



Editorial

Budget 2010-11

Trying to save capitalism from itself

Treasurer Wayne Swan's forecast that the budget deficit will be turned into a surplus by 2013 is based on a China-led economic recovery. This is a neo-liberal budget with forecasts that make a mockery of the "this reckless spending must stop" line of the Opposition. The most important content of the budget was buried in diversionary debates about future budget surpluses and the mining super profits tax, with the Opposition appearing to make some mileage if the opinion polls are to be believed.

The most important aspects of this budget are what it failed to do. The people who have footed the bill for Labor's "miracle", the most disadvantaged in the community, are yet again neglected. It is business as usual; the lessons of the financial and subsequent economic crises have clearly not been learnt.

Swan went to great lengths to demonstrate "fiscal responsibility" – spin for budget surpluses and austerity measures – and counter the line that Labor is not as good an economic manager as the Liberals.

The government intervened in 2008 and 2009 to stabilise the financial sector and create the economic conditions for the corporate and financial sectors to find a profitable way out of the crisis. Not for one minute did it abandon its long-term agenda. As PM Kevin Rudd said in his essay "The Global Financial Crisis" (*The Monthly*, Feb 2009) "the international challenge for social democrats is to save capitalism from itself". The state, he said, has a role to play in "creating the framework in which the markets operate and in correcting market failure."

In terms of managing the capitalist system in the interests of big business it has so far proved very successful.

Just 12 months ago the Treasurer forecast that the government's debt would peak at \$203 billion and be paid off by 2020-21. Whether the figures were exaggerated is debatable, but at the time the Opposition did not think so. It ferociously attacked them, claiming government debt would peak at \$315 billion and "reckless spending" Labor would never pay it off.

Last week, Swan forecast a peak debt of \$93.7 billion with debt paid off three years earlier, by 2017-18. He also stated that the budget deficit would be turned around into a surplus in three years time – not six as forecast last year.

Opposition leader Tony Abbott was left speechless. There was little of substance for the official neo-liberals to attack and leading big business and finance sector representatives, with the exception of the powerful mining lobby, were smiling.

The Opposition tried to cast doubt over Labor's seemingly miraculous performance, claiming it was based on the super profit tax on mining corporations which might not get through Parliament. This line did not stand up well, as the super profit tax on resources does not come into operation until the year of the predicted surplus. In that year the budget estimates only \$3 billion in income from the super profit tax – hardly a major factor in turning around a forecast budget deficit of \$40.8 billion!

The sad truth is that the Opposition could not have delivered a more conservative budget itself. They are scratching to find something to attack, that they could disagree with or would not do themselves. Neither of the major parties nor the



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mass media question the neo-liberal assumption that budgets should turn a surplus.

As for this latest set of predictions, they could also be turned on their head any time. As Swan notes, "... events in Greece remind us that risks in the global economy endure."

"Aftershocks from the crisis continue to reverberate. The robustness of this budget forms a solid buffer against the troubles of Europe."

Actually the real buffers being relied on by the government against "the troubles of Europe" are the robustness of the Chinese economy and expectations of economic growth in India.

Basis of budget turnaround

The budget deficit arose largely out of the government's \$43 billion counter-cyclical stimulatory package as the economy was heading into recession. It was contributed to by morally and economically indefensible personal income tax cuts on higher incomes and a drop in income tax due to a fall in wages and corporate profits. The stimulus packages helped retain business confidence, sustain demand for goods and services and generate jobs. But it was China that paved the way for recovery in big business fortunes.

The stimulus measures are coming to an end, and the winding back of this spending is one of the main factors behind the government's forecasts of a return to surplus. The government is also relying on an upsurge in tax takings from individuals and companies as export earnings rise, profits take off, and employment and total wages income increase. It will also increase its revenue by raising the tax on tobacco and a number of savings and cuts in other areas. These include:

- Cancelling 260 childcare centres
- Reducing and freezing the cap for childcare subsidies
- Transferring more than 25,000 people from disability

pension to Newstart Allowance (means a reduction in the single benefit from \$350 to \$251 per week)

- Scrapping the emissions trading scheme
- Slashing foreign aid by \$1 billion over four years
- Scrapped or capping a number of environmental programs such as water saving programs and home insulation
- Cutting payments under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

In most areas government ministers were required to contain spending increases to within two percent in real terms. With wages expected to rise by around four percent per annum, this can only lead to job losses in the public service – possibly by attrition. It is not much different to Opposition leader Abbott's plans to slash the number of public servants.

The two percent does not keep pace with the rapid growth in population and forecast growth in the national economy of 3.5 percent (as measured by Gross Domestic Product) next year and four percent the year after. It represents a contraction in government activity relative to the economy.

"I also announce a new phase focused on building even stronger surpluses and paying off debt even more quickly," Swan announced.

Restoring the budget to a surplus of income over spending and wiping out government debt is a neo-liberal obsession. There is no valid reason why governments should not fund programs and infrastructure through debt. To the neo-liberal, every cent the government borrows is a cent less available to the private sector for investment and profit-generating. Yet lending to a government is far less risky than to the private sector and the money can buy more without the layers of profit extracted by the private sector.

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The insanities of our times

The Guardian

Issue 1455

May 19, 2010

Budget 2010-11

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Basis of recovery

The budget contains a number of measures to make Australia more attractive to foreign investors, in particular to encourage exploration in the resource sector.

It hopes to position Australia as a leading financial hub in the Asia Pacific region.

"The private sector is re-emerging as a driver of growth", Swan said in his budget night speech, and it was that growth and not the well-being of the most disadvantaged in the community that the budget was directed to assist.

What the budget didn't do

Pensioners, carers, unemployed, those with disabilities and other welfare recipients yet again miss out. They are expected to continue battling on below subsistence incomes and charity. Many of them face harsher means testing and higher hurdles to jump to remain on their benefits. They are paying a high price for Labor's budget obsession with surpluses.

The public sector continues to be wound back with additional funding for training going mostly to the private sector. The changes to the public health system take public hospitals and Medicare another step closer to privatisation. There are a few headline items relating to GPs, nurses and after hours services, but total neglect of dental, mental, preventative health and aged care services. Nurses and other aged care staff are still fighting to be recognised as professionals and paid accordingly.

Likewise the government continues with its development of an education market – increasing funding to private schools by even more than to state schools.

The government has begun phasing in some of the Henry Tax Review's recommendations (see *Guardian* May 12 for details of Review). It has commended the reduction of company taxation to the Review's recommendation of 25 percent – reducing it from 30 percent to 29 percent in three years time and 28 percent the following year (2014-15).

The final round of income taxes, originating from the Howard government, will commence on July 1. As with previous rounds, those on high incomes have the most to gain. Some low income earners will benefit by an increase in the low income rebate.

There are a number of tax incentives for small business and huge handouts to mining companies for exploration costs. The mining companies will have the benefit of tax cuts up to the level where the super profit tax cuts in. The introduction of a super profits tax is important and should be extended to all industries, in particular, to the finance sector. It remains to be seen whether the government stands up to the powerful mining lobby and scare tactics of the Opposition.

The budget shows that lessons of the financial crisis have not been learnt. There are no measures to re-regulate the financial sector, impose controls on capital flows or abolish the most highly speculative activities of hedge funds and other financial institutions which operate beyond the radar of government regulation. Yet it is these institutions that would have caused a systemic collapse of the global financial system if governments had not come to their rescue with taxpayers' money.

In fact, the government is negotiating free trade agreements with the US and at the World Trade Organisation for the further lifting of restrictions on capital flows internationally – a sure recipe for further crises.

The money directed to infrastructure will serve to further privatise roads, ports, rail and other key infrastructure. It is mostly directed towards coal mining and other resource industries with a focus on exports.

The budget is remarkably silent on the pressing needs of urban development, public housing, public transport and other infrastructure. Its attitude to the environment and climate change is nothing short of criminal with a few token gestures.

Needless to say, military spending and other related security activities are not subjected to the same austerity, with no shortage of funds for weapons or serving the US military in Afghanistan and where ever else called upon.

When the electorate threw the Howard government out in 2007, it was seeking real change in social, environmental and economic policy. It is not surprising that Labor's fortunes in the opinion polls have plummeted as very little has changed on the ground in regard to health, education, public transport, industrial relations, the environment and treatment of Indigenous Australians. This budget, as with Labor's previous two budgets, fails to deliver the hoped for changes.

See pages 3 and 5 and future issues of *The Guardian* for additional analysis of the budget and an alternative Budget for The People.

PRESS FUND

Anyone who is interested in the anarchy of production under capitalism should study the Australian wine industry. The demand for wine has fallen over the last ten years or so, production costs and competition have risen, and now there are 95 million 12-bottle cases of wine that can't be sold, sitting in warehouses around the nation. If you put each bottle in a line it would stretch from Sydney to New York – and back again! They should give some of it to the CPA. We could raffle it and use the proceeds to boost the Press Fund. Unfortunately, they won't, so we'll just have to appeal to you, our supporters, to contribute to the fund for the next issue. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

Christine Murray \$10, H North \$80, "Round Figure" \$11.80, T&N's coffee/lunch club: \$158.20.

This week's total: \$260 Progressive total: \$1,940

Message of solidarity

The Australia-Cuba Friendship Society in Perth, Western Australia, condemns in the strongest terms the attacks organised, financed and carried out by Washington's lackeys in Spain.

The Friendship Society in Perth has learned about a planned homage to the so called Cuban dissidents living in Madrid by the former head of the Spanish government, Jose Maria Aznar, an openly pro-imperialist who should be tried for war crimes committed against the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. Aznar was the instrument used by the Bush administration in 1996

for the European Union common position against Cuba. Aznar has returned to Spain to play out his role as Washington's lackey to promote the homage which is planned for the May 17 during the meeting of the European Union and Latin America.

These dissidents, servants of imperialism, do not rest in their media campaign against the Caribbean island which has been an example of the highest human rights as it is the right to life with social justice and dignity.

The Friendship Society expresses its solidarity with the Cuban

people and its revolution in this new imperialist manoeuvre at the hands of the Partido Popular and its leader Jose Maria Aznar.

We warn that all these manoeuvres will be defeated despite the millions of dollars that would be better invested in alleviating the hardships of European workers victims of the global economic crisis and their pro-capitalist governments.

In solidarity,

Vinnie Molina
Branch President

CPA condemns executions of Iranian political prisoners

The Communist Party of Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent execution of five political prisoners, including teacher and trade unionist Farzad Kamangar, at the Evin prison in Teheran. The other victims of this crime were Ms Shirin Alam Hooli, Farhad Vakili, Ali Heydarian and Mehdi Eslamian. (See Tudeh Party statement page 8)

A number of these prisoners had been held for years in prison and subjected to abuse including

torture. They were never given their right to an open and fair trial.

We note that this outrage occurred near the first anniversary of the elections in which Ahmadinejad was installed as president amid widespread electoral fraud.

This was an undemocratic process that thwarted the will of the people, unleashed another wave of oppression against the political opposition, and generated

an atmosphere of intimidation and fear.

We join those calling for an end to all executions of political prisoners and for the release of all political prisoners in Iran.

In no way do we support the enemies and would-be plunderers of Iran, but we wholeheartedly support the progressive forces in the country campaigning for human rights and peace and for a truly democratic future and peace for its people. ☘

Communist Party of Greece – Central Committee CPA message of solidarity to the Party and PAME

Dear comrades,
On behalf of the Central Committee and the membership of the Communist Party of Australia we wish to convey to you our solidarity and support for your determined struggles at the forefront of the working class and the peoples movement fighting to repulse the unpopular austerity measures introduced by the PASOK government, on the pretext of saving the country from the economic crisis and bankruptcy.

Our Party has followed with intense interest the recent developments in your country, recognising the fact that the Greek crisis was not just a Greek problem but a wider international problem associated with the imperialist drive to attack the peoples' rights and living standards on a global scale.

We recognise that the developed level of political understanding among the Greek working people is due in large measure to the consistent work of the KKE.

