



### EDITORIAL

# Floods raise major implications for the nation's future

The floods in Queensland and other states have brought tragedy on a massive scale, but also wonderful examples of heroism, cooperation and sacrifice. Volunteers arrived to help from all over the country, and also from other nations. Emergency services and other organisations at all levels of government cooperated and acted with efficiency and dedication. Residents fleeing flooded homes, or returning to begin the heart-breaking task of cleaning up, have often found themselves assisted by total strangers.

A UN official has praised the nation, and the Queensland government and people in particular, for their wonderful performance in dealing with this catastrophe. Nevertheless, the story of the floods includes some official blunders, and has major long-term implications for the entire nation, particularly regarding climate change and environment policies.

#### Devastation on an unseen scale

The scale of the flood crisis is the greatest in Australia's recorded history. River height records were broken in most of the towns affected. In Brisbane the floods did not quite reach the heights of the 1974 floods. However, this was largely because the Wivenhoe dam, built after 1974, retained the water until it nearly reached the top of the dam, forcing au-



thorities to open the sluice gates. If it had not been for the dam the total amount of water reaching Brisbane would have been far greater.

Other states as well as Queensland were also affected. Rivers broke their banks with a vengeance in northern NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. Nor was the flooding limited to Australia, for that matter. Floods have made a million people in Bangladesh homeless, and have killed 355 people in Brazil.

As *The Guardian* goes to press, 18 people are known to have died and about 60 are missing. Various areas of Queensland are still flooded, and are

likely to remain so for several weeks. Floodwaters are still rising in Victoria and South Australia.

That process will be very long, very difficult and very expensive. Damage to crops will result in shortages of fruit and vegetables. The estimated cost of repairing the damage in Queensland alone is \$5 billion, and a 0.75 percent rise in inflation is expected.

#### Planning for the aftermath

Discussion is well underway with regard to recovery and rebuilding in the aftermath of the Queensland crisis. The floods have revealed weaknesses in local and state planning laws and procedures, for example the granting of permission by councils for building development in flood-prone areas. The floods have also demonstrated the importance of public health services and public railways as a means of transport. In one area, with all the roads cut off, a historic rail service proved vital in bringing in emergency service volunteers. Consideration is now being given to construction of a special rail network to service north Queensland coastal areas.

Attention has also been focused on other issues that had a direct bearing on events, for example the rejection by the state government and most Queensland councils of an offer from Telstra of a free emergency warning phone call system for residents in areas threatened with flash flooding.

Residents of Toowoomba suffered the terrible "inland tsunami", with tragic results, including many casualties. The state emergency services were not able to issue warnings in time. The Telstra service might have done so, but the local Council is said to have failed to respond to the company's offer at all.

Despite its initial mitigation of the flooding of Brisbane, the Wivenhoe dam proved unable to avert the swamping of low-lying areas. The building of more dams will doubtless be advocated by Labor and Liberal politicians, particularly because of their very cosy relationships with major development and construction corporations.

However, hydrology professor Dr Willem Vervoort has warned against the building of further dams, which he says lull people into a false sense of security. For a start, constructing a dam is extremely expensive, and its effectiveness in dealing with floods is limited by its use for other purposes, for example retaining water for agricultural, domestic or industrial consumption, or for hydroelectricity generation.

Moreover, planning the capacity of dams is not straight forward because climate change is making it difficult to predict the likely frequency or level of future floods. Last, but certainly not least, dams also have severe impacts on the environment, particularly regarding downstream flora and fauna, as demonstrated in the Murray-Darling system.

Continued on page 2

#### Statement on the Queensland floods

National President CPA

On behalf of the Communist Party of Australia I wish to express our deepest sympathy for those who have lost family members and friends in the flood crisis in Queensland. We also feel for those made homeless and all those who must live with uncertainty about the future. Our own Party members have not been spared this hardship.

We have been inspired by the solidarity and collective spirit shown by the people of Queensland and the generosity of the rest of the country during this emergency.

Our Party believes that the severity of the weather events in Australia and around the world at present, which have left loss and destruction in Australia, Brazil, Colombia, and elsewhere are related to the neglect of the environment by the social and economic system that dominates the globe.

The floods in Queensland strengthen the need for a strong public sector, a health system capable of providing mental and health care to the people of Australia.

We must strengthen our efforts to bring about a society based on social justice and respect for the natural environment.

Yours in solidarity,

Vinnie Molina

page **3**



**Scandalous power sell-off**

page **5**



**Uluru**  
- 25 years since historic handover

page **6**



**WikiLeaks - a free & fearless press?**

page **8**



**The unreported war in Mexico**

page **9**



**Cuba retools its socialism**

## The Guardian

Issue 1485

January 19, 2010

### Floods raise major implications for the nation's future

Continued from page 1

Other countries are now concentrating on alternative measures to deal with floods. These include the cessation of residential and industrial development in flood-prone areas, increasing surface infiltration, and taking measures to slow the flow of floodwater.

Professor Vervoort has also suggested rerouting floodwaters to less critical areas of floodplains. This also raises the question of redirecting floodwaters above maximum critical levels out of the floodplains altogether, possibly to supplement ailing river systems such as the inland Murray-Darling system.

There has also been much concern about the traumatic effect on people whose homes and workplaces have been damaged or lost in the flooding. Public health is a source of serious concern, as is the difficulty flood victims experience in making insurance claims.

The insurance industry is reluctant to offer cover against floods, and policies that are available are extremely expensive. Moreover, the industry has decided not to offer voluntary (no liability) compensation and it is entirely possible that some companies that have offered flood cover will attempt to dodge any liabilities for compensation arising from their policies.

Prior to the arrival of white invaders from Britain, floods were far less frequent in Australia, and were mitigated by the Aboriginal people's maintenance of a landscape in which the flow of rainwater was slower and far more inclined to permeate the soil. Since then land clearing and mono-cultural crop cultivation on a vast scale, together with the widespread use of fertilisers and pesticides, has altered the soil's characteristics, and made it susceptible to erosion. Floods are now frequent and savage, and are progressively stripping off the frail and ancient topsoil.

And now we also have the threat of climate change. The scientific discovery of the El Nino and La Nina weather patterns, which bring about Australia's "droughts and flooding rains", is only relatively recent. So is the detection of climate change, which some scientists think is now bringing about extreme weather events worldwide, as well as the Australian floods – for example the extremely bitter winters in Britain and Western Europe, which may be a result of the slowdown of the Atlantic Gulf Stream current.

Throughout the flood crisis, mass media news reports barely mentioned climate change. This is astonishing, because for years climatologists have been warning that it is likely to bring about an increase in extreme weather events in certain areas of Australia, particularly the eastern coast and hinterlands, combined with long periods of drought in other regions.

It is ironic that coal mining was one of the industries worst hit by the flood crisis, given that the global emission of vast amounts of carbon dioxide from the industrial combustion of coal is probably humankind's biggest single contributor to climate change.

Until the floods began, Queensland was supplying almost 25 percent of the world's sea-borne coal exports, including about half of the world's coking coal, which is used in the production of steel. Before the floods Queensland Premier Anna Bligh managed to sell off most of the infrastructure for transporting and processing coal. Apart from disposing of tremendously valuable public assets, the government has ensured that the purchasers will be extremely tenacious in maintaining coal as the nation's primary energy source.

However, much of the rail network used to transport coal to the coastal ports is now in ruins, and many of the mines are inundated or damaged. Coal production has fallen by about 75 percent and it could take a year for full production to be resumed.

It is possible that the shortage of coal arising from the Queensland crisis, combined with the near-certainty of increasingly unstable weather patterns in future, may prompt governments and industrial corporations to begin phasing out the use of coal as an energy source. Who knows, perhaps the tragic 2011 floods will end up helping to save humankind and the rest of the world's living creatures from the terrible threat of climate change.

#### PRESS FUND

What a start for the new year and our first edition! Many of our readers will be contributing to funds to assist people who have lost their homes or property in the floods in Queensland and other states. However, you should take care, because there is at least one email scam asking for contributions to help the people of "Rockhampton". Bear in mind also that the Press Fund needs your support, because it's our job to analyse the political background and the implications of such catastrophic events. After our last edition we received further contributions from the following supporters, to whom we offer our sincere thanks:

T Adcock \$10, D Anthony \$12, June Ayres \$50, E Durston \$10, Brunswick Heads CPA Branch \$35, J M Kiek \$50, T Markou \$20, K M \$5, Noel \$30, Gary Spiers \$155

Final total for 2010: \$7097.

