know nothing when it comes to expressing their point of view about their profession. It seems to me that treating teachers with respect and consulting them on subjects they actually know something about is a good idea. At the moment they are trying hard to make sure that children are not classified as potential failures through ill-conceived testing methods.

They are being punished for doing their job with courage and determination. Some parents are caught in the debate without looking into all the details and think it might be a good idea to have schools ranked. I know a lot of parents and grandparents who are supportive of teachers and do not want to be used as pawns in these games.

They were planning to keep their children at home for the NAPLAN test day rather than subject them to

some untrained people coming into classrooms to supervise the tests. The Labor Party has practically morphed into the Liberal Party – how else can you explain the willingness and eagerness to cross picket lines teachers were planning to set up, and their general attitude to working people.

Mati English
Sydney

Remembering the victory over fascism

I watched the Moscow Red Square Victory parade on May 9 over the Internet. It was fantastic to watch it live and once again marvel at the tremendous technical achievements that we take for granted nowadays. It was even more moving to pay tribute to the 27 million fallen Soviet citizens who had defended their country and the world against fascism. Stunning as the parade was, the main heroes were the war veterans. Moscow had 4.2 million people out in the streets and parks to celebrate the Victory Day and many other cities and towns paid tribute to the veterans as well.

There was another great celebration – Vietnam just celebrated 35th years since its victory against the USA. I came across a very interesting quote from General Do Xuan Cong, a veteran of that war. Talking about the US military he said: “Their supremacy was technological. But their armaments were for distance wars, with aeroplanes, rockets and bombs. We reduced the space, forced combat into our backyard for their troops. Modern arms had no use, did not substitute their lack of morale for the struggle”.

We should not be forgetting that the Soviet Union, USA, Britain,

France, Australia were allies in the fight against fascism. But we should not be forgiving imperialist aggressions against other countries either. Let the two anniversaries remind us of that.

T Southern
Brisbane

On the impact of unabated growth

It is hard to disagree with the Statement by the Central Committee of the Communist Party calling for “fundamental changes” to economic, political and environmental issues (*Guardian* April 28). However, I fail to see how “more equitable socio-economic policies and fairer distribution of wealth” alone is “the best” (or only) “approach to combat ecological degradation”.

Given that such radical changes can be achieved and that within such a society the effect on the land of an expanding population is dramatically reduced, we are nonetheless confronted with having to assess, sooner or later and however unpalatable, the impact of unabated growth.

For some time the demand for housing alone, west of Sydney, is consuming some of the best arable land on the coastal plain. Development on the eastern seaboard is relentless.

This is a debate that has some way to go and we should rely on science rather than be influenced by the racist politics of fear and exclusion or the politics of greed (The Business Council of Australia) or the quaint view that somehow more is better.

Ed Phillips
NSW

A.C. Alim · Ann Jarjoura · Bhagavadas Sriskanthadas · Danny Gardner · Gina Wilson
Melissa Paris · Nashaa Hamody Abdul-Hassan · Nur J. Alam
Rima Najm · Ten Ch'in U · Willem Tibben

Za|za|a Inner Quakes & After Shocks

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Auburn Botanic Gardens
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Riverside Theatres, Parramatta
Thursday 20 May 2010 • 6.00pm

Bangarra Mezzanine, Walsh Bay
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HAVE YOUR SAY
Write a letter to the Editor

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Horowitz off target

Anthony Horowitz's series *Foyle's War*, about a democratically-minded and very principled copper on the South Coast of Britain during WW2, earned a lot of credibility through its frank depiction of the prevalence of the forces of appeasement in that country, especially in the early part of the War.

It was refreshing to see a modern series written from an anti-fascist perspective. However, in the first episode of the latest series of *Foyle's War*, entitled *The Russian House* and shown last week, Horowitz blotted his copybook big time.

He chose to present the Russians captured by the Allies while fighting for the Nazis as the good guys! He portrayed their being returned to the USSR to face the consequences of their treachery as a scandal.

In Horowitz's version, the British government conspired with the dreaded Stalin to send the captured Russians back to the USSR, because “there were 20,000 British POWs still in Russian hands”. These could only have been British POWs held in German POW camps liberated by the Red Army.

Horowitz implies heavily that the USSR held up the return of these troops in order to blackmail the British government into returning the Russian collaborators. But the British authorities actually went to

considerable pains to disrupt and prevent the return of Soviet citizens to the USSR.