Here in Australia there is an increasing realisation that the Greek people, who have nothing to do with the crisis and the excessive debt and budget deficits, have been asked to pay for this whole crisis, while those really responsible, successive governments and the ruling class, not only are not paying anything but continue to make huge profits and to amass fortunes. We are aware that while the country is in deep debt, with almost 800,000 unemployed and 2 million people below the poverty line, Greek businesspeople and politicians have deposits in Swiss banks in excess of 240 billion Euros.

We condemn the bourgeois parties for their actions and their provocations against the KKE. These provocations are staged because bourgeois politicians realise that your party's call on the people to resist the austerity measures with all the might of the workers movement spells great danger for them and the capitalist system.

Dear comrades,

Please convey our congratulations and solidarity to the Greek working people on their courageous and determined struggle to defend their rights and conditions.

We stand in solidarity with the KKE and the trade union front PAME in your efforts to develop and intensify the class struggle to sweep away the current government and achieve people's power.

We wish you every success in your mass rally on May 15 and in your efforts to defeat the unpopular measures and open the way for the socialist alternative.

Long live the class struggle! Long live the friendship and solidarity between the Communist Party of Greece and the Communist Party of Australia!

Yours in solidarity,

Dr Hannah Middleton
General Secretary
Communist Party of Australia



Sydneysiders are invited to an exhibit by Jane Bennett

"CLOSING THE GAP"

18 May-1 June 2010

FRANCES KEEVIL GALLERIES
Bay Village 28-34 Cross St, Double Bay

Gallery hours: Mon-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat 10am-4pm, Sun 11am-4pm

Official Opening: Tuesday, May 18, from 6 - 8pm

More info: Frances Keevil Gallery 02 9327 2475

Budget 2010-11

Education

Howard era priorities locked in

Bob Briton

The spotlight was off education in this year's federal budget. Calls for a fairer share of Commonwealth funding for public schools have been ignored for another year. Vocational education and training seemed to be getting a modest boost but it turns out even this appearance was achieved with smoke and mirrors.

Wayne Swan announced a \$660 million skills training package with \$200 million being spent over the next four years on 39,000 training places in sectors of the economy facing skills shortages, \$120 million for adult literacy and \$130 million for teacher incentives in larger training organisations. There is no specific commitment in the budget to assist the struggling public TAFE system. In fact, it seems to be lined up for the same treatment as public schools with funding being found for a My Skills website similar to the existing and highly destructive My Schools site.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) has noted that of the \$660 million found in the budget, \$527 million is being brought forward or being redirected from existing programs. It is concerned that TAFE's

crucial community service role in providing vocational education and training is not recognised in the budget allocations.

"It is critically important that the TAFE share of this funding is maximised because that is where the money is needed most," AEU federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said. "Only TAFE can deliver the high quality training and education that Australians need."

"TAFE provides opportunities for all Australians to get vital skills, to learn a trade or change careers and to rise above economic or social disadvantage and yet it has been systematically starved of funding. The AEU released in March a report by the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training which found government spending per hour on vocational education and training had fallen by 12 percent since 2003 and 22 percent since 1997," Mr Gavrielatos said.

The union is also concerned that the budget cements in place the funding inequality between public and private schools. The Commonwealth spends two thirds of recurrent funding on private schools despite teaching only one third of the country's students. "This underscores the



Bendigo TAFE – City Campus

importance of the upcoming review of schools funding. The review must deliver a schools funding system which recognises that the primary obligation of governments is to properly and adequately fund public schools," the AEU president told the media last week.

The National School Chaplaincy Program – the scheme established by Howard to reinforce religious

instruction in schools – will be funded for another three years with a cost of \$47 million to the taxpayer next year. The measure is out of step with community expectations as shown by the trial of secular ethics classes in 10 NSW schools.

Scripture classes offered in the schools lost 47 percent of enrolments to the secular alternative and prompted the Sydney Anglican Diocese to

set up a special fund to promote religious instruction. Special Religious Education promoters expect to lose 60 percent of enrolments next year to the secular ethics program that appears to have a "bias towards left-wing or progressive subjects", according to Bishop of South Sydney Rob Forsyth. It remains to be seen how long this experiment in choice for parents and students will be allowed to run. ✪

Budget 2010-11

Let down on environment

Bob Briton

The Rudd government is happy to blame the international community and the Coalition for its failure to deliver a carbon pollution reduction scheme but there is little in the budget to boost its environmental credibility. A commitment of \$652 for renewable energy projects is widely regarded as an inadequate and scattergun response to the climate change challenge. Other measures add to the evidence that Rudd is not going to campaign strongly on the environment at the federal election.

"The budget announcement of \$652 million for renewable energy is welcome but it is a piecemeal

approach to the problem when what we need is a price on greenhouse pollution," Greens parliamentary leader Bob Brown said last week. The Greens have complained bitterly that the government refused to examine their carbon tax alternative to Rudd's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS), which would have paid the biggest polluters in the country to carry on essentially as usual.

Critics have pointed out that the \$652 million undertaking is to be paid out of the allocations that would have gone to the thwarted CPRS. There is \$490 million earmarked for other climate and environmental projects but these are being bankrolled by \$550

million worth of cuts to other projects. Oxfam has noted that there is no new money to assist developing countries deal with climate change. The \$350 million allocated for 2012-13 follows the overall "steady as she sinks" approach of the budget.

The alleged super profits tax on the resource sector is not going to fund any major measures to tackle the climate emergency. There is a new cash grant for every \$1 million spent on exploration and all the other incentives like the taxpayer funded infrastructure and the 38 cents a litre diesel rebate remain in place. The already limited cash dividend from the "uniform resource rent tax" is likely to go down sharply as the horse-trading with mining transnational CEOs gets underway. There will be little to spend on measures to protect the environment, especially seeing that the issue has now slipped down the government's list of priorities.

Environmental advocate and former Australian of the Year Tim Flannery has expressed the disappointment of many at the government's relative inaction over climate change and the environment in a recent comment to the media. "I could go to the Prime Minister now and say, 'Look, why don't we put some policies together to address climate change effectively'... And even if he accepted them, I wouldn't have any faith that he would actually deliver on them because we've already seen this breach of faith." ✪

Pete's Corner



ABORTION RIGHTS UNDER ATTACK! Sydney

RALLY & MARCH
MAY 29
MARTIN PLACE 11AM

WE DEMAND!
- DROP THE CHARGES AGAINST THE CAIRNS COUPLE!
- REPEAL ALL ABORTION LAWS!
- FREE, SAFE, ACCESSIBLE ABORTION ON DEMAND!

THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RIGHT TO LIFE ASSOCIATIONS IS MEETING ON 29TH MAY IN SYDNEY 2010 TO PLAN ATTACKS ON ACCESS TO ABORTION IN AUSTRALIA & INTERNATIONALLY.

RALLY & MARCH:
11AM SATURDAY 29TH MAY 2010 AT MARTIN PLACE.
ORGANISED BY WOMEN'S ABORTION ACTION CAMPAIGN

Contact: waac@yahoo.com.au
www.waac.org.au MARGARET 040764557

IF YOU SUPPORT A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO HAVE CONTROL OVER HER BODY, WE NEED YOU TO JOIN US IN PROTESTING THIS CONFERENCE AND TO SHOW OUR SOLIDARITY WITH THE CAIRNS COUPLE

Perth
5th Latin American Film Festival in Australia
Next film screening 7 pm May 28: *Pan's Labyrinth* (Mexico)
Perth Tango Club, Lesser Hall 82 Cambridge St West Leederville
08 9271 0555 www.perthtangoclub.com free entry

Stop League Tables

A rally outside the office of Verity Firth, NSW Minister for Education, organised by the Inner City Teachers' Association was held on Tuesday May 11. The rally was against the abuse of NAPLAN tests by the media to form league tables on schools' performances. The campaign against league tables is fully endorsed by the Communist Party; the local branch of the party will be distributing a bulletin throughout Ms Firth's electorate condemning league tables and the attack on public schools. ✪



Iraq: Victims of cowardly terrorist bombings

Statement Executive Bureau
The General Federation
of Iraqi Workers (GFIW)
Baghdad – 12 May 2010

Terrorist anti-people gangs have committed one of the ugliest crimes against the Iraqi workers when a series of cowardly bombings targeted the textile factory in Hilla while the workers were leaving the factory at the end of the working day. More than 40 workers, including women, were killed and dozens wounded as a result of this barbaric attack.

We urge you to raise your voices to denounce this heinous crime, strongly condemn the terrorist killers and express solidarity with the workers of the textile factory in Hilla and the families of innocent victims.

We also urge you to call upon the Iraqi authorities to take urgent measures to provide all the necessary protection for the workers and to provide compensation to the families of the martyrs and wounded.

We look forward to your solidarity with the Iraqi workers and your support for their struggle for a free, dignified and secure life in



a democratic, fully sovereign and prosperous Iraq.

The CPA condemns this murderous attack on innocent workers and stands in solidarity with them and all the working people of Iraq. ✪

Don't Jail Ark Tribe! Abolish the ABCC!

The Communist Party of Australia calls on all fair-minded Australians to show solidarity with South Australian construction worker Ark Tribe. He has been hounded by the notorious construction industry secret police force, the Australian Building and Construction Commission, ever since it charged him with failing to attend an interrogation regarding a union health and safety meeting at his workplace in 2008. His matter comes before the Adelaide Magistrates Court again on June 15, 16 and 18 and he faces six months jail and fines of up to \$22,000 if convicted.



all Australian workers and we will work with his union and others to build the biggest possible rallies in support of Ark when the despicable charges against him are heard again in June. We wholeheartedly support the demands of building and construction workers – “Don't Jail Ark Tribe!”, “Abolish the ABCC!”.

Ark Tribe is an outstanding example of the firm resolve and courage that built the labour movement in this country and secured the rights and conditions now being undermined by waves of anti-union legislation. In taking a stand against the police state powers of the ABCC he is defending the rights of all workers to organise for their own safety and in their own interests.

Ark has earned the solidarity of

The CPA fully supports the calls to demonstrate in support of Ark Tribe and the decision of his union to take industrial action in the event he is imprisoned. We condemn the government's legislation that takes industrial matters to the civil courts. The Act that provides the framework for the ABCC must be repealed. ✪

Infrastructure building must include shipping – MUA

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has backed Budget measures to lift spending on resource and freight infrastructure but said Australia would not be prepared for the substantial freight task ahead if the next steps did not include incentivising and revitalising Australian shipping.

“Items in the Budget like the new \$5.6 billion infrastructure fund to help manage capacity restraints in resource rich states and progressing the Moorebank intermodal transport solution for freight movement in the Sydney basin are important initiatives,” said Paddy Crumlin, national secretary MUA. “But the next steps in the freight solution must include mechanisms to trigger investment in shipping infrastructure which is in a parlous state”

The Budget sees the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) industry as a “key driver” of the economy and that LNG production could increase to around three percent of GDP by 2013-14, doubling current

levels of engineering construction investment in Australia.

“Australian flagged ships make up less than 20 percent of the current shipping fleet exporting LNG and when we think of future infrastructure, there must be a place for Australian ships and crews in this trade,” Mr Crumlin said.

Mr Crumlin said the government's provision of \$5.1 million to fund the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) is a significant move. The regulator will also now regulate all commercial vessels, not just those involved in interstate and international trade.

“The decision by the government to publicly fund AMSA, places a new obligation on the regulator to lift its safety performance standards across the maritime industry,” said Crumlin.

The union also sees the skills training funding was among the best news in the Budget.

“While the \$660 million comes after a major call from

industry and unions it does not diminish its importance. In areas like LNG and mineral resource development we have clearly lagged in skills provision and maritime workers have been among the most affected. This funding promises nearly 40,000 new training places in places where it is desperately needed such as infrastructure, construction, renewable energy and resources.”

Mr Crumlin also welcomed the government's extra \$14.5 million for Australian transport safety authorities to help train Indonesian authorities to regulate higher safety standards, particularly in their maritime sectors.