The Press Fund has received \$10 from the irrepressible "Round Figure", as the first contribution for 2011 so join him by sending in something for the next edition! We really need your help.

## Invitation

# Planning meeting for action against US-Australian war games

Thursday February 3, 6pm to 8pm

Level 1, NSW Teachers Federation, 23-33 Mary Street, Surry Hills

You are invited to a meeting to discuss responses by Sydney peace, environmental, social justice and solidarity organisations and individuals to the Talisman Sabre 2011 military exercises.

The Talisman Sabre war games, held second yearly, are among the world's largest military exercises, involving up to 30,000 Australian and American military personnel. Besides civilian facilities such as ports and airports, they use military training areas in Queensland, the NT, and areas of the Coral, Arafura and Timor Seas within Australia's maritime zones and its Exclusive Economic Zone. A key locality for field training is the Shoalwater Bay Training Area whose waters are contained within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

For Talisman Sabre 2011 (the fifth exercise in the Talisman Sabre series), manoeuvres and live firing elements will be conducted over a two-week period from July 18-29. There will also be a period for the preparation of troops before the more intensive periods of training. Some training will take place in the USA.

Plans for a 2011 Peace Convergence are underway, and interested people are invited to the meeting to share their ideas about how Sydney activists might contribute towards the protests.

For more information, please contact Denis on 0418 290 663. ☘



Peace campaigners protesting against the 2009 Talisman Sabre Australian-US military exercises.

## Challenge to proposed Muchaty dump

Three days before Christmas the government concluded a sham committee inquiry endorsing Energy Minister Martin Ferguson's plans to dump nuclear waste at Muchaty in the NT. Traditional owners were not given the opportunity to speak to the committee or even to lodge a submission. Ferguson continues to refuse requests to meet with traditional owners opposed to the dump. traditional owners have initiated legal action in the Federal Court yet it seems likely that Ferguson will push ahead with his Radioactive Waste Management Bill early this year.

The Bill overrides state and territory laws, it overrides important federal Aboriginal heritage and environmental legislation, and it enshrines Muchaty as the only site under consideration despite the opposition of many Traditional Owners, the NT government and many others.

Muckaty Traditional Owners are calling for our support to stop the dump. Contact: Jim Green, Friends of the Earth national nuclear campaigner, 0417 318368, jim.green@foe.org.au.

The lower house committee was formed to examine the National Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2010 and tabled its report recommending they be passed.

The laws would allow a site to be established anywhere in Australia, not only just the Northern Territory, overriding state and territory laws.

Muckaty Station, near Tennant Creek, is one of the sites the federal government has considered after it was volunteered by a branch of the Ngapa tribe in 2007. But traditional owners of the site have taken their fight against the waste dump to the Federal Court.

The Australian Greens have described the process as a whitewash.

Greens MP Adam Bandt said the lower house committee had refused to hear from the public or the area's traditional owners. The committee's report says the issue has been the subject of earlier inquiries, including a Senate committee, and there have been opportunities for comment in those hearings.

"This is Martin Ferguson's appalling Christmas present for the people of Muckaty," Mr Bandt said.

The radioactive waste is now stored in suburban and regional areas across the nation. About 4,000 cubic metres of low-level and short-lived intermediate-level radioactive waste has accumulated in Australia in the past 50 years. Mr Bandt said the report asked Mr Ferguson to meet the traditional owners – but so far he hadn't.

"The traditional owners of the proposed waste dump site, Muckaty Station, have also written to him requesting that he meet with them," Mr Bandt said. "Martin Ferguson has ignored them. Instead of asking why or inviting the traditional owners to appear before the committee, the house committee chose not to

receive any public submissions or any new information."

The draft laws would override the wishes of traditional owners, said Mr Bandt who, as a member of the committee, gave a dissenting report. He said it was interesting the report was tabled while parliament was not sitting and just three days before Christmas.

Australian Conservation Foundation spokesman Dave Sweeney said the committee process was a quick and dirty attempt to solve a long and dirty problem. "The timing appears a cynical attempt to further avoid public scrutiny as the inquiry was not required to report until late March 2011," Mr Sweeney said. "There is no reasonable rationale for putting out this report three days before Christmas, especially given that the Federal Court is set to consider this issue in January."

The proposed law would remove appeal rights from the Muckaty people, suspend key Indigenous and environmental protection, and override all Commonwealth, state and territory laws that could delay or frustrate the opening of a waste dump, Mr Sweeney said.

"It is not based on good science and does not follow a robust, open, transparent process. The federal government should stop pushing the contested Muckaty dump plan and establish an independent and public review of nuclear waste management options based on best science, transparent process and community inclusion and consent." ☘

# NSW electricity privatisation – scandalous sale to be probed

Bob Briton

As *The Guardian* goes to press, an inquiry into the NSW government's scandalous electricity privatisation is getting underway. Premier Kristina Keneally had done her level best to prevent any investigation of the patently bad deal – in fact the theft of the people's assets. Parliament was "prorogued" (shut down early) on December 22. The plan was to prevent the convening of a properly constituted parliamentary committee of inquiry as that could only happen "during the life of the parliament". There was the threat that parliamentary privilege could not be granted to witnesses and that they could be sued for revealing matters considered "commercial in confidence."

The bullying and bluster were for nothing. It turns out that the life of the current parliament extends right up to the days before this year's state election to be held on March 26. That election is widely expected to be a wipe out for Labor. The privatisation is extremely unpopular with voters – they have seen what has happened to household power bills in states that have gone down this path. But Labor was hoping to win back some support from big business and get some credit for delivering on another pro-corporate "reform" project.

NSW Treasurer Eric Roozendaal was scheduled to fly out to New York on the evening of December 14 when things started to go sour. He was planning to address big financial players in the US about the electricity coup back home and convince ratings agencies that NSW was worthy of a AAA ranking. That day, however, eight out of eleven directors of the two state-owned energy-generating companies, Delta Electricity and Eraring Energy, resigned in disgust at the deal they were being asked to rubber stamp.

Under the privatisation scheme, electricity retailer Origin Energy would buy out Integral Energy and Country Energy and get the output from Eraring for \$3.3 billion. A bargain. Hong Kong based TruEnergy would scoop up Energy Australia, the output of the Delta West Generator, the Mount Piper Extension and two

Marulan development sites for \$2 billion. Another dream deal. AGL would also enter the retail market but Origin and TruEnergy would get 85 percent of the pie between them. That's the sort of dominance Woolworths and Coles have over the supermarket trade and the public knows what that has done to food prices.

The electricity price regulator, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, is to be wound down over the next few years leaving it to "competition" to deliver the "best" price for consumers. That has not been the experience elsewhere and the people of NSW can look forward to higher prices, a bewildering "choice" of plans and more salespeople pestering them at the front door on top of the theft of another public asset.

In the end, Roozendaal replaced the dissenting board members with some advisors to the sell-off deal and former senior Macquarie Bank executive and public/private partnership promoter, Michael Lilley. The treasurer made the infamous sell-off announcement to parliament just before midnight on December 14.

The Coalition is making the most of the government's embarrassment and taking the opportunity of appearing to be the people's friend before either inheriting the deal after the election or pushing through something similar themselves. In the meantime, they have been scoring heavily off the Keneally government. Earlier in the debate, shadow treasurer Mike Baird managed to sound like an opponent of privatisation and big coal:

"Whatever they finally announce, it is clear from the ongoing speculation that the receipts will be at the lower end of the \$5 billion to \$7 billion range, which is about half what these assets are worth – and that is before you take off the \$2.3 billion in inducements for the new coal mine needed to get the deal away. The result is billions of dollars lost forever."

The "reasons" for privatisation used currently by Labor (and by Coalition parties in different states at different times) shift like the sands and must be discounted. It is said the cash will help out the state books' bottom line, a claim that won't look to bright when the income from the former state-owned energy retailers



"Stop the sell-off" protest in Sydney, 2008 – campaigning against the sale of NSW electricity.

Photo: Anna Pha

stops. The state can't afford overdue infrastructure upgrades, it is alleged. Private operators don't like spending the money either and proceed to run an unreliable system, sell off to another private outfit or plead poor and put the price of the upgrade onto the public through increased charges or grants from the public coffers.