However, in 1945, the mind of the public was still filled with the ideals of the anti-fascist coalition. The Red Army was viewed – particularly in Britain – with awe and respect. Quislings, collaborators and other pro-Nazi elements were scorned as “scum”.

It was the task of the Cold War, which Winston Churchill launched, to change that attitude and make the public ready to accept the concept of war with the USSR.

There is not a hint in Horowitz's program as to what these Russian prisoners had been doing, fighting for the Nazis. But we know what they had been doing: these anti-Soviet recruits to the Nazi cause became members of punitive detachments to hunt down and destroy Russian partisans; they made excellent (efficient and ruthless) concentration camp guards, and of course they were eager scouts for the German army.

I met a Russian émigré once whose hatred of the USSR was very evident. He claimed to be very well informed about the history of the Soviet Union, citing as proof “My grandfather owned three villages”. Not houses or farms, you'll notice, but three entire villages. His family had obviously been rich (very rich) kulaks, accustomed to copping a hefty share of everything the poor peasants who lived in the three villages had produced.

The Revolution had put a stop to that and taken away his family's privileges. And he hated it (and Communism) for that reason. The remnants of the kulaks, and of other previously privileged feudal strata, such as the White Cossacks, and the sons of the Tsarist officer corps who had fought tenaciously against the Revolution, still survived in the USSR when the Nazis invaded.



Foyle's War – Anthony Howell as Paul Milner, Michael Kitchen as Christopher Foyle and Honeysuckle Weeks as Sam Stewart

Nursing their grievances (real or imagined), despising Communists and Jews (whom they viewed as more or less the same thing) and contemptuous of poor peasants and factory workers (but not so much of rich peasants or kulaks), these anti-Soviet hangovers were prone to revive a belief that had been popular in Russian middle and upper class circles during the First World War: that Germany was invincible and that what Russia needed was a touch of “German discipline”.

In other words, those whose class position put them on the side against the Revolution and Socialism welcomed the Nazis as allies, which in fact they were. They joined in the killing of their own people. The Soviet Union, let us never forget, lost 26 million people – most of them civilians – in the War.

The Axis troops – Germany and its fascist allies – in Russia were encouraged to regard the Soviet

people as subhuman. The Germans in particular (there were also Hungarian, Finnish and Italian troops in the invading force) massacred men, women and children and then proudly posed for photographs among the bodies of their victims.

Commonly, the inhabitants of captured villages were herded wholesale into the barn or church, which was then set on fire. Any who managed to break out were indiscriminately gunned down.

The people who helped the Nazis bring down this horror on their fellow citizens were naturally regarded as the worst kind of war criminals. And not just by Russians.

Collaborators and quislings were universally despised by the people who supported the Allied cause. In occupied Germany, just after the War, while the British government tried to help refugee Russian fascists to escape, British officers in the field tended to look on these traitors as

vermin, deserving of whatever punishment was waiting for them.

Horowitz's portrayal of the armed White Guard terrorist cell operating from “the Russian House” as some sort of James Bond-style secret agents defending truth and justice is a shameful and rather ludicrous example of rewriting history. Many White Guard Russian émigré groups worked with and for the Nazis throughout the 30s. They were not the good guys.

This lapse on the part of *Foyle's War* is unfortunate, but serves to remind us that even the informed and otherwise astute can fall for Cold War propaganda, if it is presented in the right way. We must always ask ourselves, does this article, program, film or whatever, support the interests of the working class as a whole, or the interests of the capitalist ruling class?

Maligning the USSR's incredible efforts against Fascism in WW2 unquestionably serves the interests of the anti-socialist, exploiting class. ☛



Sun 16 May –
Sat 22 May

Close Up: Photographers At Work, Portraits (ABC1 Sunday May 16 at 4.20 pm) is a 43 minute program in a series made for the Ovation cable channel in the USA. The film was made by Maysles Film Inc, the famous documentary production company renowned for the films of the Maysles brothers.

Albert Maysles is also a well known photographer, and he is the first of the five photographers profiled in this film, the others being Andrew Moore, Sylvia Pachy, Timothy Greenfield-Saunders, Mary Ellen Mark and Gregory Crewdson.

Maysles is seen snapping portraits on the street with the kind of small digital camera most of us use. He first gets his subjects' attention, talks to them, makes friends, and only then, with permission, takes a simple portrait shot. His snaps show not just a face but a personality, a whole person briefly glimpsed.

In contrast, some of the other photographers use a truckload of gear and set up portraits like they were shooting a movie, with props, scenery, extras, etc.

I found the more commercial photographers the least interesting, although all of them are masters of the use of light.