“We have seen how often our own merchant seafarers find themselves in Indonesian waters and involved in actions with refugee vessels and any dollar used raising security and safety standards at this level is money well spent. It's ultimately the security of Australia that's being looked after,” said Crumlin. ✪

WA hospital EBA

Mark Hayward

The West Australian hospital support workers' EBA (Enterprise Bargaining Agreement) campaign started last week with the first meeting of the LHMU (Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union) negotiation committee that was recently elected by state wide public hospital workers.

The Barnett government has introduced a draconian set of policies that are designed to suit its privatising agenda and make any industrial action extremely difficult. Barnett's wages policy is a paltry 2.5 percent which equates to about 50 cents per hour for an already low paid work force.

Barnet has withheld the entire fortnight's wages of some education workers for imposing mild work bans during recent negotiations with these workers. All this while several ministers, Treasurer Buswell included, claimed zone allowances of \$30,000.

Privatisation

The LHMU campaign is two pronged as the government has already told us it intends to contract out large swathes of patient support services. Privatisation will cause a decrease in services as it will have profit as its motive, profit that is derived from payments made by taxation through the government to the contractors.

It will undermine morale and will be unaccountable to the public. Unknown numbers of cleaners, food service attendants, store workers, orderlies, patient care assistants and sterilisation

technicians' jobs will be under threat. The current standards will never be met by private providers. Patient care will be compromised and the public will not benefit, as users of the public system and/or tax payers.

The result will be dirty hospitals and overworked nurses and lower standards of care. The campaign will involve the public through advertisements in newspapers, radio and television. Interestingly, Roger Cook the shadow health minister introduced a private members bill in parliament banning any more privatisation in public schools and hospitals. There was a statement made by Cook and former treasurer Eric Ripper outside a children's hospital (PMH) to announce the bill.

Labor's past has been chequered in health as when its leader Eric ripper was treasurer, he proposed three percent cuts to the health budget, something that was eagerly taken up by Barnett and increased another 10 percent by him after the election. Ripper also introduced PPPs (public private partnerships) as the state has been dropping its ability to build or maintain infrastructure (public works) for years.

The ground is being set for what we expect to be a fight to stave off the multinationals and their plans for the public health care system. It is a fight that must involve the public as the loss of assets will be detrimental to the wellbeing of literally hundreds of thousands of people that are current and future patients of the public healthcare system. ✪

Sydney Film Night

Blue Sky

Wednesday May 19, 6pm
Party building, 74 Buckingham Street, Surry Hills

This 1994 film starring Tommy Lee Jones and Jessica Lange, for which Lange won an Oscar, deals with a touchy subject: people in the military taking a stand against nuclear weapons testing.

Presented by Sydney Central Branch.



Budget 2010-11

Boosting investment, cutting income taxes

Anna Pha

When introducing his first federal budget in 2008, Treasurer Wayne Swan said it “assumes the biggest transformation of the architecture of the Australian economy ever contemplated in our peacetime history” and “the biggest transformation of the role and responsibilities of the federal government, in the pattern of our federation, for well over sixty years.”

The pillars of this transformation are the development of special funds, a total revamp of the taxation and social welfare systems, measures to increase productivity and a new federalism.

The Building Australia Fund for infrastructure, the Health and Hospitals Fund and Education Investment Fund were established with predictions that more than \$40 billion would be deposited in them by the end of 2008-09 from budget surpluses. The surpluses came to an abrupt halt with the economic crisis and the government’s stimulus packages but the policy direction remains unchanged, although possibly the pace slowed a little until the budget is returned to surplus.

The Henry Tax Review outlined policy direction for taxation, superannuation and welfare payments, with the intent that they be phased in over several decades. The government responded a week before the budget to a few of its recommendations and added to these in the budget.

The main trend is towards reducing the role of personal and company income tax, eliminating a multitude of state taxes and increasing the relative contribution of other indirect taxes such as land and transaction taxes. The Review recommended reductions in the higher marginal rates of personal income tax, a flattening of the rate and an increase in the tax-free threshold to \$25,000. It proposed a reduction in company taxation from 30 to 25 percent in the short to immediate term.

The government went ahead in the budget with the last of the Howard government’s personal tax cuts and a further raising of the Low Income Tax Offset (reduction in tax paid) from \$1,000 to \$1,500 bringing the effective tax-free threshold to an income of \$16,000 before paying tax. The thresholds at which the Medicare levy kicks in for those on low incomes will be raised. Those on higher incomes, the tax-free threshold

still remains at \$6,000 after which marginal rates cut in.

At present there is a tax offset (rebate) of 20 percent of net medical expenses above \$1,500. This threshold will be raised to \$2,000 next year and then indexed annually. (Eligible medical expenses includes pharmaceuticals, dental, medical, hospital, optical and a number of other services and expenses.)

As a step towards simplifying the tax system and in line with Henry Review recommendations, the government is offering workers an automatic work-related expenses deduction of \$500 from July 1, 2012 and \$1,000 in the following year. Those who wish may continue to collect receipts and make specific claims above that amount.

For full-time workers who do not have many tax deductible work-related expenses, this might result in anything from \$75 to \$185 extra in the first year and double that the year after depending on their tax bracket.

While the changes for low income earners will leave them better off, the overall trend towards the lowering of higher marginal rates and flattening

provisions. The government previously matched personal, non-concessional superannuation contributions up to \$1,000 with up to \$1,500 depending on their level of income. The co-payment had been reduced to \$1,000 on a temporary basis. The reduction will now be permanent. The government will, however, be introducing a rebate of up to \$500 for low income earners. The threshold determining eligibility for a co-contribution will be frozen for at least two years, meaning a reduction in real terms.

The compulsory superannuation guarantee will be increased from nine percent to 12 percent. The higher rate will be phased in gradually beginning on July 1, 2013 with a 0.25 percent increase to reach 12 percent in July 2019.

A number of measures are aimed at increasing personal savings and investment, to make available more capital for investment by big business.

One example is the introduction of a 50 percent discount on tax paid on the first \$1,000 of interest or other income from savings such as in banks, credit unions, building

The government should be raising the marginal rates on high incomes and extending the super profit tax to other industries to fund the many unmet social, infrastructural and environmental needs.

of the personal income tax system is regressive. The government should be raising the marginal rates on high incomes and extending the super profit tax to other industries to fund the many unmet social, infrastructural and environmental needs.

The government had already announced in response to the Henry Review the resources super profit tax and federal refund to companies of royalties paid to the states. Likewise, the forthcoming reductions in company taxation from 30 to 28 percent over the next few years were no surprise.

There were a number of adjustments to superannuation

societies, bonds or annuities. This will only amount to a few hundred dollars at the most for those who have savings.

It is only a small, initial step towards the Henry Review target of 50 percent applying to all such savings. It is one of a number of measures to increase personal savings and thus increase the capital base for investment by big business – a central goal of the government’s and Henry Review’s strategy.

The tax on company profits will be reduced to 29 and then 28 percent beginning in 2014. For small business it will be cut to 28 percent in 2012.

The tax reforms are aimed at giving Australia the “international competitiveness” demanded by foreign capital. In particular the government wants to attract foreign banks to make loans for infrastructure and exploration investment. It plans to halve the interest withholding tax paid by foreign banks on interest they are paid on borrowings from their overseas parents. This measure also applies to Australian bank borrowings from overseas.

There are other sweeteners for small business, directly flowing from the Henry Review. They will be able to immediately write off all assets costing less than \$5,000 (up from \$1,000) and bundle remaining assets into a simpler depreciation scheme. ☺



Treasurer Wayne Swan.



A fortnight ago we paid tribute to the workers who had lost their lives at work. It is only natural to expect that one of the most dangerous professions – miners – will have proper safety systems as there are enough dangers in mines as is. It turns out that a review of NSW coal mines praised by the state government as evidence of world-class safety system is severely flawed. The problem lies in the fact that it is not the mines that had been examined but paperwork. “All they’ve really done is go through paperwork in the mine offices to check whether the mines have adopted the various management systems required by the legislation,” commented Michael Quinlan who was charged with inspecting workplace standards at Tasmania’s Beaconsfield mine after the death of mineworker Larry King in 2006. He also pointed out that the same situation was evident at Beaconsfield where a desktop review was okayed not long before the mine collapsed. It gives a false sense of security but no real safety.

Quick to take but slow to return – that’s how you can describe the situation with stolen wages of Indigenous workers. A repayment scheme in NSW will wind up at the end of June but there are still 4,629 claims to be processed. In five years only 162 of 958 claims have been successful. Many people who are legitimate claimants have no knowledge about the scheme because there was no advertising. One would have thought that it was the government’s duty to do everything possible to find the people it had essentially stolen wages from. The Department of Community Services estimated there were 11,500 eligible claimants in 2001. Only \$1.85 million had been repaid with about \$70 million in stolen wages still being held by authorities. The NSW government has never explained what is going to happen to these millions when the scheme winds up.

International students contribute \$17 billion to the country’s economy. More than 500,000 full fee-paying foreign students get their education in Australia, almost 300,000 of them in higher education. Many universities cannot survive without the budget input of the international students. Yet in many respects their rights are often violated either through exploitation or discrimination. Foreign students are not regarded as “proper” citizens and sometimes become targets of abuse, violence and discrimination. Racist attitudes in the community should be constantly challenged and it is something that local authorities should take on on a permanent basis and work on consistently. Public awareness and education will help not only the international students but communities in general.

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AFRICOM's First War: US Directs Large-Scale Offensive

Rick Rozoff

Over 43 people were killed in the Somali capital of Mogadishu in two days of fighting between Shabab (al-Shabaab) insurgent forces, who on March 10 advanced to within two kilometres of the nation's presidential palace, and troops of the US-backed Transitional Federal Government. The fighting has just begun.

The last ambassador of the United States to Somalia (1994-1995), Daniel H Simpson, penned a column for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on March 10 in which he posed the question "why, apart from the only lightly documented charge of Islamic extremism among the Shabab, is the United States reengaging in Somalia at this time?"

He answered it in stating "Part of the reason is because the United States has its only base in Africa up the coast from Mogadishu, in Djibouti, the former French Somaliland. The US Africa Command was established there in 2008, and, absent the willingness of other African countries to host it, the base in Djibouti became the headquarters for US troops and fighter bombers in Africa.

"Flush with money, in spite of the expensive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Defence obviously feels itself in a position to undertake military action in Africa, in Somalia."

Fulfilling its appointed role, the *New York Times* leaked US military plans for the current offensive in Somalia on March 5 in a report titled "US Aiding Somalia in Its Plan to Retake Its Capital." (Note that the Transitional Federal Government is presented as Somalia itself and Mogadishu as its capital.)

The tone of the feature was of course one of approval and endorsement of the Pentagon's rationale for directly intervening in Somalia at a level not seen since 1993 and support for proxy actions last witnessed with the invasion by Ethiopia in 2006. The report began with a description of a military surveillance plane circling over the Somali capital and a quote from the new chief of staff of the nation's armed forces, General Mohamed Gelle Kahiye: "It's the Americans. They're helping us."

Afterwards "an American official in Washington, who said he was not authorised to speak publicly" – a hallmark of the American free press – was, if not identified, quoted as maintaining that US covert operations were planned if not already underway and "what you're likely to see is air strikes and Special Ops moving in, hitting and getting out."

The *New York Times* also provided background information regarding the current offensive: "Over the past several months, American advisers have helped supervise the training of the Somali forces to be deployed in the offensive..."

of the deepening Afghanistan-Pakistan war, the deadliest and lengthiest in the world, to the west and south in stating that "al Qaeda and violent extremists who share their ideology are not just located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region but in places like Somalia, Mali, Nigeria and Niger."

In his formal report Ward pursued a similar tact and expanded the Pentagon's "counter-terrorism" (CT) area of responsibility yet further from South Asia: "US Africa Command has focused the majority of its CT capacity building activities in East Africa on Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Uganda, which – aside from Somalia – are the countries directly threatened by terrorists."