A looming price on carbon is somehow seen as a cue to leave the public to their fate in an unregulated market. The inquiry underway into the sell-off might scuttle the government's plans and they may not get another opportunity before election time. In order to protect what remains of the integrity of their public electricity system, the people of NSW must break the dominance of the traditional big parties, support parties and candidates committed to public ownership and get active to stop the ongoing privatisation of public assets. ✪

## Asylum seekers lose appeal rights

Refugee advocacy groups have condemned the Gillard government's response to the High Court decision on offshore processing. "The government had an opportunity to positively respond to the High Court decision on offshore processing, but it hasn't. Instead of ending discrimination against offshore asylum seekers, it has acted to compound it," said Ian Rintoul spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Not only has the government maintained two different processes for onshore and offshore asylum seekers, they have removed significant appeal rights from offshore asylum seekers.

"It is a despicable decision from a mean-minded government.

"Chris Bowen (Immigration Minister) has not even been honest enough to admit they have taken away appeal rights. There is nothing faster or fairer about this process. Even those found to be refugees at the initial interview will face months in detention while they wait for security clearances, just as they do now," Rintoul said.

"But worse; under the present scheme, asylum seekers are able to appeal to a Merits Review

assessment after their initial refugee status hearing. Under the new scheme, this will be dropped."

Offshore arrivals will only have access to judicial appeal after what is now called "Independent Protection Assessment". There will be no avenue for merits review. Judicial review only considers errors or law or procedural fairness. The courts cannot consider the use of incorrect country information, errors due to language or translation problems, mistakes of identity or errors due to stress or mental illness.

The Merits Review process has been an important check to the flaws in offshore processing. Merits Review was overturning over 50 percent of rejection decisions. It provided a small counter to the kind of political interference such as last year's visa freeze and the government announcement that it expected more asylum seekers to be rejected. Now that is gone.

"Offshore processing should be scrapped", said Ian Rintoul. "All asylum seekers should have the same rights. But the government is insisting there is one law for those who arrive by plane and another for those who arrive by boat." ✪

Pete's Corner



cpasa.blogspot.com

Official blog of the CPA South Australia

# At last paid parental leave

Anna Pha

**On January 1, Australia finally joined the rest of the world with the commencement of a parental leave scheme. The scheme comes after a long campaign by trade unions and mounting public pressure as Australia faced increasing international embarrassment as one of only two OECD countries (the US being the other) without a universal paid parental leave scheme. The scheme is not universal, nor can it be described as generous or adequate, but it is an important breakthrough.**

Eligible parents will receive the national minimum wage for 18 weeks following the birth or adoption of a child. The payment is means tested, work tested and involves the loss of the baby bonus. The leave, normally taken by the mother, can be transferred to the father if he is the primary care leaver. Proposals for two week's paid leave for the father were not included.

It compares poorly with Canada's 50 weeks' paid leave, the UK's 39 weeks, or the 18 months on full pay in France, Sweden and Estonia.

To qualify, the parent taking the leave will have worked for at least 10 out of the previous 13 months for a minimum of 330 hours prior to the birth or adoption. There are no parental leave entitlements prior to the birth. The combined family income must be less than \$150,000 per annum to be eligible. The payment

at present is \$570 per week, for 18 weeks - a total of \$10,260.

The additional income is very welcome, especially by women on low incomes, in casual or part-time employment who are unlikely to have employer-paid leave. But it is not as generous as it sounds because parents receiving the payment will not receive the baby bonus - at present \$5,294. In effect, the net gain in income arising from the scheme is just short of \$5,000.

## Inadequate

The 18 weeks is far too short to meet the needs of parent or baby in terms of bonding and breast-feeding. Even the neo-liberal Productivity Commission in its report on parental leave recognised that a minimum of 26 weeks is needed by babies to bond with their mothers.

Mothers who do not return to the workforce for at least 10 out of 13 consecutive months between children will not be eligible for new additions to the family.

Parents will still be eligible for 12 months unpaid leave as legislated by the government, but financial realities will see many mothers forced back into the workforce far too early. That is, if they can raise the childcare fees, another related issue that still needs to be addressed.

Mothers already at home with other children are not eligible. They continue to receive the baby bonus payment of \$5,294 broken up in 13 fortnightly instalments. In weekly

terms it is \$203.61 per week over 26 weeks. This is also means tested - combined taxable income must be less than \$75,000 over six months.

The scheme lets employers off the hook. Since the legislation went through the Senate in June 2010 the trade union movement has been campaigning to gain agreements with major employers to top up the government payment to meet existing wage rates. They have also a fight on their hands to prevent bosses absorbing the new payment into existing paid parental leave schemes. The 18 week payments are supposed to be in addition to other payments, but if the employer's scheme is not part of a legally enforceable enterprise agreement, there is no legal obligation on their part.

The scheme can only be seen as a first step by a government that still fails to recognise the importance of family life and the role of parents in raising a young family. It needs to be extended to include:

- 26 weeks paid leave
- provisions to take leave at half pay to extend the period
- requirement by employer to top up payment to achieve full income replacement
- more flexibility in commencement date enabling payments prior to birth
- equivalent benefits for "stay at home mums" who were not in workforce prior to birth of child
- paid leave of two weeks for father. ✪



## Local Post Offices must be saved

**Australia Post must do everything in its power to retain local Post Offices and ensure communities have access to postal services, the CEPU Communications Union said today, following news reports a string of post offices in Sydney and nationwide are to be closed down.**

"Australia Post has promised the union that it will do everything possible to turn around profitability of its poor performing Post Offices branches so that its outlets become sustainable - it's time to follow through on that promise," said CEPU NSW Branch Secretary Jim Metcher.

"Employees and unions are willing to work with Australia

Post to find ways to make this happen."

"Australia Post should be looking at improving the profitability of its entire retail network - not just earmarking individual outlets for closure when profitability becomes an issue or the lease is due for renegotiation," said Mr Metcher.

Local communities including business will suffer the most when they lose access to their local Post Office. Mr Metcher pointed out that when one is closed, it never returns.

"Australia Post should seriously reconsider the closures they've already announced and do the right thing by retaining the Post Offices earmarked for closure next year.

"The Federal government

should also be demanding Australia Post find ways to keep branches open, so that Australia Post can meet its community services obligations."

With so many bank branches gone, closing Post Offices can be the final nail in the coffin for local communities having access to not only postal services but also bill paying and banking facilities.

The union says that communities rely on access to postal and the other range of services their local post office provides - Australia Post should not pursue larger profits at the expense of local jobs and community services being maintained. ✪



Glebe Post Office - the local community is currently campaigning to stop the closure of their post office.

## Nurses to start re-opening hospital beds

**NSW Nurses Association (NSWNA) members started reopening nearly 600 closed hospital beds last week while they consider a nurse-staffing offer from the state government.**

State government representatives made the offer at a report meeting in the NSW Industrial Relations Commission. The NSWNA said it had been seeking such an offer since August 2010.

The NSWNA council met to consider the Association's initial response to the offer and passed the following resolution:

Council notes that an offer has been made by the government, Wednesday January 12, 2011.

In order to analyse the offer in detail, and for further negotiations to take place to seek further improvements, Council resolves that industrial action should cease from January 13.

Council directs the general secretary to lead further negotiations and prepare a full report for consideration by Council on Monday, January 17 in order to make a recommendation to the Committee of Delegates at its meeting on January 18.

On January 4 NSWNA members in public hospitals and community health services started closing one in four beds and better managing nurse-to-patient numbers, as part of their campaign, the "1 nurse : 4 patients - The way to safe patient care campaign", for a major overhaul of the state's public hospital and healthcare system, through the introduction of mandated, minimum nurse-to-patient ratios in public hospitals and community healthcare services. ✪

## Webb Dock waterside workers strike action

**Maritime Union of Australia workers at Patrick's Webb Dock in Melbourne last week extended a 48 hour stoppage to 72 hours after the latest round of EBA negotiations with management failed to yield any offer from Patrick.**

MUA assistant national secretary Ian Bray said that after six months of negotiations, members have reached the point where going out on strike was the only option left for them.

"We don't want to strike. It is always our last resort. But when management refuses to move on key issues such as safety, training and permanency, they leave us with no choice," Mr Bray said.

"We've lost three workers last year, two out of bulk and general, and

our New Year's resolution is to make the wharves safer for our members.