Another, better program about portrait photography is **Karsh Is History** (ABC2 Sunday May 16 at 8.25 pm, repeated ABC1 Sunday May 23 at 2.45 pm). The subject of this hour-long program is Yousuf Karsh, the poor Armenian immigrant to Canada who became probably the most famous portrait photographer of the 20th century.

He specialised in the famous and the important. To be photographed by Karsh was a mark of honour; a recognition that the sitter had attained the heights.

And his portraits were marvelously composed and lit, many becoming icons of the age. This film, by Joseph Hillel, shows not only a host of his famous photos but also talks to his charming widow, and to his apprentice (later, of course, a photographer in his own right).

This week's episode of **Foyle's War** (ABC1 Sunday May 16 at 8.35 pm) is called **Killing Time**, and was not written by the series' creator Anthony Horowitz but by David Kane. However, directors Stuart Orme and David Richards have managed admirably to retain Horowitz' style throughout the program.

The substance of the program deals with racial prejudice, both within a mixed-race US Army unit stationed in Hastings at the end of the war, and also within the local English population when a local girl takes a shine to a black US soldier and has a child to him.

As written, a happy ending would have been a virtual impossibility, so the girl is conveniently killed off, providing one of several crimes Foyle is called on to take care of.

Outnumbered (ABC2 Tuesdays at 8.00 pm from May 18) is a six-episode sit com from the team behind *Drop The Dead Donkey*, and like that excellent show uses a mix of scripted and improvised

Stephen Fry the host of *Qi* (ABC1 Tuesdays at 9.35 pm from May 18).



dialogue. However, the scripted parts of the earlier program were considerably funnier than this effort.

A comedy looking at "middle-class, cash-strapped, contemporary life in suburban London" (*Variety*), it strives to be "true to life", but good comic writing depends on timing, and improvisation seldom provides dialogue with that sort of timing.

I found the first episode fitful, its witty or insightful moments spaced out between longueurs. The English reviewers loved it; my wife and I found it dull.

Much more enjoyment is to be had from the new series of the non-quizz show **Qi** (ABC1 Tuesdays at 9.35 pm from May 18). Like the earlier series, this is really a panel show in the tradition of such classic BBC radio shows as *My Word* and *My Music*, shows that mixed erudition, wit, good humour, reminiscences, tall stories and more, shows that allowed the audience to share in the fun that the panel were obviously having.

This first episode of the new series is just what it claims to be: a gallimaufry (yes, that is a real word – look it up; I had to) of ancient

mountains and even older animals, harmless sugar drinks and harmful crisps, and dangerous toilets. Among other amusing items (Alan Davies extemporised flights of fancy about the world's first driving licence are priceless).

The program last week on SBS **Innocence: The Other Side Of DNA** about the Innocence Project, in which law students investigate cases of prisoners who maintain that they are innocent of the crimes for which they have been convicted, showed the astounding number of cases where new evidence (such as DNA) has proven that someone was wrongfully convicted.

This week on the ABC we have another program involving the Innocence Project, the prize-winning **Conviction: The True Story Of Clarence Elkins** (ABC2 Wednesday May 19 at 9.30 pm).

Elkins was convicted in 1998 of rape and murder, crimes of which he was innocent. His wife spent eight years and all their money trying to prove his innocence. Finally, through the intervention of the University of Cincinnati's Ohio Innocence Project he was freed in 2006.

If nothing else, the film confirms that justice in the USA is very much a matter of luck, timing, the media and the money to pay for a really good legal team.

As a historian, Simon Schama in my view does not give enough attention to the significance of class struggle, but he is more alert to it than most TV historians. His new four-part series, **The American Future: A History** (ABC1 Thursdays at 9.30 pm from May 20), is an interesting venture which most *Guardian* readers should find worthwhile.

The first episode concentrates on an environmental question not often dealt with in programs about the USA: water. Schama relates the abuse of America's water sources and the threats posed by the country's avaricious industry and commerce to historical themes such as the opening of the West or the onslaught of "capitalist agribusiness" on the land, much of which he points out is desert.

Schama occasionally reveals a tendency to regard the USA with awe, but on the whole the program is definitely worth watching. ★



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The Guardian

Editorial Office
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Editor: Tom Pearson

Published by
Guardian Publications
Australia Ltd
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

Printed by Spotpress
24-26 Lilian Fowler Place
Marrickville 2204

Responsibility for electoral comment
is taken by T Pearson,
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

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POLITICS
in the pub

May 14
THE BURDEN OF DEBT: HOW SERIOUS & WHO WILL PAY?