He also spoke of the current offensive by "the transition government to reclaim parts of Mogadishu", stating "I think it's something that we would look to do and support."

Senator Levin and General Ward included eight African nations in the broader Afghan war category of Operation Enduring Freedom, countries from the far northeast of the continent (the Horn of Africa) to the far west (the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea). The US military has already been involved in counterinsurgency operations in Mali and Niger against ethnic Tuareg rebels, who have no conceivable ties to al-Qaeda, not that one would know that from Levin's comments.

In between South Asia and Africa lies Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula. The *New York Times* report cited earlier reminded readers that "The United States is increasingly concerned about the link between Somalia and Yemen." Indeed as Levin's comments quoted above establish, Washington (along with its NATO allies) is forging an expanded war front from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Yemen and into Africa.

That extension of the South Asia war has not gone unobserved in world capitals, and earlier this year Russian political analyst Andrei Fedyashin commented: "Adding up all four fronts – if the United States ventured an attack on Yemen and Somalia – America would have to invade a territory equal to three-fourths of Western Europe; and it is hardly strong enough for that."

Strong enough or not, that is just what the White House and the Pentagon are doing. The only other objection that can be raised to the above author's description is that it too severely narrows the intended battlefield.

In the past six months Somali troops have been sent to Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda for combat training and "most are now back in the capital, waiting to fight."

In addition, "There are also about 5,000 Ugandan and Burundian peacekeepers, with 1,700 more on their way, and they are expected to play a vital role in backing up advancing Somali forces."

Last October the US led ten days of military

In addition to using such a multinational regional force in Somalia, the US can also deploy it against Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels in Uganda, Congo and Sudan, and could even employ it against Eritrea, Zimbabwe and Sudan, the only nations on the African continent not to some degree enmeshed in military partnerships with Washington and NATO. (Libya has participated in NATO naval exercises and South Africa has hosted the bloc's warships.)

Earlier this month the Kenyan newspaper *The East African* divulged that "American legislators are pushing for a law that will see another phase of military action to apprehend Lord's Resistance Army rebels."

The news source added that the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Bill adopted by the US Congress last year "requires the US government to develop a new multifaceted strategy" and as such the new bill under consideration "will not be the first time the US government is providing support to the Uganda army in fighting the LRA."

"The US has been backing the UPDF [Uganda People's Defence Force] with logistics and training to fight the rebel group."

Last month it was announced that the US Africa Command has dispatched special forces to train 1,000 Congolese troops in the north and east of their nation, where Congo borders Uganda.

Former US diplomat Daniel Simpson was quoted above as to what in part is Washington's motive in pursuing a new war in and around Somalia: to test out AFRICOM ground and air forces in Djibouti for direct military action on the continent.

A United Press International report of March 10, placed under energy news, offered another explanation. In a feature titled "East Africa is next hot oil zone", the news agency disclosed that "East Africa is emerging as the next oil boom following a big strike in Uganda's Lake Albert Basin. Other oil and natural gas reserves have been found in Tanzania and Mozambique and exploration is under way in Ethiopia and even war-torn Somalia."

The region is, in the words of a chief executive officer of an oil prospecting firm, "the last real high-potential area in the world that hasn't been fully explored."

The article added: "The discovery at Lake Albert, in the centre of Africa between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, is estimated to contain the equivalent of several billion barrels of oil. It is likely to be the biggest onshore field found south of the Sahara Desert in two decades."

It also spoke of "a vast 135,000-square-mile territory in landlocked Ethiopia that is believed to contain sizable reserves of oil. It is

Organisation allies are also deeply involved in the militarization of East Africa.

On March 10 NATO extended its naval operation in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia, Ocean Shield, to the end of 2012, an unprecedentedly long 33-month extension. On March 12 "Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 will take over missions from Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 for the four-month assignment. The change will increase NATO's contribution from four ships to five ships...."

At the same hearings of the Senate Armed Services Committee that AFRICOM commander William Ward addressed, NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, America's Admiral James Stavridis, "noted that 100,000 NATO troops are involved in expeditionary operations on three continents, including operations in Afghanistan, off the coast of Africa, and in Bosnia." (Evidently Kosovo was meant for Bosnia.)

Stavridis, who is concurrently top military chief of US European Command, said "The nature of threats in this 21st century [is] going to demand more than just sitting behind our borders."

He also said he finds "Iran alarming in any number of dimensions", specifically mentioning alleged "state-sponsored terrorism, nuclear proliferation and political outreach into Latin America."

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen recently returned from Jordan and the Persian Gulf state of Bahrain where he pressured both nations to support the war in Afghanistan and Alliance naval operations.

NATO's top official said [on March 9] that he has asked Jordan and Bahrain to contribute to alliance naval operations fighting terrorism and piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf of Aden, as he ended a visit to the two countries. NATO is keen to improve cooperation with Arab and Muslim states, seeing them as important allies for a number of missions, including the all-important deployment in Afghanistan.

Regarding the Western military bloc's almost nine-year Operation Active Endeavour in the entire Mediterranean Sea and its Operation Ocean Shield in the Gulf of Aden, Rasmussen said, "We would very much like to strengthen cooperation (with Bahrain and Jordan) within these operations."

While in Jordan he was strengthening military ties with NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue partnership – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia – and in Bahrain firming up the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative aimed at the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates have military personnel serving under NATO in Afghanistan.

In late February a delegation of the 53-nation African Union (AU) visited NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Mons, Belgium.

"NATO continues to support the AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM) through the provision of strategic sea- and air-lift for AMISOM Troop Contributing Nations on request. The last airlift support occurred in June 2008 when NATO transported a battalion of Burundian peacekeepers to Mogadishu."

On March 10 AMISOM deployed tanks to prevent the capture of the Somali presidential palace by rebels.

The North Atlantic military bloc, which in recent years has conducted large-scale exercises in West Africa and inaugurated its international Response Force in Cape Verde in 2006, also supports "the operationalisation of the African Standby Force – the African Union's vision for a continental, on-call security apparatus similar to the NATO Response Force."

In May the European Union, whose membership largely overlaps with that of NATO and which is engaged in intense integration with the military bloc on a global scale, will begin training 2,000 Somali troops in Uganda.

Brigadier General Thierry Caspar-

In the words of a chief executive officer of an oil prospecting firm, East Africa is "the last real high-potential area in the world that hasn't been fully explored."

The Americans have provided covert training to Somali intelligence officers, logistical support to the peacekeepers, fuel for the manoeuvres, surveillance information about insurgent positions and money for bullets and guns."

Four days later General William ("Kip") Ward, commander of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

In his introductory remarks the chairman of the committee, Senator Carl Levin, reinforced recent American attempts to expand the scope

exercises in Uganda – Natural Fire 10 – with 450 American troops and over 550 from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The US soldiers were deployed from Camp Lemonnier (Lemonnier) in Djibouti, home to the Pentagon's Joint Task Force/Horn of Africa and over 2,000 US forces. The de facto headquarters of AFRICOM.

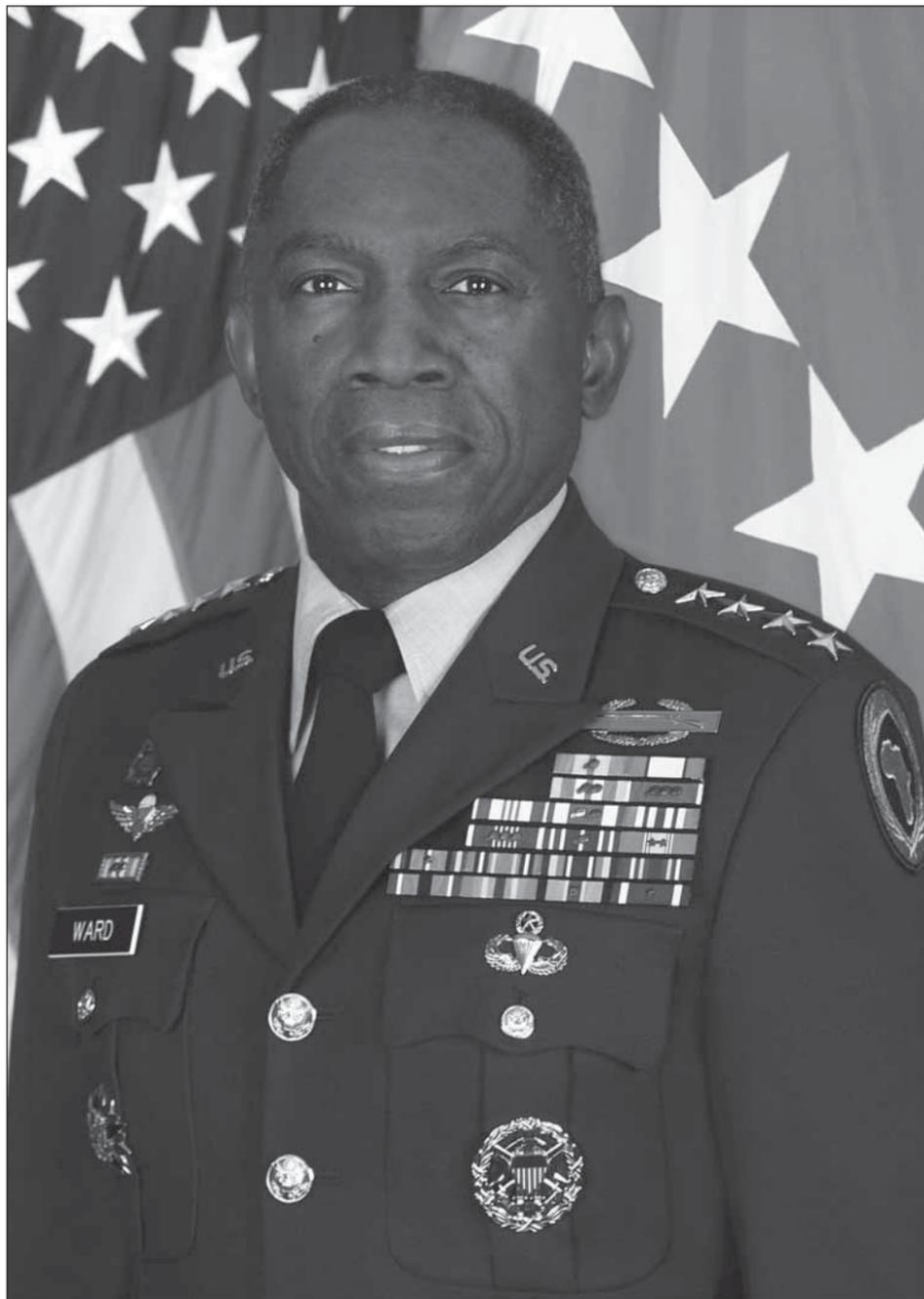
At the time of the manoeuvres a major Ugandan newspaper wrote that they were "geared towards the formation of the first Joint East African Military Force."

estimated to hold 4 trillion cubic feet of natural gas as well."

And, more pertinent to the Horn of Africa: "A 1993 study by Petroconsultants of Geneva concluded that Somalia has two of the most potentially interesting hydrocarbon-yielding basins in the entire region – one in the central Mudugh region, the other in the Gulf of Aden. More recent analyses indicate that Somalia could have reserves of up to 10 billion barrels."

Washington's North Atlantic Treaty

In Somalia



General William ("Kip") Ward, commander of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM).

Fille-Lambie, commanding officer of French armed forces in Djibouti, said "the Somali troops will be trained with the necessary military skills to help pacify and stabilise the volatile country."

He issued that statement at the closing ceremony of four-week French operational training of 1,700 Ugandan troops to be deployed to Somalia in May. The French ambassador to Uganda said "The EU troops shall work in close collaboration with UPDF to train Somali troops."

The 2,000 soldiers to be trained by the EU will represent a full third of a projected 6,000-troop Somali army.

The US-NATO-EU global triad plans an even larger collective military role in the new scramble for Africa. On March 4 and 5 a delegation from AFRICOM met with European Union officials in Brussels "seeking EU cooperation in Africa," specifically in "areas where cooperation could be possible, notably with the soon-to-be-launched EU mission to train Somali troops."