"Without a commitment to reduce casualisation and improve training, management cannot claim to have employee safety at heart. They're kidding themselves if they can't see these issues are inextricably linked.

"It is ridiculous that 60 percent of the workforce is employed as casuals, and many of these have been employed as casuals for more than 9 years. The average is around 5 years."

Also, there is minimal training and it is delivered without a strategic or purposeful framework, said Mr Bray.

Members at Webb Dock voted unanimously in support of the action. ✪

# Uluru celebrates 25 years since the historic handover

**An estimated 500 people celebrated the 25th anniversary of the handback of Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park at the Uluru sunrise viewing area – Talinguru Nyakunytyjaku – last October 26.**

The festive atmosphere of the day was a welcome change from the tension that preceded the handback in 1985.

The words of the Northern Territory Labor government's Minister for Regional Development Malarndirri McCarthy praising traditional owners for sharing the park with people from around the world were in stark contrast to former chief minister Tuxworth's national campaign against the handback in 1985.

"Congratulations to the Anangu on this great achievement and for sharing their culture and their spiritual sites of significance with the world," Ms McCarthy said.

"Through their joint management of the park with the Australian government, the Anangu have also made a significant contribution to both the Australian economy and their local region economy.

"The history of 25 years and the struggles for the Anangu people to be recognised in this land is a shameful history in the history of the Northern Territory Parliament and the then CLC government," Ms McCarthy said.

"It's shameful to think that such a beautiful time for the people of this region began with incredible protests by the CLP government of the day and fellow Australians who just did not want to understand that the Anangu and Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory were never about being separate to other people; we're always about being strong about our language and culture and wanting to share it with all people".

And they did again on the 25th anniversary of the handback. Anangu traditional owners mixed with international tourists as speeches, inma

(dancing), bands, spear throwing and races celebrated a high point in the land rights struggle.

The day had started with Uluru completely cloaked in a heavy fog, which later lifted to reveal the sacred site in all its glory. With key federal politicians tied to Canberra by a hung parliament, Senator Don Farrell represented the government.

"The handback was testament to the vision and hard work of senior men and women from families like Uluru, Tjikadu, Okai, Fraser and Lester, many of them or their children celebrating today," Senator Farrell said.

"Sadly many of the original visionaries from 1985 have passed on but I salute them all for providing this incredible gift, not only to their children, but to all Australians".

Chairman of the board of management and Anangu traditional owner Harry Wilson said the anniversary marked a turning point in the park's history.

"The board has provided strong directions for the park through the plan of management focussing on employment, education for Anangu, new directions in tourism and importantly keeping our country and Tjukurpa strong," he said.

"The new direction in tourism will mean our Anangu people will benefit from new tourism opportunities and enable visitors to share and learn about our culture and our land. We will work together to bring about the dreams and visions of our forefathers.

"This day's important for our children to remember the work that has been done but also signifies a bright future for them as we keep our culture and country strong together."

Another traditional owner and translator for the official events, Donald Fraser, paid tribute to traditional owner and one of the key campaigners to win the park back,



Yami Lester. Mr Lester was unable to make the celebrations because he was in hospital.

Central Land Council deputy chair, Gina Smith, congratulated the traditional owners for having come so far.

"There were dire warnings that the rock was for all Australians and it would be locked away, taken away by the Aboriginal people," she said. "As Yami Lester so wittily said in 1985, may I quote him: 'I welcome the governor general this afternoon. He's able to come here, see the rock, by tomorrow the rock will be gone'.

"Well as you can see the rock is still here. The people got their land rights and the sky hasn't fallen. The (the traditional owners) now spend a good proportion of what they receive in gate and rent fees for community development initiatives.

"Since 2005 they have been working with the Central Land Council to develop community based projects. The Land Council has developed community projects with the communities like power supplies, BMX tracks, stores, craft rooms, restoration of old buildings, a church, mechanics sheds and so on.

"Since they are among the poorest people in Australia, giving up money for the good of everyone, helping our community, is an amazing thing to do."

There was a feeling of optimism for a bright future during the celebrations. Not least from the Territory government.

"I want to make special mention of Harry (Wilson) and the young Anangu leaders who are coming forward and to say to you Harry and to others in Mutitjulu that the Northern Territory government, especially under the leadership of Chief Minister Paul Henderson, will always be about working with Aboriginal people to find a good way forward," Ms McCarthy said.

"And I say it to the federal government, to Senator Don Farrell, to certainly take this message back to the Parks Minister Tony Burke that the Northern Territory government will work very strongly with Parks Australia and all in the federal parliament, especially Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin, and with the Mutitjulu people, Anangu people to make sure that these next 25 years are a hell of a lot better."

Land Rights News, December 2010



The NSW government's plans to sell land around Royal North Shore Hospital for redevelopment have alarmed the hospital's medical staff. The plan has a potential to compromise patients' care and make servicing the growing population even harder. Underfunding of health services has led to a scramble for resources and a number of areas including mental health are missing out. If the government goes ahead with the land sale it will put mentally ill at risk.

"Children as young as four place a thumb on a scanner and lunch money is deducted from their account". One in seven schools in Britain, 3,500 are using fingerprint technology. Parents are not allowed legal redress and nobody asks their permission to have their children fingerprinted at school. The European Commission demanded that Britain justify the routine and widespread fingerprinting of children. The Commission took up a case of a Scottish father who had fought education authorities for several years because his daughter's fingerprints had been taken without consent. He was refused permission to take his case to court but because the British authorities broke European Union privacy laws the European Commission could take some action. EU data protection rules that override British law require the gathering of biometric information to be "proportionate" and allow judicial challenges.

The Harvey Norman chain store owner, Gerry Harvey, was surprised by the backlash from consumers when he and other big retailers put out an advertisement calling on the government to end the GST exemption on imported goods worth less than \$1,000. Consumers did not buy their arguments and justifiably pointed out that there was lack of service, overpricing and sweatshop conditions for outworkers – not in some far-distant foreign lands but here, in Australia. Hypocrisy and greed were not appreciated by consumers and they let their feelings be known.

Once again the schools chaplaincy program is in the news. It is being investigated by the Commonwealth Ombudsman after a highly critical report of its operation in the Northern Territory. There is also a High Court challenge launched by critics of the program which saw \$437 million committed by successive federal governments. The problems with the program started from the very beginning because it was an election gimmick to win votes. Chaplains are not professionally qualified to counsel children; schools cannot effectively supervise their work; they are evangelising in the playground. If that is not bad enough the fact that chaplains get public funding means that it undermines the separation of church and state. The only winners are the religious parasites who have free and unsupervised access to children and public money.

**Sydney**

**WALAKOTA**  
INTERNATIONAL PEACE ACTIVIST

2011

**Aboriginal & Indian Cause**

Key discussion points: current injustice against Native Peoples and Mother Earth, Land Rights, Deaths in Custody, Political Prisoner, Uranium Waste, UN Declaration of Human rights

**Speakers**  
Welcome to country by Aboriginal Elder Ben Taylor  
For the Aboriginal Peoples: Marianne Mackay, Glenn Moore  
For American Indians: Wanbli Tate, Selina Berger

Their ears are open to hear and answer your questions.  
Please come along.

**ROSIE O'GRADY'S - NORTHBRIDGE**  
23rd of January 2011  
6 00 pm to 9 00 pm..... free admission

# A free and fearless press?

## In WikiLeaks fight, US journalists take the Fifth

Nancy A Youssef

**WASHINGTON:** Not so long ago, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange could count on American journalists to support his campaign to publish secret documents that banks and governments didn't want the world to see.

But just three years after a major court confrontation that saw many of America's most important journalism organisations file briefs on WikiLeaks' behalf, much of the US journalistic community has shunned Assange – even as reporters write scores, if not hundreds, of stories based on WikiLeaks' trove of leaked State Department cables.

Some call him a traitor, responsible for what's arguably one of the biggest US national security breaches ever. Others say a man who calls for government transparency has been too opaque about how he obtained the documents.

The freedom of the press committee of the Overseas Press Club of America in New York City declared him "not one of us". The Associated Press, which once filed legal briefs on Assange's behalf, refuses to comment about him. And the National Press Club in Washington, the venue less than a year ago for an Assange news conference, has decided not to speak out about the possibility that he'll be charged with a crime.