Jim Stanford, Dr, Canadian Auto Workers Union, author *Economics for Everyone*;
Steve Keen, Assoc Prof, author *DeBunking Economics*,
University of Western Sydney

May 21
LATIN AMERICA

Nelson D'Avila L'Ameda, Venezuelan Ambassador;
Peter Ross, Dept Spanish & American Studies

May 28
RUDD'S BACKFLIP ON AFGHAN & SRI LANKAN REFUGEES-CONSEQUENCES?

Julian Burnside, AO, QC, Refugee Advocate;
Ben Saul, A/Prof, Director Sydney Centre International Law

June 4
THE NEW COMMONWEALTH/STATES HEALTH DEAL – GOOD DEAL, BAD DEAL? FOR WHOM?

Ian Hickie, Prof, Brain Mind Institute, Uni. of Sydney;
Gawaine Powell Davies, A/Prof, CEO, UNSW Research Centre Primary Health Care & Equity

June 11
NO MEETING
Long weekend

June 18
PROSPECTS FOR NON-NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION & DISARMAMENT

Rory Medcalf, Convenor Nuclear Policy, Lowy Institute;
Sue Wareham, President MAPW

25th of June 2010
IS EQUALITY STILL A PRIORITY?

Julian Disney, Director Social Justice Project UNSW;
Frank Stilwell, Prof, Political Economy, Uni of Sydney

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Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights (SIGTUR)

Declaration – 9th Congress, Sao Paulo, 18-23 April 2010

Global economic justice for workers in the Global South

We, who are trade union activists from 24 countries across four continents in the Global South, representing democratic unions from the following countries – Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Colombia, South Africa, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Guinea, Kenya, Democratic Republic Of Congo, Tunisia, Zambia, Angola, Eritrea, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, East Timor, Philippines, South Korea and Australia gathered in Sao Paulo, Brazil on the April 19-23, 2010. In the Global South workers in many places are under attack as we meet today. We recognise their predicament and extend our solidarity.

One hundred and ten delegates debated and engaged the deepening global economic crisis manifested in failure of financial systems, the capitalist restructuring of the global economy and work and the catastrophic ecological crisis. Delegates considered the impacts of these crises on the global working class, particularly from developing and poor countries.

In our fight to secure global economic justice as we confront these multiple crises, we recognise that the forces pitted against us are formidable: free market global capitalism has consolidated the power of multinational corporations to an unprecedented degree. In every economic sector a mere ten corporations control the sector and of these the top three control 40 percent of the total. They have budgets bigger than many nation states. However, we also observe that these forces are themselves trapped in the deep crisis produced by financial hyper speculation which de-legitimises capitalism as a system and provides new opportunities for struggle.

Our collective, democratic debate is crystallised in the following declaration, which reflects a different priority to the logic of capitalist global markets – the priority of society; the wellbeing and security of workers and their families; and the care of planet earth now confronted by the destruction of its fragile, interlocked ecology.

Global economic and social justice is the fundamental aim of the democratic union movement of the Global South. This is reflected in the Strategic Trade Union Platform.

Strategic Trade Union Platform

We come out of this gathering united behind a global economic justice program which is the mainstay of our campaigns, networking and

co-operation as workers and activists from the South.

The key pillars of our program are:

- Just and fair trade for industrialisation and development in the global South.
- The end of financial speculation and the subordination of financial markets to the needs of development and social equity.
- Building working class solidarity to confront the power of multinational corporations and defend workers from exploitation and the abuse of their rights and to advance decent work for all.
- Building popular consciousness about the ecological crisis and the devastating effects of climate change on workers and the future of our planet in general
- Fighting for gender equality, health and safety and actively campaign against the scourge of HIV and AIDS in most of our countries.
- Fighting for the effective transformation of global governance and democratising global power relations.
- Intensifying the advancement and defence of trade union rights in all countries.
- Creation of a world free from imperialist aggression, nuclear weapons, occupation and economic blockades and unjust sanctions.

These are the key elements of our integrated program for global economic justice which is the anchor and focus of our activities. We continue to note the emergence of undemocratic and exclusive clubs of the rich and powerful countries in their desperate efforts to retain the neoliberal global economy and retain full control in line with their own interests, to the detriment of the developmental needs of the poor.

In this regard, we continue to call for the democratisation of global power relations and the effective support of the process towards the transformation of the most representative global multilateral institutions, particularly the ILO and the UN. Therefore we reject the attempt to substitute their role by exclusive institutions that undermine and subvert broad representation and participation which serves to erode the multilateral system.