Tony Holmes, AFRICOM's deputy to the commander for civil-military activities, said "Somalia, that's an area where we're going to be doing a lot more, the European Union is already doing a lot and will be doing more...."

"Somalia is very important for us. The European Union is involved in training Somalis in Uganda and that's something we might be able to work closely with to support."

The AFRICOM delegation, including Major-General Richard Sherlock, director of strategy, plans and programs, also discussed "counter-terrorism cooperation with the EU in the Sahel region, notably in Mauritania, Mali and Niger...."

To demonstrate that NATO's anti-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia has other designs than the one acknowledged, early this year a NATO spokesman announced that the bloc's naval contingent in the Gulf of Aden "now has an additional task" to intervene against a fictional deployment of Somali fighters across the Gulf to Yemen.

The spokesman, Jacqui Sheriff, said "NATO warships will be on the lookout for anything suspicious."

Five days after the New York Times feature detailed American war plans in Somalia, the Washington Times followed up on and added to that report.

US operations are "likely to be the most overt demonstration of US military backing since the ill-fated Operation Restore Hope of 1992...."

"Unmanned US surveillance aircraft have been seen circling over Mogadishu in recent days, apparently pinpointing insurgent positions as the TFG [Transitional Federal Government] marshals its forces. US Army advisers have been helping train the TFG's forces, which have been largely equipped with millions of dollars' worth of US arms airlifted into Mogadishu over the last few weeks."

The campaign has already begun. "After securing Mogadishu, the offensive, supported by militias allied with the government, for now, at least, is likely to continue against al-Shebab in the countryside west and south toward the border with Kenya."

After the capital, the entire country. After Somalia, the region.

The war has just begun. ✪

Tribute to Judy Chester

This tribute to renowned Aboriginal activist Judy Chester was given by Patrick Dodson (Lingiari Foundation), Jak Ah Kit (Northern Land Council) and David Ross (Central Land Council).

Our sister, who we remember today near the country of her birth, represented a set of values that are in scarce supply in this contemporary society.

In a world where loyalty and commitment to a set of real values based on the truth of our history is rare, the example that she has given is a lesson for all our young people to consider and try to emulate.

She was staunch in her belief of the causes she promoted and supported, never wavering in the energy that she devoted to their achievement, and as a rock when adversity and dismay crept into the hearts of those less courageous and prepared to compromise the principle.

Hers was the strength of belief that was the hallmark of so many of the Aboriginal leaders who came out of New South Wales in the early days of the last century. Today she will take her place alongside Patten, Ferguson and other great leaders, not because she made great speeches, even though she had a gift for words, not because her writings were published in journals and books, but because she took her place in the frontlines of adversity and provided continuous support and encouragement to all those who stood at the barricades alongside her in solidarity.

Our sister was not constrained by the mediocrity of local prejudices about a people's worth or where they were from.

She was a believer in national solidarity

for her people and all of us from outside New South Wales have felt the warmth of her friendship and encouragement in the search for national outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Hers was the house of the open door with a welcome mat for all who knocked and convivial company for all who entered – a place of support and respite for all.

To those young people here today there is a great lesson in strength, courage, humility and loyalty to be learnt from the life of this woman. If we are to survive as a people in this Nation then those that come behind us will need to develop and practise the values that were central to the life of this great woman.

From all of us here in the Kimberley, Central and Northern Australia we share with the family your suffering at your loss but also celebrate with you the story of a life well lived and a journey to be emulated by the young people who will take her place in the struggle.

As the sun rises and falls, and the sea comes in and goes out.

We that fly into and out of the eastern states will know that we are accompanied by your great spirit of generosity, care and love as we travel.

As mother earth welcomes you home and to country, we know we will see you in the stars above us at night.

Kulia ✪



Judy (centre) at a school peace festival when Patrick Dodson was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize in 2008.

Experts confirm leak is far worse than BP is saying

John Wojcik

NEW ORLEANS: Statements by local labour leaders to the *People's World* newspaper that the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico is far bigger than the 5,000 gallons a day claimed by BP were confirmed by national experts.

Ian R McDonald, an oceanographer at Florida State University and one of the nation's leading experts on major oil spills, told *The New York Times* that satellite imagery indicates the spill is, at a bare minimum, four or five times bigger than reported.

Those "findings" came on top of other news, however, that has people's blood boiling down here.

One issue raising the anger level is the news that the federal agency supervising oil drilling failed to obey the law when granting permission to drill.

Under the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Mineral Management Service is required to get permits to allow drilling where it might harm endangered species or marine mammals.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, is partly responsible for protecting endangered species and marine mammals.

It has said on repeated occasions that drilling in the Gulf affects these animals but the mineral agency since January 2009 has approved at least three huge lease sales, 103 seismic blasting projects and 346 drilling plans without getting the permits required under federal law.

Managers at the agency have routinely overruled staff scientists, who are warning about the environmental

risks of drilling, according to both current and former agency scientists.

There is also anger aimed at Senator Lisa Murkowski who has blocked legislation that would make BP pay some of the astronomical damages the oil spill will cause.

Democrat Senator Robert Menendez has introduced the Big Oil Bailout Prevention Act that would insure BP can't hide behind the \$75 million liability cap that the oil industry had previously lobbied and obtained from Congress for damages from oil spills.

The Sierra Club's Carl Pope said, "But Murkowski, once again using the Senate's rules by which a single senator can prevent the majority from legislating in a crisis, blocked consideration of the bill."

Pope derided Murkowski's reasoning that she wants to protect so-called "mom and pop" oil companies that could not afford massive clean-ups.

The real mom and pop businesses all over this state and along the Gulf Coast, meanwhile, are fighting to stay alive.

Jeff Pohlmann has owned a small seafood place and lunch counter in Chalmette, La. for 25 years. He said that even when there are no liability limits, "companies get away with paying out as little as possible." He explained that a ruptured oil tank belonging to Murphy Oil during Katrina damaged homes in the area and "people were forced to settle for very little – they were left with nothing."

Pohlmann said he got no special consideration from Murphy Oil even though "for months we were the only ones who fed the workers they relied upon to rebuild after Katrina."



Oil slick in the Gulf of Mexico captured by satellite.

"It's impossible to calculate the damage from this. How do you calculate a lifetime of lost property and income and damage to the environment that destroys the ability of everyone here to make a living. How do you add in the cost to our children and grandchildren?"

"We exist because the fishermen here are the backbone of the economy. They go down and we all go down. I don't want to get second rate products from elsewhere. The stuff is not going to be as good. I buy my product from my neighbours. This is killing the very people who came back here after Katrina to bring things back up. And what good will it do when my friends, my neighbours, the people who are family to me, can't even afford a fresh fish sandwich?"

People's World ✪

Germany: Left goes in, right goes out – or does it?

Victor Grossman

BERLIN: The state of North Rhine-Westphalia in the valleys of the Rhine and Ruhr is far and away the most populous German state, with 18 million people. Once extremely prosperous, much of it is now in the Rust Belt category. But it still has key political importance, and was ruled for the past five years by the same two right-wing parties as those ruling the whole nation, Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats and the Free Democrats of Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle.

In this month's election, both of them took a beating. The ruling Christian Democrats, whose local leader, Ruetters, had hopes of following Angela Merkel at the top spot in Berlin, or even pushing her out, can now forget about it. His home state handed him and his party their worst defeat ever, a loss of over 10 percentage points.

And yet, to the end, it was a nip and tuck battle between his party and its main rivals, the Social Democrats. The latter also lost voters, though not nearly so many (2.4 percent), and came out second best in the rivalry, not quite catching up to the Christian Democrats. The final result was tight, 34.6 to 34.5 percent.

The difference between their two smaller partners was much clearer. While the other big business party, the Free Democrats, could only tread water, ending up with 6.7 percent, the Greens were the big winners of the day, almost doubling their number, with over 12 percent of the voters. They were understandably in a jubilant mood.

But what counts when forming a government in German politics (as in most of Europe) is not the number of voters but the number of seats in the legislature, where a majority is needed to form a stable cabinet. In this case that means getting 91 or more of the 181 state seats. And when all the counts came in during the night, the Social Democrats and

their favourite partners, the Greens, ended up with just 90, ten more than their two old rivals, but still one seat short of victory.

The reason neither pair got over half the seats was because of the new addition, the Left. It made its debut in the state by squeezing past the required percentage with 5.6 points and thus getting eleven seats in the legislature. A wagon with four wheels can usually be steered; one with five wheels is far more skittish.

For the Social Democrats to form a government they must either join up with their traditional rivals, the Christian Democrats, and fight over top positions, a very unpleasant and uncertain prospect, or else accept not only the Greens as partners but the Left as well, just to reach that magic number of 91.

That too is anathema, however, especially since national party leaders in Berlin fear any similar opening for the Left on a national scale in 2013 and could try to prevent it. Some local Social Democrats are also so fierce in their rejection of this "formerly Communist" party, their term for the Left, that they might even rebel at any such three party solution and desert to the other side – as happened two years ago in Hesse (perhaps with some desirable temptations as incentives for the deserters).

To make matters even more wobbly, the Left in this state is allegedly the very farthest to the left in all the party. It has not only horrified many good citizens by calling for the legalisation of marijuana, but also supported the nationalisation of banks and major utility giants.

Thus, the future in North Rhine-Westphalia is still undecided. If the Social Democrats emerge as leaders, in one way or another, this would cost the central government its present majority in the national Upper House, or Bundesrat, where each state is represented. Without this majority, Angela Merkel's government may find it very difficult to get laws approved.

People's World ✪

Execution of political prisoners in order to induce an atmosphere of fear in Iran

A united campaign to confront the execution of political prisoners!

As proclaimed in the notice issued by the Public Court and the "Islamic Revolution Court" of Iran, early this morning – Sunday May the 9th – five political prisoners were executed in Evin prison in Tehran.

Farzad Kamangar, Shirin Alam Hooli, Farhad Vakili, Ali Heydarian and Mehdi Eslamian were the five prisoners who were hanged without a fair and public trial and on the basis of manufactured and unsubstantiated allegations.

The Islamic Revolution Court, which is one of the suppression machines of the coup perpetrators, claimed in its notice that the political prisoners who were executed were engaged in "terrorist acts, such as setting bombs" in state buildings.

Such baseless allegations are manufactured by the security organs of the theocratic regime. These individuals and in particular Farzad Kamangar, the martyred teacher, and Ms Shirin Alam Hooli, had many times and on different occasions rejected the allegations and charges made in their cases.

Farzad Kamangar, who was a committed and dignified member

of the educators community of our nation, had repeatedly rejected the false accusations such as bombing and membership of PJAK, and had called the process of his prosecution and trial as unfair.

He and Farhad Vakili and Ali Heydarian had been in jail since 2006. Shirin Alam Hooli was arrested in May of 2008 and during the entire time in prison was subjected to psychological and physical coercion by torturers. Mehdi Eslamian was also arrested last year, shortly after his brother had been executed.

The time chosen by the theocratic regime for these executions is not accidental. Approaching the anniversary of the election coup d'état, generating an atmosphere of intimidation and fear and casting a shadow of the police state over the political landscape of the country, is the goal that the ruling reaction has on its agenda.

In addition to attempting to split and divide the popular movement and creating national and ethnic divisions by executing Iranian-Kurdish political prisoners, this crime is part of the plots of the regime to cast a shadow of security-military atmosphere over our nation

to lay the grounds for further intrusion of organs such as the Guards Corps (Sepah).

The coup perpetrators committed this crime today and executed these five political prisoners in fear of the continuing struggle of the masses as we approach the anniversary of the election in which Ahmadinejad was installed as the president in the course of a coup and widespread [electoral] fraud.

We must not lose our sight and alertness in dealing with the conspiracy of the criminal reactionaries and shouldn't stay silent. The way to confront the plots of the coup perpetrators is a united, joint and organised struggle.