With a few notable exceptions, it's been left to foreign journalism organisations to offer the loudest calls for the US to recognise WikiLeaks' and Assange's right to publish under the US Constitution's First Amendment.

Assange supporters see US journalists' ambivalence as inviting other government efforts that could lead one day to the prosecution of journalists for doing something that happens fairly routinely now – writing news stories based on leaked government documents.

"Bob Woodward has probably become one of the richest journalists in history by publishing classified documents in book after book. And yet no one would suggest that Bob Woodward be prosecuted because Woodward is accepted in the halls of Washington," said Glenn Greenwald, a lawyer and media critic who writes for the online journal Salon.com. "There is no way of prosecuting Julian Assange without harming investigative journalism."

Woodward, who rose to fame by exposing the Watergate conspiracy that forced President Richard Nixon from office, told a Yale University law school audience in November that WikiLeaks' "willy-nilly" release of documents was "madness" and would be "fuel for those who oppose disclosure." But that appearance came before US Attorney General Eric Holder launched a criminal probe against Assange. Woodward didn't respond to e-mails seeking comment.

Woodward's newspaper, *The Washington Post*, however, is one of the few that's editorialised against prosecuting Assange. "The government has no business indicting someone who is not a spy and who is not legally bound to keep its secrets," the *Post* said.

Assange increasingly has presented himself as a journalist in the weeks since Holder's threat to bring charges. He's the website's editor, and WikiLeaks publishes editorials.

Few could argue that WikiLeaks didn't perform journalistic functions in April when it released video taken from an Army helicopter of a 2007 incident where Army pilots fired on civilians in Baghdad, killing 17 Iraqis, including two employees of the Reuters news agency, and wounding two children. In addition to editing and captioning the video, WikiLeaks interviewed the Iraqi families about the incident. The release of the video, which Reuters had sought for years but had been denied, was widely covered by US news organisations.

US journalists have been far less zealous about WikiLeaks, however, in the ensuing months, as the Obama administration has mounted increasingly vocal attacks on the organisation over three batches of leaked US documents – military logs of events from the war in Afghanistan, including the names of Afghans

who'd cooperated with the US; initial incident reports from throughout the Iraq War; and most recently, thousands of diplomatic cables.

The problem with speaking up for WikiLeaks now, said Lucy Dalglish, the executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, one of the country's most prominent defenders of press freedom and one of the groups that backed WikiLeaks in its 2008 court case, is that she doesn't consider Assange to be a journalist.

Assange, she said, "has done some things that journalists do, but I would argue that what the *New York Times* does is more journalism. They vet the information. ... They consider outside sources. They take responsibility. They publicly identify themselves. ... They do some value added. They do something original to it," Dalglish said.

She added that part of her hesitation to back Assange is that the public knows so little about him and how he acquires information.

WikiLeaks "takes secrets. But they are secretive. We don't know who they are. I think one thing journalists pride themselves on is transparency. I think people are a little apprehensive because he was releasing information last summer he had an agenda to bring down the US government," she said. "I think that makes people reluctant to jump into making a statement."

Greenwald rejects that argument. He noted that US journalists often don't reveal their sources or how they gather information for stories.

Greenwald said he thinks journalists aren't rallying to defend WikiLeaks because it has no building, no ties to the US and doesn't feel obliged to consult with the US government before publishing. The issue, he said, is that American journalists too often befriend the government and seek its approval for their work.

Besides, he said, the Constitution protects everyone's right to publish.

"What matters is the activity itself and not who the person is. Bob Woodward is no more entitled to publish classified information than some random person out of the phone book."

Greenwald's position is echoed by Joel Simon, the executive director of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, another prominent US advocacy group that's made one of the rare public arguments against prosecuting Assange.

Simon said he and his colleagues had an extensive debate about whether to speak up. In the end, they determined that debating whether Assange is a journalist is irrelevant.

"If he is prosecuted, it will be because he is a journalist," Simon said.

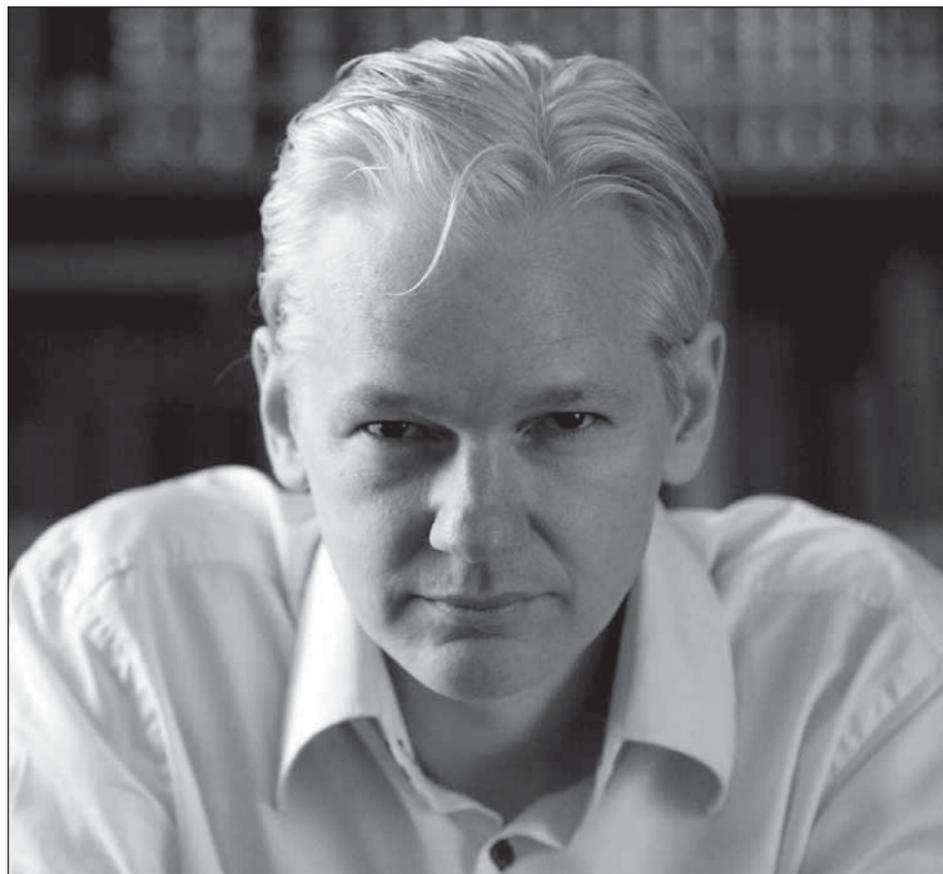
The group sent a letter to Holder on December 17 urging him to not prosecute Assange, warning that it could have a chilling effect around the world.

"There is a commonality of purpose," Simon said in an interview. "The function of WikiLeaks is to take information, particularly classified information, and distribute it to the public. From a legal perspective, it is essentially a journalistic function. We have to respond when there is a threat to journalism."

The current situation even has split former allies in the battle over press freedom. Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers to *The New York Times* in 1971, has come out strongly in support of WikiLeaks. But Floyd Abrams, who was the *Times*' attorney in its fight against the Nixon administration's efforts to block publication, has taken the opposite position.

In an opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, Abrams noted that Ellsberg himself kept secret four volumes of the classified Pentagon history that became the Pentagon papers because he feared they'd harm diplomatic efforts to end the Vietnam War. Abrams said WikiLeaks' publication of so much secret material could lead to tougher restrictions for US journalists.

"His activities have already doomed proposed federal shield-law legislation protecting journalists' use of confidential sources in the just-adjourned Congress," Abrams wrote. "An indictment of him could be followed by the judicial articulation of far more speech-limiting



Julian Assange.

legal principles than currently exist with respect to even the most responsible reporting about both diplomacy and defence."

And if Assange isn't indicted or is acquitted of any charges, Abrams warned, Congress might pass "new and dangerously restrictive legislation."

There was no such debate in February 2008, when 12 journalism organisations, including the Associated Press and Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press, filed a brief on behalf of WikiLeaks and its domain register, Dynadot, in a case brought by a Swiss bank, Bank Julius Baer.

The bank filed the suit after WikiLeaks published hundreds of private documents on a land deal that suggested money laundering and tax evasion. It asked a US district judge in California to enjoin WikiLeaks from publishing the documents and order Dynadot to stop hosting its website.

The judge agreed, but quickly reversed his order after the US journalism organisations weighed in, calling the decision an affront to the First Amendment and WikiLeaks' right to publish.