SIGTUR: the movement of workers in the Global South

SIGTUR is an active and living voice of workers in the Global South representing a diverse and broad

spectrum of trade unions committed to global economic justice. It seeks to inspire ordinary workers to take up and intensify class struggles against the exploitative system of neoliberal globalisation and the increased suffering of workers and communities in all our countries. SIGTUR aims to ensure the voice of workers in the Global South and indeed across the whole globe is not censored or suppressed in any form whatsoever.

We emphasise that we represent and support democratic trade unions and their radical struggles for economic justice at national, regional and global levels.

Building the organizational capacity of SIGTUR

Delegates recognised that if we are to meet the challenges of our goal of global economic justice, we have to strengthen the capacity of national unions to globalise their local struggles against multinational corporations and political and economic policies which consolidate their power over society and politics.

The Congress therefore devoted time to the practical mechanics of global networking, adopting and articulating an implementation program through registering on the SIGTUR website and using Labour Start campaign tools, Unionbook, Skype and Twitter. These tools are to be embedded in organisation and struggle through internal networking within SIGTUR in the areas of global corporations, the public sector, gender, union education and transport and communications and through developing corporation specific, campaign oriented networks as the need for specific struggles materialises.

Congress asserted that SIGTUR is a mechanism for uniting and strengthening the voice of workers in the Global South in order to achieve a balanced, even and just economic development across the globe. In this regard SIGTUR is an important meeting forum, a privileged democratic space for worker movements in the global south, promoting debate and engagement in the struggle for an economic paradigm based on justice. The strategic conclusions of these debates will be activated through global networking which creates a new potential for resistance.

There was consensus that the coordinating functions of SIGTUR must be strengthened so that this goal of economic justice can be achieved.

Peace & Justice

The strong presence of Africa at this Congress brought to the forefront



the connection between economic justice and the need to end the terrifying violence imposed on workers and society in so many areas. In particular, conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo exposes the role of multi-national companies in promoting armed bandits to secure mining interests. There is a need to end the various forms of violence, abuse and persecution of workers, women and children in many parts of the Global South as a campaign linked to the prosecution of individuals and companies involved. Such brutality must be opposed with the greatest sense of urgency by the entire global community.

G20 meeting in South Korea

Congress supports KCTU's plans to organise protest action against the South Korean government's repression of trade unionism in South Korea and against the failure of the G20 to address the GFC in the interests of societies across the globe. The South Korean government's repression of trade union rights disqualifies them from any leadership role in international affairs. With regard to the G20 meeting in South Korea in November, SIGTUR makes a call on unions in the Global South to endeavour to participate in this action.

Let us prepare ourselves for new battles

We are well aware of the role of the global corporations we struggle against. Scratch beneath the surface and we discover that these same corporations are also arms manufacturers. For example a supposedly innocent white goods manufacturer like Westinghouse, the biggest producer of stoves, dishwashers and washing machines is also producing death-oriented weapons.

We are pitted against powerful states which fully support these

logistics and which at the same time produce laws to limit the scope of trade union action.

However, we also acknowledge that the vast majority of unions in the Global South are best placed to lead the intense battle against the power of the corporation over societies world wide for these unions were born in the fire of struggle against authoritarian regimes in the Global South which were themselves highly militarised.

We discovered in these struggles the power of democratic organisation and the mobilisation of our weapons of action; we discovered our capacity to form alliances in civil society in creative mass action to force change; we saw how after a period of intense struggle the strongest of regimes were forced to concede – the racist apartheid regime in South Africa and the military regimes in South Korea, Indonesia, Timor and Brazil could not sustain their repressive rule.

Out of this history we should be well prepared for a united struggle against the globally coordinated forces of neo-liberalism in the multi-nationals, in the banks and stock markets of the world and in the IMF, the WB and the WTO and those ruling elites who benefit from exploitation and oppression of the majority.

Step by step we will build a globally integrated labour movement in the south, in the most fundamental battle of our era. In this we represent the hopes and aspirations of generations to come; hopes for a just global economy providing security for all in society; for a planet whose fine tuned ecology is protected before all else and for world society that relegates the weapons and methods of warfare to the dustbin of history, where they truly belong.

In each of these struggles we will never cease to advance, for while we have breath in our bodies we will remain committed to what is best and to what drives our movement: a solidarity which will last forever!
Sao Paulo, April 23, 2010 ★



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