The Tudeh Party of Iran strongly condemns the execution of political prisoners. While warning about the continuation of executions and the danger that threatens the lives of all political prisoners, especially the followers of other schools of thought [other than Islam], the Tudeh Party of Iran calls for the organisation of a joint campaign to prevent crimes and executions committed in the prisons [of the Islamic Republic].

Tudeh Party of Iran ✪

Women punished twice over in Colombia's prisons

Helda Martínez

BOGOTA: Loss of freedom should not mean loss of fundamental rights," Diana Sánchez, a lawyer with the Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee (CSPP) says. "But in Colombia prisoners are punished twice over: with a prison sentence, and with restrictions on their other rights."

Women prisoners in Colombia face poor medical care and hygiene conditions, overcrowding, harassment by male guards, mistreatment and abuses at the hands of staff, and lack of privacy during conjugal visits, according to complaints filed with state oversight agencies. In addition, they are often transferred to prisons far from their homes and families.

The same kinds of abuses are faced by women inmates whether they are common prisoners or political prisoners in this civil war-torn country, human rights organisations report.

To address the situation, the CSPP and other local human rights groups are organising a campaign for the Rights and Dignity of Women Prisoners in Colombia, to be launched in June.

The organisers of the campaign argue that "being deprived of freedom does not mean the same thing for men and women, because ... women carry the weight of being judged by a moralistic society that reproaches them for violating the idea of the submissive woman who is the caretaker of order, values and the family."

The campaign is aimed at drawing national and international attention to the situation of women in Colombia's prisons. In this South American country of 45 million people, an estimated 76,500 people are in jail, including 4,830 women, or 6.3 percent of the prison population.

The figures are approximate, because the National Penitentiary Institute does not provide precise numbers, Sánchez said.

The head of the CSPP, Agustín Jiménez, said that as a result of the "democratic security" policies of the government of right-wing President Álvaro Uribe, "some 2,000 women have been incarcerated over the last six years for 'falsos judiciales'."

"Falsos judiciales" is a term referring to trumped-up charges that lead to arbitrary arrests used by the government to exaggerate the success of its hard-line counterinsurgency tactics against the leftist guerrillas.

María, who asked not to be identified, is a case in point. She told IPS that early one morning in April 2005, armed men ransacked her home and arrested her, while seizing the only "suspicious" thing they found: her students' homework.

María is a teacher, a former trade unionist, and a supporter of the left-wing Alternative Democratic Pole party. "But I have never been a guerrilla," she said emphatically.

After spending 13 days in a cell at the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad – Colombia's domestic intelligence agency – she was transferred to a prison in Bogotá, accused of "rebellion" against the state and "terrorism" charges often faced in Colombia by labour, social, student and human rights activists.

After a year in the Bogotá prison, she was driven in a police motorcade, complete with armoured vehicles and sirens, to a city she hardly knew, where she was tried as a "dangerous guerrilla."

"I'm a teacher, not a guerrilla," she told the court over and over again.

Like 33 percent of the prison population in Colombia, María was held in preventive detention without bail. She spent a total of 19 months behind bars before she was released without any explanation or apology.

"It was all so absurd," she said. She is now waiting for a settlement hearing with government officials before deciding whether to sue.

Jiménez and Sánchez talked about the problem of overcrowding in prisons that hold, on average, twice the number of inmates for which they were designed – or in some cases, many times more.

"Seven people are squashed into a cell for two, and there are no facilities for studying or working, which means there is no rehabilitation," Sánchez said.

In 1998, the Constitutional Court declared overcrowding in prisons unconstitutional, which prompted the

construction of new penal facilities, built in line with US specifications.

"Access to water for people in cells on the upper floors is difficult in these buildings, for example," said Sánchez. "The women have to lug up heavy buckets, causing health problems or fuelling a new 'business' in the prison."

In addition, the number of women transferred to prisons far from their homes, and their children, has increased, "causing deep depression and suicide attempts, like what happened last year in the prison in Valledupar," in northeast Colombia, Jiménez added.

"That separation is the most painful thing," María said. The youngest of her two children was nine years old, and María still cries when she remembers how hard their visits were, and how difficult it was to be so far away.

"It was heart-wrenching. I can't forget the sight of a 24-year-old woman whose little children would be brought to her, and they would cling so tightly to her legs that the guard had to peel them off when the visit ended," she said.

In Colombia, children can stay with their mothers in prison until they turn three. After that, they are handed over to the family or to the government Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) if there are no relatives who can take them in. The ICBF can place them in foster homes.

"It is the children, the innocent ones, who are the most disregarded by the state. It's hard to conceive why many women in for lesser crimes are denied house arrest when white collar criminals serve their sentences at their country houses," María said.

Another problem is the prison system's refusal to allow women, even those who are in prison for decades, to have conjugal visits with anyone but the partner they initially named at the start of their sentence. "They have the additional penalty of having to have sexual relations with the person they registered or with no one," Sánchez said.

She said that in contrast to women, who normally continue to visit and support their imprisoned husbands for years, men often visit three or four times and stop going.

Prisoners who dare to protest or speak out about abuses or poor conditions are often beaten or punished by means of a transfer to a facility that is even more distant from their homes or where conditions are worse.

Jiménez and Sánchez also mentioned the elimination of the ban on male guards in women's prisons, which has given rise to cases of sexual harassment and abuse.

Another problem is that since 2008, medical care in prisons has been in the hands of a public health care provider that is facing bankruptcy.

The campaign for the rights of women prisoners will seek solutions to all of these problems.

IPS ☼



Colombian political prisoner, Liliyany Obando on her Australian visit in 2007.



Global Briefs

AFGHANISTAN: In its annual Mother's Day report on women's and children's survival, Save the Children gave its lowest marks to Afghanistan among 160 countries surveyed. Specifically, one in eight Afghan women die in childbirth, women's life expectancy is to age 44, and 259 children die by age 5 per 1,000 births. Almost half the children are moderately underweight or worse, 75 percent of Afghans drink contaminated water, and only 14 percent of women giving birth receive midwife help. Afghan women average four years of schooling. The report says, "An alarming number of countries cannot provide the most basic health care."

GREECE: Green Party leader in the European Parliament Daniel Cohn-Bendit on May 7 accused Germany and France of forcing Greece to pay up on arms purchases from France and Germany as a condition for accepting the European Union's 110-billion-euro bailout of the heavily indebted nation last week. As reported by Agence France-Presse, Cohn-Bendit learned of the arrangement, denied by French President Nicholas Sarkozy, in conversations with Greek Prime Minister George Papandreu. The preceding conservative Greek government of Kostas Karamanlis had contracted to purchase submarines, warships, helicopters and war planes worth billions of dollars from France.

EGYPT: The government disregarded a court order on April 30 for a wage increase to replace the monthly US\$6 minimum wage in effect since 1984. On May 2 opposition groups and thousands of unionists protested in Cairo, joining counterparts already camped in front of Parliament and others engaged for months in street actions for higher wages. The heightened militancy builds on wage and benefits protests ongoing since 2006, especially in the textile, public and transportation sectors. Women activists, undeterred by the "threat of state-sponsored brutality," have assumed leadership roles in the strike wave.

SOUTH AFRICA: Adherence on May 11 by the United Transport and Allied Trade Union to a day-old strike initiated by the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union meant that 40,000 of 54,000 employees of state-owned Transnet Corporation were fighting together for a 15 percent wage increase. The employer proposed 11 percent. The nationwide job action threatened passenger transportation services along with exports of coal burned in European and Asian power plants, fruit worth \$1.2 billion in annual sales, and ferrochrome, of which South Africa is the world's leading producer.

ECUADOR: Beginning on May 10, indigenous groups blockaded highway access to the capital, Quito, in protest against the Rafael Correa government's proposed "Law on Waters." Citing ancestral rights, CONAIE Federation President Marlon Santi expressed indigenous peoples' fears of eventual privatization of water access, especially by mining corporations. TeleSUR reported calls for radicalisation of the protests mounted in advance of National Assembly reconsideration of the legislation on May 11. Parliamentary President Fernando Cordero reiterated claims that indigenous and peasant representation there made demonstrations unnecessary. He pointed to new constitutional prohibitions against water privatisation, also to restrictions the legislation envisions against water hoarding. Nationwide protests against the law expanded into calls for protection of food sovereignty and defence against multinational corporations.

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
Auburn Poets and Writers Group (APWG)

PERFORMANCES

Riverside Theatres, Parramatta – 6:00pm Thursday May 20
Bungarra Mezzanine, Walsh Bay – 10:00am Saturday May 22

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Putting things in perspective

Again I owe the CPA's *Guardian* thanks for clarifying my thinking. Like so many normal folk I was becoming accustomed to thinking that Australia was being inundated with refugees.

I knew this wasn't the case and that Liberal National Party propaganda was driving the press and views with inaccuracies to distort our thinking through their lies.

Your article "Asylum seekers myth buster 2010" certainly places everything back into perspective. Through your article I can again reason and debate the issue using facts and not rely on lies and innuendo like LNP supporters.

Thank you.
Andrew Mellis

Don't mention the war

In the post-budget commentary, very little is said about the expenditure on defence and cuts to aid.

It is a shameful state of affairs when the culture of violence and the global dependence on violence is seen

as the priority in budgets. It is worth while remembering that the United Nations organisation was set up after WW2 with the commitment to preserve peace and collective security.

Yet, the UN's entire budget is just a tiny fraction of the world military spending, approximately 1.8 percent. The present government came to power promising to withdraw troops from US wars – nothing of the sort is happening and taxpayers money continue to be wasted. When will it become clear that security and prosperity is brought by peace not war? Will we see the day when the budget will have "peace expenditure" as an item?

Mari Senior
Adelaide

Institute to honour war criminals

Just when I thought that we had finally got rid of Howard and his mean policies comes the news that a group associated with the hard right of the NSW Liberal Party is moving to set up a John Howard Institute.

Evidently Tony Abbott and his former boss support the idea. There is even talk about approaching George W Bush to launch the venture. The Howard years in the Australian politics were divisive, anti-progressive and nasty. His legacy is still hanging on in the form of non-repealed, unjust laws and regulations. Instead of promoting the same attitudes it's time to move forward – the Labor Party has a lot to answer for in not taking on Howard's legacy and dealing with it once and for all.

Fancy inviting George W Bush! The man who single-handedly discarded international laws and attacked a sovereign state under false pretences. The fact that Howard slavishly followed does not justify the actions – in a really just and fair world both of them (and their dear friend Tony Blair) should be charged with war crimes and treated as they so richly deserve – as war criminals.

I seriously take exceptions to these plans to promote someone like Howard.

J Dunleavy
Wodonga

On Foyle's War

I read with interest Robert Gowland's commentary on the recent episode of *Foyle's War* (Issue #1454), but feel that he had rather missed the point of the episode in question, "The Russia House."

Mr Gowland is entirely accurate in stating that many of the Soviet citizens who had fought with the Nazis were guilty of unforgivable war crimes.

True, many of those who fought with the Nazi's were themselves from SSRs who were in many cases occupied forcefully by the Russian-dominated Soviet Union (as the episode pointed out) and this may do something to explain their motives, but it does nothing to explain their actions. All this discussion somewhat misses the point of the episode however, and that is that these men, many of whom were guilty of war crimes, should have been tried for them in courts.

The crux of the episode hinged

upon the fact that these repatriated soldiers were not returning to trials but to firing squads. The moral crimes of one group of people cannot and should not allow another group to exact revenge.

As Foyle pointed out in the episode, a war had just been fought to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again – to preserve civilization.

To participate in the un-trialed killing of POWs lowered the UK and the Soviet Union close to the level of the very people they fought so hard against. These soldiers deserved rightly to be punished, but the point of this episode is that in a moral world no crime is an excuse for murder. If you have to make excuses for what was done then you were not doing the right thing.

Russell Smith
Columbia, MD, USA

Health hazards in the dust capital

The last few months here in the Hunter Valley has been a busy time for me and some other environmentally responsible people culminating with me appearing on the ABC TV 4 *Corners* program. As a result of this program going to air the NSW government has reluctantly agreed to do an independent health study here in the Upper Hunter (the dust capital of Australia).