The Justice Department now appears serious about building a case against Assange, though it remains unclear which law he violated – officials acknowledge that the Espionage Act of 1917 has never been used to prosecute anyone for publication of secret documents.

Last month, a US magistrate in Alexandria, Virginia, issued a secret subpoena ordering the Twitter online messaging service to turn over all information it has about five of its users, including Assange and Army Private Bradley Manning, 23, the one-time Baghdad-based intelligence analyst accused of unauthorised downloading of the hundreds of thousands of classified US government documents WikiLeaks is now publishing.

The subpoena was unsealed after Twitter said it intended to notify each of the account holders that their records had been sought and had become public when one of those account holders told UK *Guardian* newspaper in London. In addition to Assange's and Manning's, the targeted accounts include those of an Icelandic member of parliament and two computer programmers. WikiLeaks, however, argued in a "tweet" that the records of all 670,000 of its Twitter "followers" are subject to the subpoena because it demands information about outgoing messages from the WikiLeaks account.

Dalglish said her organisation might reconsider its silence if the US files a criminal case against Assange. That will depend, she said, on a determination of the case's potential threat to journalism.

Alan Bjerga, the president of the National Press Club, said his organisation also might take a stand depending on what the Justice Department does.

"The National Press Club is always concerned about any government action that would harm the ability of journalists to do their work, and any action against Julian Assange that would impede journalists is one we would oppose," he said in an e-mail. "It is difficult at this time to comment on the specifics of a case the government has yet to make."

Until then, it's fallen largely to foreign-based journalism organisations to defend WikiLeaks.

In August, Paris-based Reporters without Borders wrote a letter condemning Assange for publishing the names of Afghan informants, saying it could endanger lives. But it decided last month to provide a mirror site to WikiLeaks' website after the WikiLeaks site came under attack.

The change came after lengthy discussion – and because WikiLeaks has since been more cautious about redacting the documents it posts.

"We think WikiLeaks is doing a public service," said Clothilde Le Coz, who directs the group's Washington office.

The idea of America, heralded as a beacon of press freedom, internationally, prosecuting someone for publishing secret documents would have a chilling effect throughout the world, the *Australian* newspaper editors wrote in a letter to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, whose government also is considering charges against Assange, who's an Australian citizen.

"Any such action would impact not only on WikiLeaks, but every media organisation in the world that aims to inform the public about decisions made on their behalf," the organisation said in its December 15 letter. "It is the media's duty to responsibly report such material if it comes into their possession. To aggressively attempt to shut WikiLeaks down, to threaten to prosecute those who publish official leaks, and to pressure companies to cease doing commercial business with WikiLeaks, is a serious threat to democracy, which relies on a free and fearless press."

McClatchy

## Reflections by Comrade Fidel

# The crime against the Democratic congresswoman



Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

As it is well known, the state of Arizona, a territory that was taken from Mexico by the United States along with much more territory, has been the scene of painful events for hundreds of Latin Americans who die trying to immigrate to the US in search of work or to join their parents, spouses or other kinfolk who are there.

In that country, these are the people who work at the toughest jobs and live under the constant fear of arrest and forced deportation. Despite the drastic measures, every year the number of those dying in the attempt grows and there are hundreds of thousands of them who are annually deported to their countries of origin.

The number of Americans opposed to that abuse is also growing, such as those who supported and, for the third time, elected the young congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

At the present time, the state of Arizona is one of the wealthiest because of the minerals taken from its soil, especially copper and

molybdenum; great productions of cotton and beef that use up vast areas of its land; the beauty of its landscape, such as the famous Grand Canyon carved by the Colorado River, considered to be one of the most beautiful on the planet and, one of the three great native American communities. The state is visited annually by 30 million domestic and foreign tourists. Approximately 30 percent of its population is of Hispanic-American origin.

On the other hand, the Tea Party, made up of the most reactionary and politically backward elements of society, tries to drag the Republican Party to extremist and warmongering positions, that in the middle of the crisis and the disillusionment about the promises that Obama hasn't wanted or hasn't been able to fulfil, would lead the country to the abyss. From the debate that will have to come out of this, one can draw the pertinent conclusions.

On the congresswoman's health, this morning, January 10,

the Spanish digital version of *El Mundo* published the following information:

"The bullet entered the rear of the Democratic congresswoman's head ... crossing the left hemisphere of the brain and exiting from the front. After a two-hour operation during which the remains of the bullet were removed, along with part of the dead brain tissue and approximately half of the cranium – which is being kept to be re-attached later on – the Tucson University Medical Centre surgeons ... showed 'cautious optimism'."

Dr Francisco Villarejo, head of Neurosurgery at the Niño Jesús Hospital and the La Luz Clinic in Madrid, experienced in this kind of surgery, explained to *El Mundo* that the most dangerous thing for the congresswoman at this time is that the brain should swell, since the bullet as it went through dragged along bone fragments with it, and this could produce inflammation.

Fidel Castro Ruz ✪

## HAITI CAN HOLD ME

my eyelids press mercilessly,  
too tightly upon my eyes.  
i fall, stumble and falter;  
quake and stop to look:  
observing the end.  
wishing i could finger  
my tarnished rosary beads.  
it is as though somebody else  
closed my eyes for me  
for the darkness in its finality  
is solid enough to touch.

solitary silences. jolting tremors.  
behind hidden eyes i watch  
wisps of clouds scatter,  
and the clear blue sky  
stand firmly behind the sun;

and i marvel when dusk fans  
the smoldering coals  
in the dusty horizon and – JOLT! – again  
darkness plants itself in the path of the sun:  
observing the end. observing the end.

ashen cement has choked  
the tears in my eyes.  
behind choked eyes i see  
tropicbirds in angelic white fly with wild  
abandon, and palm trees sway  
carelessly with a new air of sureness.  
saints right then tell me about this land.  
that it is big and strong from being fed  
the blood and water of rebellious slaves.  
and for that it held firmly our bare and blithe  
feet as the first black-led republic.  
for that, Haiti can hold me, too.

i stop pushing; i. stop. the land can hold me.  
i will not spend my last moments crying  
behind a painted face, a face whitened by  
dusky crumbled cement. i know i am  
pressed against the same gritty earth  
that held Toussaint upright.

and so behind useless eyes i see  
Port-au-Prince as it was.  
i see Hotel Montana in its white grandiosity;  
i see myself two hours ago serving rum and  
coke to rich white people who speak  
through their noses.  
i watch the smiling sun  
part the clouds and break  
the unsuspecting dawn,  
commanding my Haiti to rouse,  
to do, to pray.

Donald Molosi

# The unreported war in Mexico

Mike Whitney

**Fifty one people were killed one weekend two weeks back in drug-related violence across Mexico. In the beach resort of Acapulco, a gruesome record was set when the bodies of 15 men were found in a local shopping centre all of whom had been decapitated. Their severed heads were clumped together nearby. The flurry of homicides adds to the more-than 30,000 deaths since Mexican president Felipe Calderon took office in December 2006. The daily death toll in Calderon's failed drug war now exceeds that of Afghanistan and Iraq combined.**

Ciudad Juarez has become the murder capital of the world, a fact that is omitted in the US media because it casts doubt on US/Mexico drug policy. President Barack Obama could put an end to the bloodletting by simply changing the policy, but he won't do that because he supports the militarisation of the drug war as enthusiastically as did George W Bush. So the killing continues unabated.

The uptick in violence can be traced back to the Merida Initiative, a \$1.4 billion US/Mexico program aimed at fighting narco-trafficking. Plan Mexico – as Merida is also called – was signed in 2007 by President Bush and his Mexican counterpart, Calderon. It led to the deployment of more than 50,000 Mexican troops to areas where the drug cartels carry out their operations. Laura Carlsen, director of the Americas Policy Program in Mexico City, says that the Obama administration has increased its funding of Merida even though 200,000 civilians have fled Juarez, business and tourism has dried up, and the city has devolved into a Mad Max, free-fire zone. Here's what Carlsen said:

"The Obama administration has supported Plan Mexico and even requested, and received from Congress, additional funds beyond what the Bush administration requested. In the three years since Calderon launched the war on drugs in Mexico with the support of the US government, drug related violence has shot up to over 15,000 executions and formal reports of violations of human rights have increased six-fold.



Ciudad Juarez has become the murder capital of the world.

...Washington recognises serious problems with the drug war model and yet continues to claim, absurdly, that the rise in violence in Mexico is a good sign – it means that the cartels are feeling the heat ..."

Washington hawks continue to support Merida despite its clear record of failure. Here's a short clip from a speech by the American Enterprise Institute's Roger F Noriega which explains how hardliners view the present policy:

"The violence that Mexico's anti-drug offensive unleashed is tangible evidence that President Felipe Calderón ended the unwritten policy of past Mexican political leaders who kept the peace with 'narcos' by turning a blind eye to their criminal activities. ...While it may be fair to liken Calderón's initial tactics to swatting a hornet's nest, it is impossible to estimate the costs of the past policy of tolerating criminality ...

"Congress should show more support for the Mexican government's courageous campaign. ... Calderón can reassure the United States of his seriousness if he redoubles efforts to secure his northern border from the illegal crossings that are a major part of the illicit drug trade and an irritant to security-conscious conservatives in Congress ...

"As Congress reviews the drug-trade problem, it will likely recognise that additional funds, hardware, and technical support are desperately needed in Central America ... The Obama administration has conceived

a follow-up program of roughly \$500 million for Mexico and Central America. But that level of support is not commensurate with the challenge of preventing these Central American states from becoming ungovernable territories where criminals operate with impunity." (*Latin American Action Agenda for the New Congress*, Roger F Noriega, American Enterprise Institute)

In other words, the policy is only failing because of lack of funding, not because it is the wrong policy. But that's clearly not the case. Plan Mexico has been in operation for four years now and the violence is getting worse not better. More than 30,000 civilians have been killed already. So, what is the benchmark for failure: 60,000? 120,000? 1,000,000? The fact is, the military is not the right tool for fighting crime. Anyone can see that.

Take a look at some of the recent statistics and see what a mess Calderon has made of things. According to Stop the Drug War: "The city and the surrounding Valle de Juarez ended the year with 3,111 murders. Of these, 304 were women, 149 were members of the various law enforcement bodies that operate in the city, and 187 were minors. The most violent month in the city was October, during which time 359 people were murdered." ("Mexico Drug War Update", stopthedrugwar.org)

Many of these lives could have been saved if traditional investigative and policing tactics were used rather than hamfisted military force.

How many drug kingpins are nabbed at army checkpoints anyway? Zero.

In truth, the Merida Initiative is just a smokescreen. The real purpose of the War on Drugs is to keep poor people in line. *Counterpunch* editors Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St Clair sum it up as well as anyone in a 1998 article from their book *Whiteout*:

"Domestically, the 'drug war' has always been a pretext for social control, going back to the racist application of drug laws against Chinese labourers in the recession of the 1870s when these workers were viewed as competition for the dwindling number of jobs available ...

"President Nixon was helpfully explicit in his private remarks. HR Haldeman recorded in his diary a briefing by the president in 1969, prior to launching of the war on drugs: 'Nixon emphasised that you have to face the fact the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise

a system that recognises this while not appearing to.'

"So what was 'the system' duly devised? The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, with its 29 new minimum mandatory sentences, and the 100-to-1 sentencing ratio between possession of crack and powder cocaine, became a system for locking up a disproportionate number of black people.

"So to call for a 'truly open and honest dialogue' about drug policy, as all those distinguished signatories in the advertisement requested, is about as realistic as asking the US government to nationalise the oil industry. Essentially, the drug war is a war on the poor and the dangerous classes, here and elsewhere. How many governments are going to give up on that?"

The war on drugs is a fraud, but its costs are quite real. Just ask any of the family members of its 30,000-plus victims.

*Information Clearing House* ✪

## Governor's murder a crime against Pakistani people too

**The following is a statement issued by the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) on the day of the murder of Governor Salmaan Taseer.**

The brutal murder of Mr Salmaan Taseer, the governor of the Pakistani state of Punjab, is yet another substantial proof that the wrath of the Islamic religious fanatics endangers the lives of the common citizens of Pakistan, and leaves them far from peace.

If a governor cannot speak up with freedom on the subject of human rights, or talk about religious tolerance, then just imagine what hope is there for a common citizen of Pakistan?

The Communist Party of Pakistan strongly condemns and denounces this audacious murder of the only liberal democrat and secular head of a province.

The state of anarchy in Pakistan has prevailed and reached its peak, to such a point that Islamic religious political leaders issued Sharia edicts (fatwas), sanctioning in public the murder of Governor Taseer for his talk and condemnation of the misuse of blasphemy laws against minorities and others.

But, ironically, the government functionaries could not apprehend these instigators of barbarism, because behind this whole game are the mighty iron hands of the

military establishment, which has tactfully adopted, on one hand, the promotion and husbandry of Islamic religious fanaticism as a great profitable business, and on the other hand uses Islam as the basis for Pakistan's very existence.

The left and progressive, secular, democratic forces in Pakistan have been so weakened that it is just not possible to confront these maverick forces of jihad and fanaticism.

The present government, which to a minor degree represents a liberal trend, has been paralysed by these intransigent assassin forces of bigotry.

The right wing and religious political parties at times, upon the directives of the fostering military establishment, do create an environment of such chaos around the president, the prime minister and parliament that NO secular legislation can be adopted at all.

CPP demands the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party and other democratic parliamentary parties work diligently for the complete repeal of the notorious blasphemy law and apprehend and award due punishment to the political Islamic religious fanatic leaders for the public instigation of the murder of Taseer.

CPP is deeply shocked and extends its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family, his friends, comrades and the PPP. ✪

## Vietnam ratifies Marxism-Leninism as socio-economic engine

Charly Morales Valido

**The 11th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) last week endorsed Marxism-Leninism as the cornerstone of the economic renewal process started here 25 years ago. During the solemn opening of the conclave, the top leadership of the country, also appreciated the successful implementation of the ideology of Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam to apply the principles of Marx and Lenin.**

Vietnam President Nguyen Minh Triet, highlighted the legacy of Uncle Ho, whom he defined as "a man of world culture, while a tireless fighter for national independence."

The president praised the millions of compatriots who were

slaughtered over eight decades, to obtain, defend and uphold the sovereignty that allows the country to move towards socialism. In this regard, Triet said that the country currently faces many challenges following the global financial crisis, but said the leadership of the PCV plans to make Vietnam an industrialised nation by 2020.

"The 11th Congress is a big responsibility to the people to face reality and tell the truth and pursue our transition to socialism," he said. Triet stressed the crucial role of the "Doi moi" (renovation) begun in 1986, the increasing mobility of Vietnamese society, and called for the process to be perfected.

At the opening, 1,377 delegates took part, representing 3.6

million members of the PCV, as well as former members of its Central Committee and the group called Heroic Mothers, women who lost their children in the independence struggles.

The PCV holds its national congress every five years to draw up socio-economic strategies and choose the highest political and administrative leadership of the nation.

Vietnam has been successful in economic reforms while still maintaining the objectives, principles and viewpoints of socialism.

The building of a socialist-oriented market economy in Vietnam and the country's achievements over the past time are valuable experiences as well as progress made in agriculture.

*Prensa Latina* ✪

# Cuba retools its socialism

WT Whitney

**“The old story of non-compliances and overdrafts must come to an end,” Cuban President Raul Castro told the National Assembly on December 18. “The plan and the budget are sacred.”**

Cuban socialism is changing. Foreign onlookers on the right welcome the prospect of a failed socialist state. Others on the left warn of alleged capitalist accommodation. But for many who respect Cuba's sovereign right to chart its own course, the assumptions, goals, and methods involved are of intense interest.

Recently released documents, reports and interviews are relevant. Divided into 11 work groups, the Cuban Communist Party's Economics Commission last November released its “Draft Economic and Social Policy Guidelines for the Party and the Revolution.” This detailed, comprehensive summary of proposed changes was prepared for nationwide study prior to the Sixth Communist Party Congress in April, 2011.

Cuba's hand is forced. Affected by the world economic crisis, export and tourist income is down and import prices, particularly for food, are high. Internal waste and low agricultural production weigh heavily. Foreign debt is past due or coming due. The US economic blockade ups the cost of buying and transporting vital foreign goods. International lending institutions and banks, under US influence, interfere with Cuban trade and borrowing. Hurricanes in 2008 caused damage costing \$10 billion.