An independent health study carried out on school age children in the Singleton shire between the ages of 9 to 14 years have shown that one in four of those children surveyed have

shown symptoms of lung dysfunction, mostly asthma and other respiratory problems. There are 14 open cut mines and two coal fired power stations here in the Hunter Valley and there is strong feeling amongst the local community to halt any further development of the coal and power industry until the government has completed its health survey and has made public its findings.

The government has so far agreed to install 14 dust monitors throughout the dust affected areas in the Hunter BUT only three of these monitors will measure the PM2.5 dust particles. This is very fine dust has the ability to get further down into the lungs of us humans causing all kinds of problems. This same fine dust can be passed directly into the bloodstream.

Progress is very slow getting this dust monitoring program underway because of the local mining and power companies' stranglehold over the NSW government who rely heavily on royalties from the mines and power stations. We are talking around \$1.5 billion yearly in royalty here and it is quite evident to me that this cash strapped NSW government does not care about the health and welfare of its citizens who live in this infernal dustbowl known as the Hunter Valley.

Maybe the bureaucrats who reside in Macquarie Street will change their minds when they get some international criticism from people around the world after seeing the on camera interview that I did on Wednesday last with the BBC. This program will be shown worldwide!!!!!!

Yours in solidarity,
Peter Kennedy

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

Attacking Lenin while the world changes

Two weeks after May Day, the Newcastle *Herald* – apparently having decided to "do something" in response to these demands for socialism on the part of workers and other marchers here and abroad – devoted an entire page to an attempted "demolition job" on no less a person than Lenin himself.

The author of this bizarre document was an academic from the University of Western Australia, Dr Mark Edele, Associate Professor of History at that institution. Attacking Lenin of course will do Professor Edele nothing but good in the eyes of the ruling class here and in other capitalist countries.

Nor will the article do harm in the eyes of the trendy petty-bourgeois left whose shrill "revolutionary" sloganising masks their objectively counter-revolutionary analyses and actions. Significantly, Professor Edele calls the sailors of the Kronstadt naval base, who – influenced by anti-Bolshevik anarchists and Left-Social Revolutionaries staged a counter-revolutionary mutiny in 1921 – "bona fide revolutionaries".

It was at the end of the Civil War against the Whites and the imperialist Intervention, and was a very

dangerous ploy, intentionally striking behind Red lines and threatening the revolutionary capital Petrograd itself. Had it been successful, it could have, probably would have, been disastrous for the Revolution in Russia, just when the intervention appeared to have been defeated.

Edele, however, thinks the Kronstadt mutineers were the "bona fide revolutionaries", unlike the ragged armies of workers and peasants under Bolshevik leadership who fought against the likes of Kolchak and Denikin, whose armies were armed and financed by Britain, France and the USA, equipped with heavy weapons, even aircraft, backed up by actual armed forces from fourteen countries (including Australian naval and military contingents).

The Soviet forces won the Civil War, despite all the foreign aid to their opponents, because the bulk of the workers and peasants supported them. Edele has no time for that, however, claiming instead that "Lenin's faction, the Bolsheviks, managed to win by hook and by crook".

Having attempted to smear Lenin as an anti-Semite, Adele sums up Lenin as "Some hero, indeed. ... Without Stalin, Hitler or Pol Pot, he would have made it on the winners' rostrum in the competition for its [the 20th century's] chief villains."

For all the efforts of anti-Soviet and anti-Communist propagandists like Professor Edele, Lenin's place in history and in the hearts and minds of the world's workers and peasants is assured and permanent.

It may seem hard to discern at times, especially from within the restricted informational confines of a US satellite like Australia, but the world is turning inexorably to the Left. The ideals that Lenin worked for all his life have not only taken root across the world, they are bearing fruit with consequences that are reshaping the world we live in.

The apparent success of the counter-revolution in the USSR has been unravelling steadily. Far from

becoming a satellite or neo-colony of the USA, three of the former republics of the USSR had already ousted their post-Soviet governments several years ago and reverted to Soviet-style regimes.

And now another one (Kyrgyzstan) has kicked out US stooge President Kurmanbek Bakiev, "in a popular uprising against nepotism, corruption and disastrous social policies which stretched his people to breaking point" (www.ravda.ru).

Bakiev came to power on a popular ticket in the US-backed 2005 "Tulip Revolution", one of the so-called "colour revolutions" that were used to disguise counter-revolutionary actions in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

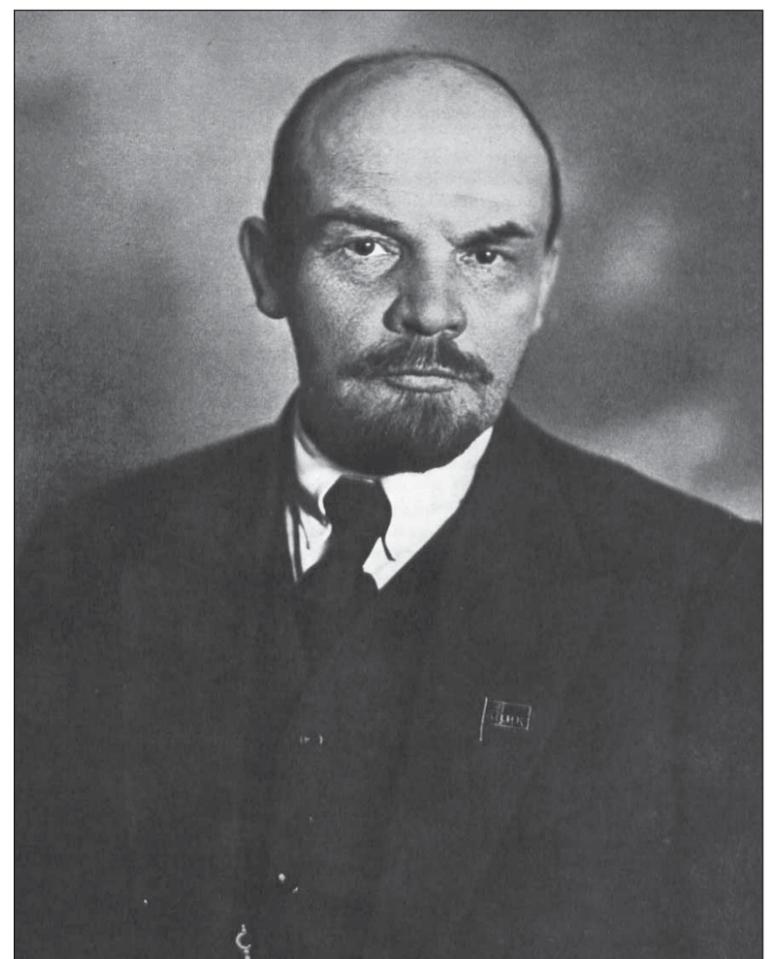
Far from bringing a new age of democracy and prosperity to Kyrgyzstan, Bakiev's tenure in office has left a legacy of a population one third of whom live below the poverty line. Forty percent of the country's income comes from remittances by Kyrgyz workers in Russia.

Imperialism's reversal in Kyrgyzstan follows the total failure of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine.

Worse still, from imperialism's point of view, Russia and China are both acting to shore up the anti-imperialist countries of the world, while endeavouring to prevent or defuse global conflicts and not to provoke the US and NATO into undertaking new dangerous military adventures.

In what the USA used to regard as its private playground, South and Central America, the massive bilateral agreements signed by Russia, Venezuela and Bolivia in April sent a clear message to the US that Moscow has huge potential to overtake Washington as the main trading partner for the region.

As Britain's *New Worker* reported, "The tremendous range of agreements ... covered oil, defence, nuclear power, agriculture, education, fishing, infrastructure, transportation and health care", on a continent "where Russia is regarded with respect and



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.

the USA is considered by many as a pariah".

Russia and Venezuela agreed to set up a joint stock company to operate the Junin 6 oil field with an option to widen the bilateral cooperation to three other fields in the Orinoco strip. At the same time, Russia and Bolivia reached agreement on a joint venture for exploration of Bolivia's extensive oil and gas reserves (Bolivia's reserves of natural gas are the second largest in Latin America).

And, with the USA sabre rattling at Venezuela, Russia granted Hugo

Chavez' government a loan of US\$2.2 billion, for the purchase of T-72 tanks, Smerch multiple rocket launchers, S-300 anti-aircraft systems, and submarines. Venezuela has already acquired from Russia Mi-17 helicopters, Sukhoi-30 fighters, transport helicopters and 100,000 AK 103 guns.

Russia also agreed to help Venezuela undertake its own space program, including establishing a launch site for satellites.

All tangible signs that US imperialism in particular is facing a new world order. ☺



Sun 23 May –
Sat 29 May

At the mid-way point of the 19th century, Walt Whitman, a determinedly bohemian New York poet and sometime newspaper editor, sprung a new type of poetry on an unsuspecting American cultural elite. Influenced by the Romantic movement in literature and art, Whitman held that the chief function of the poet was to express his own personality in verse.

Equally powerful influences were his own strongly held working class sympathies and the rugged nationalism of the time in the USA, when Longfellow for example could demand "a national literature altogether shaggy and unshorn, that shall shake the earth, like a herd of buffaloes thundering over the prairies".

In 1855 Whitman published, at his own expense, a thin volume containing only twelve poems, all in his new style, entitled *Leaves Of Grass*. It was almost universally condemned by critics, although Whitman was heartened by praise he received in a letter from the poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said *Leaves Of Grass* was "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom" America had yet produced.

Whitman believed in the ideals expressed in the Declaration

of Independence and in the US Constitution. He seems to have had no grasp of economics, and thought his poems could persuade Americans to avoid civil war, although after a short stint working in the South he wrote movingly about the inhumanity of a system that sold people as commodities.

His naïve beliefs were badly shaken by the outbreak of the Civil War, but he went to the front to observe and report it. Returning to Washington, he soon found himself spending all his spare time (several hours every day) doing the rounds of the many hospitals in the capital, comforting the dying (amid severed limbs and the stench of gangrene) and trying to help the tens of thousands of wounded, both Union and Confederate.

At the same time he continued to revise and expand *Leaves Of Grass*, whose blunt affirmation of the joy of sex (both hetero and homo) had earned it notoriety as a "filthy" book, until when the fourth edition appeared in 1867, the original twelve poems had grown to scores. Two years earlier, at the end of the War, he had produced another book of poetry, *Drum Taps*, showing his readers disturbing awareness of what war really meant, reflecting his time in the military hospitals.

The feature-length program *Walt Whitman* (ABC2 Sunday May 23 at 8.00 pm, repeated ABC1 Sunday May 30 at 3.30 pm) is a splendid study of the poet's life and especially his work, from WGBH Boston, the best-known station in the US Public Broadcasting System. It's an enthralling hour and a half, with extracts from his poems read by luminaries such as Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa, and contributions from numerous eminent scholars and a couple of biographers. It is a model of how to make an interesting film about



The spectacular geysers of Saturn's moon, Enceladus – *Voyage To The Planets* (ABC1 Thursday May 27 at 8.30pm).

a poet that does not bowdlerise or trivialise either the poet or his works.

This week's episode of *Foyle's War* (ABC1 Sunday May 23 at 8.35 pm) is the last of the present short series. One assumes there will be more, however, as Foyle is off to the USA to attend to some "unfinished business" from an episode in an earlier series, the pursuit of a businessman/murderer who was allowed to leave the country because he was involved in the arms trade.

However, that is still to come. In the meantime we have this week's instalment, involving two young men who joined the British Free Corps, a special unit the Nazis set up to recruit soldiers from British POW camps into the German army to fight the advancing Red Army ("the common enemy of both countries").

The Nazis apparently thought that British POWs would be demoralised and eager to join the war against "the Bolshevik Jews". Unfortunately,

British POWs might have been bored out of their minds, but once Britain got over the disaster at Dunkirk, and especially after Hitler invaded the USSR, their morale was excellent.

The handful of quislings and latent fascists who made up the British Free Corps are not really the subject of the episode at all, but merely the setting for a fairly straight-forward murder mystery, which manages to drag in the bombing of Dresden and some very slack procedures on the part of British Intelligence.

Meanwhile Sam and her young man are having their own post-war problems thanks to a nasty little property developer, some Roman artefacts and an unexploded bomb.

Good, if somewhat conventional, *Foyle*.

The third episode of *Voyage To The Planets* (ABC1 Thursday May 27 at 8.30pm) deals with Saturn, second largest of the gas giants in our solar system, and its extraordinary moons one of which is erupting shimmering clouds of frozen methane into the atmosphere and even as we watch building one of the seven rings that surround the planet.

The wealth of amazing

information, sights and simulations are utterly fascinating even to the non-scientific, making the silly framing story of the series (supposedly a "visual guidebook" for taking a journey to the planets) totally unnecessary. There are even such self-consciously arch bits as "what to pack"!

Why couldn't they just let the science speak for itself? It is certainly amazing enough not to need the twee embellishments (which are mercifully fewer in this episode).

In the two-part drama *Midnight Man* (ABC1 Friday May 28 at 8.30 pm, second part the following week), James Nesbitt plays Max Raban, a once-successful investigative journalist now "reduced to a nightly crawl through the bins of the rich and famous". That is, until he stumbles on a genuine story, becomes embroiled in the now obligatory political cover up, and no one will believe him because he is, as the publicity sheet says, "just the mad, phobic conspiracy theorist. Framed for murder and on the run, will Max be able to get to the truth?"

Gosh, doesn't it sound exciting? Actually, it sounds like one big cliché. But, look on the bright side: perhaps it isn't. I'll let you find out. ☺



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POLITICS
in the pub

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

June 25

IS EQUALITY STILL A PRIORITY?

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

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Reflections by comrade Fidel

The insanities of our times

We have no choice but to call a spade a spade. Those who still have a pinch of common sense find it easy to see how little realism is being left in today's world.

When American President Barack Obama was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, Michael Moore said, "Now, earn it." Many people liked the ingenious comment; it was a smart phrase, even though many found the decision of the Norwegian Committee an example of demagoguery and the exaltation of the apparently harmless petty-politics of the new US President, an African-American, a good communicator and a clever politician leading a powerful empire involved in a deep economic crisis.

The World Conference in Copenhagen was about to be held and Obama sparked off hopes that the United States would join the world consensus in favor of a binding agreement to prevent the ecologic catastrophe threatening the human species. What happened there was disappointing; the international public had become the victim of a painful deception.

At the recent World Conference of the Peoples on Climate Change and the Rights of the Mother Land held in Bolivia responses were offered filled with the wisdom of the ancient indigenous nationalities, invaded and virtually devastated by the European conquerors who, in search of gold and easy wealth, imposed for centuries their selfish cultures incompatible with the most sacred interests of mankind.

Two news reports are an expression of the empire's philosophy intending to make us believe in its "democratic, peaceful, selfless and honest" nature. Suffice it to read the text of said press dispatches in the US capital.

WASHINGTON: US President Barack Obama is examining the possibility of deploying an arsenal of missiles with conventional non-nuclear warheads and a very powerful explosion capacity that can hit their targets anywhere in the world in about an hour.

Albeit the new super-bomb, delivered by Minuteman missiles, will not carry nuclear warheads: their destructive capability will be similar, as confirmed by the fact that their deployment is foreseen in the recently signed START 2 agreements with Russia.

The Moscow authorities demanded, and managed to include in the agreement, that the United States will remove one of its nuclear warhead missiles for each one of these missiles.

According to reports in the New York Times and the CBS TV network, the new bomb known as Prompt Global Strike (PGS) should be able to kill Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in a cave in Afghanistan, destroy a North Korean missile in full preparation or attack an Iranian nuclear site, "all of this without crossing the nuclear threshold."

The advantage of having the military option of a non-nuclear weapon with the same effect of the targeted impact of a nuclear bomb is judged interesting by the Obama Administration.

The project had been initially undertaken

by Obama's predecessor, Republican President George W Bush, but it was blocked by Moscow's protestations. The Russian authorities had said that given the Minuteman's capability to deliver nuclear warheads, it was impossible to determine that the launching of a PGS did not mark the beginning of a nuclear attack.

However, the Obama Administration feels that it can give Russia and China the necessary guarantees to avoid misunderstandings. The missile silos of the new weapon will be raised in areas distant from the nuclear warhead deposits and they can be regularly supervised by experts from Moscow or Beijing.

The super-bomb could be delivered by a Minuteman missile capable of flying through the atmosphere at sound speed while carrying one thousand pounds of explosives. Then, extremely sophisticated equipment will enable the missile to release the bomb letting it fall with great accuracy on the selected targets.

Responsibility for the PGS project – at an estimated cost of US\$250 million only in its first experimental year – fell on General Kevin Chilton, commander of the US nuclear arsenal. Chilton explained that the PGS will be filling a gap in the range of options currently available to the Pentagon.

"At the moment," he said, "we can target any place in the world with non-nuclear weapons in a frame of time of no less than four hours. For a faster action," he conceded, "we only have the nuclear option."

With the new bomb, in the future the United States could act quickly and with conventional resources both against a terrorist group or an enemy country, in a much shorter time and avoiding international indignation over the use of nuclear weapons.

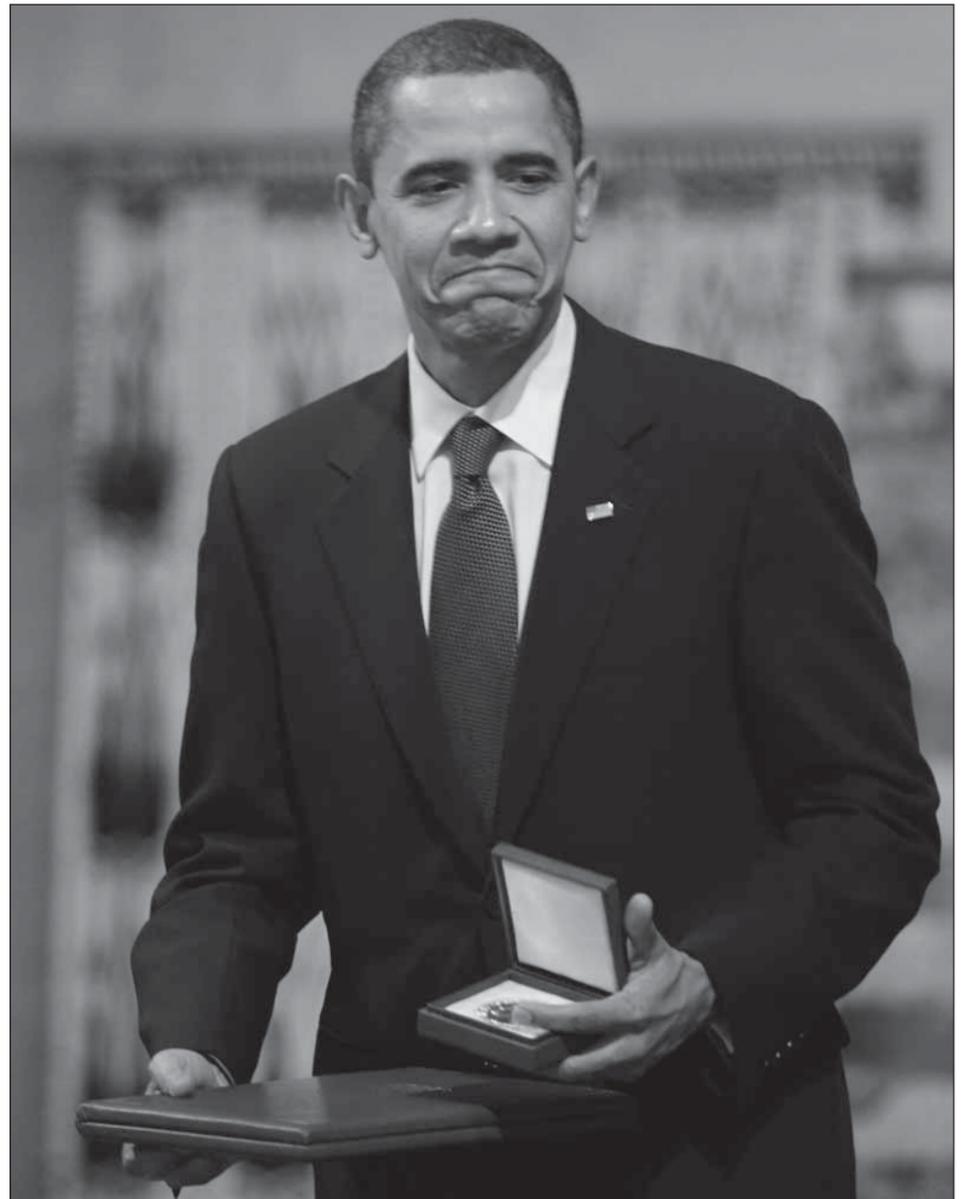
It is planned to start testing in 2014 and to have it available in the US arsenal by 2017. Obama will no longer be in power but the super-bomb can be the non-nuclear legacy of this President who was already awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

WASHINGTON: A US Air Force non-piloted spaceship took off from Florida this Thursday, its military mission covered by veil of secrecy. The automated spaceship or X-37B was launched from Cape Canaveral in an Atlas V rocket at the 19:52 hours local time, according to a video distributed by the army.

"The launching is imminent," said US Air Force Major Angie Blair to the France Press Agency. The plane looking like a miniature spaceship is 8.9 metres long by 4.5 metres wingspan.

It has taken years to manufacture the reusable spaceship and the army has offered only vague explanations on its objective or its role in the military arsenal.

The vehicle has been designed to create the ambiance of an "orbital laboratory to put to the test new technologies and components before these technologies are assigned to ongoing satellite programs," stated the Air Force in a recent communiqué.



American President Barack Obama with his Nobel Peace Prize.

Officials have said that the X-37B will be landing at the Vandenberg Air Force base in California, although they did not say how long its first mission will last.

"To be honest, we don't know when it will return," said Gary Payton, second assistant secretary of the Air Force space programs to the press this week.

Payton indicated that the ship could stay in space up to nine months.

The aircraft, manufactured by Boeing, started in 1999 as a US National Space Agency (NASA) project and was later transferred to the Air Force, which has plans to launch a second X-37B by 2011.

Do they need anything else?

Today they face an enormous obstacle: the already unstoppable climate change. There is talk of the unavoidable rise of heat by more than two degrees centigrade, with catastrophic consequences. Within only 40 years, the world population will increase by two billion to reach the figure of nine billion people in that short time. Harbours, hotels, tourist resorts, roads, industries and facilities close to the ports will be underwater in less time than a generation. Farming land and drinking water will be considerably reduced. The oceans will be contaminated and many marine species will no longer be edible while others will be extinct. This is not simply a logical assertion but the result of scientific research.

Through natural genetics and the transfer of various species from one continent to another, human beings had been able to increase food and useful crop productions per hectare. Thus, for some time, humans suffered less from the shortage of such foods as maize, potato, wheat, fibre and other necessary products.

On the other hand, we are witnessing the depletion in barely two centuries of the hydrocarbons that it took nature 400 million years to create. Likewise, crucial non-renewable mineral resources required by the world economy are being depleted. At the same time, science has created the capacity to destroy the planet several times over in a matter of hours. The major contradiction of our times is precisely the capacity of the human species for self-destruction and its inability to govern itself.

Science made it possible to turn matter into energy, as in the case of the nuclear reaction – through large investments – but there is no sign that turning energy into matter is even viable. The infinite cost of investments in the relevant research is showing the impossibility to achieve in a few decades what it took the universe tens of thousands of millions of years to create. Will it be necessary for Barack Obama, the wunderkind, to explain it to us? Science has experienced a remarkable growth but ignorance and poverty grow too. Can anyone prove the opposite?

Fidel Castro Ruz ✪



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