Finance Minister Lina Pedraza recently called for “guaranteeing income levels sufficient to back up decisions on social spending”. She indicated income from state enterprises and projects had covered only 55 percent of recently budgeted state expenses.

Economic adjustment began in 2007 with diagnostic commissions and new models of business management. In 2008, the government opened up sales of personal communication equipment and access to tourist facilities for use by Cubans. It expanded direct food sales to consumers and initiated land-use reform aimed at utilising idle land.

In 2009, Cuba modified its

budget, reduced imports, created an accounting agency, and removed some free services and subsidies. Last year the government eased home construction and repair regulations, and expanded taxable self-employment opportunities. Municipalities began incorporating small businesses and cooperatives into local development plans.

Tourist facility developers gained long-term land-use rights. Farmers could now purchase supplies on their own. Agricultural cooperatives began planning for the manufacture of agricultural products. The government announced elimination of 500,000 state jobs over six months and authorised 250,000 small, privately owned businesses that would be allowed to hire their own employees.

The planning process features attention to detail, establishment of priorities, and efforts at consensus. Haste and improvisation are out. With the “Draft Economic and Social Guidelines” as centrepiece, discussions have focused on goals, methods and mindset of a process in motion. Socialist purposes, current economic pressures and priorities, local autonomy, international collaboration, separation of long- and short-term goals, and environmental sustainability are on the agenda. That agenda includes taxes, enforcement of compliance, foreign and internal investments, management of debt and credit, salaries, pricing, cooperatives, import substitution, agricultural production, tourism and educational correlates. A multifaceted educational and deliberative process has extended throughout the island.

Recurring themes are self-criticism, decentralisation, prioritisation of economics, wealth redistribution through taxation, and emphasis on efficiency, work and self-pay programs. Speaking to leaders of the CTC trade union confederation, President Castro and Finance Minister Murillo urged unionists to take on key roles in implementing new tax policies and encouraging production and work efficiency.

A recent interview by Cuba's “Rebel Youth” (Juventud Rebelde) newspaper with former economics official Joaquin Infante provides useful background information. Australian Marce Cameron's



In 2008, the government expanded direct food sales to consumers.

translation is available on her valuable new Cuba Socialist Renewal blog.

According to Infante, “Administrative management of the economy has a long history,” with a “cult of plans for material output, not of ... financial balances. We became accustomed ... to always covering deficits and deficiencies whether or not results were obtained.” He recalled, “Finances smacked of capitalism to us, and this led to an extreme centralisation of planning and economic decision-making. With this rigidity and inflexibility, finances cannot function.”

Subsidies applying originally to “products sold to the population” extended to “thousands of products and productive activities,” he said. However, “if you subsidise all production, nobody knows the cost of anything,” he said. “One of the key changes is that losses will no longer be subsidised. Thus, the enterprise will be obliged to become more efficient.

“This implies a decentralisation of

power towards the enterprise system,” Infante explained. Currently, he said, “funds from earnings cannot be kept in the enterprise ... and everything goes up.” Opportunities are lacking to reward “work excellence and quality.

“With an economy that doesn't prosper, how can the social programs be sustained?” he asked.

Asked about criticisms from “leftist theoreticians who believe they're seeing the end of socialism in Cuba,” Infante replied: “Is it about resolving the concrete problems of a country? I'm a practical theorist. Nobody has managed to construct an ideal socialism. Here we do things in our own style, for more socialism. And what is socialism, if not to give well-being to the people and redistribute the resources in the best way possible?”

He added: “When you put an end to administrative tutelage, and you are ruled by economic-financial results, you will be cornering bureaucratism. The priority is to change our conception of the economy, for more and better socialism.” He said the aim is

for “planning to take precedence over the market, but [leaving] spaces for the market.”

Raul Castro, speaking to the National Assembly, repeated his earlier declaration that “I was not elected President to restore capitalism in Cuba nor to surrender the Revolution. I was elected to defend, maintain and continue improving socialism, not to destroy it.” Castro insisted, “The Socialist State shall not leave any citizen unprotected and via the social welfare system it shall ensure that people who are unable to work will receive the minimum required protection.”

The Cuban president said the new guidelines “signal the road towards a socialist future, adapted to Cuba's conditions and not to the capitalist and neo-colonial past which was defeated by the Revolution. Planning and not free market shall be the distinctive feature of the economy ... the concentration of ownership shall not be allowed.”

People's World ☪

## Arizona's wake up call

Joe Bernick

**TUCSON, Arizona: Tucsonans like to think that our city is different, that it's a progressive oasis in an otherwise right wing extremist state. Joe Arpaio, the notoriously racist sheriff lives up in Phoenix, as do Republican Governor Brewer, Attorney General Tom Horne (who is attacking ethnic studies programs here) and State Senate leader Russell Pearce who authored the states draconian SB 1070 anti-immigrant law.**

The deadly shooting of Democrat Congresswoman Gabby Giffords and 19 others has made us sit up. At first we sat glued to the TV or Internet to soak in the catastrophe. Tucson is a small city. We know Gabby Giffords. We are familiar with the strip mall where it happened, and with the hospital where they took the wounded. We waited for the names of the victims knowing that the list will probably include a friend or a co-worker.

People cried. Folks came down to Gifford's office and to the hospital to light candles and begin vigils that are still growing.

Tucsonans are sad but angry. We're sad because we can no longer pretend we're Baja Arizona, somehow separate from those right-wingers in Phoenix. Now we remember the bomb threats, vandalism, and gunshots directed at the Congressional offices of Giffords and Grijalva, our other congress member. So we're angry at the political climate in Arizona that encourages these acts of terrorism. We're angry at the talk radio shows, the right-wing legislature, Republican Senator Kyl, and the elected officials who come up with one racist anti-immigrant or anti-worker bill after another.

Meanwhile our schools and health care continue to rot. And we're angry with the corporate interests who own the politicians and the hate spewing radio stations. Every event here is turning into

a memorial. A press conference that had been scheduled to denounce the attacks on the 14th amendment and ethnic studies in schools was a case in point. Kat Rodriguez of the Coalición de Derechos Humanos summed it all up, “Our legislature started the year walking in hate”. All the speakers pointed out that it's not only the talk shows that encourage violence but it's the governor, legislative leadership and other right-wing elected officials who have created a climate that encourages acts of violence and terrorism.

This tragedy is a wake up call for all Arizonans.

It's time to take back our state from the right-wing, anti-people demagogues and their corporate masters. We must demand that they stop blaming immigrants for their failures. We need to organise to resist their coming assaults. We need to sweep them out of office. We have much work ahead.

People's World ☪

Newcastle

# FACES IN THE STREET

2 / 79 TUDOR ST HAMILTON 2303 PH. 0401 824 386

**FACES IN THE STREET** is a new shop supporting local new and established artists

**FACES ON THE STREET** encourages local musicians and artists to bring in their work. We will happily provide a retail location to both sell your art and provide exposure for your art.

**FACES ON THE STREET** is the best and only location in Newcastle

**Specializing in**

Artwork and Music from Political and Left Wing Artists

Badges, Jewellery, Bags, Gifts, Patches and much more!

Art Books Local Artists Political and Left Wing T-Shirts

## SUPPORTING LOCAL ARTISTS

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

## Another death in custody

**A 51-year-old man died in the Kalgoorlie watchhouse early Saturday morning (January 8).**

2010 is more than likely to have been a record year for Aboriginal deaths in custody in WA. I have recorded seven Aboriginal deaths in custody in WA during 2010. There may be more. And of course there are the non-Aboriginal deaths. Australia has one of the world's worst records of deaths in custody: some 2,300 deaths since 1982 with about 400 of them Aboriginal deaths.

It's a scandal-in-waiting. The extensiveness of our horrific record had not been realised by the majority of Australia till very recently. Annually deaths in custody have increased to 77 per year, perpetually rising. This is what has led me

to undertaking a PhD in Australian Deaths in Custody - we need to document the reality.

If the man who died in the Kalgoorlie watchhouse, was in anyway unwell, and it has been reported he may have had a seizure, he should have been in hospital. Such a policy may have prevented yet another death in custody. Whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal folk, we are all entitled to commonsense humane treatment by the authorities at hand. A civil and just society must be underwritten by humaneness.

**Gerry Georgatos  
Convener of the  
Human Rights Alliance**

## Evil democracy

**It seems reading statements in the capitalist press over the years by Bob Brown that he would have to be the leading China basher in Australia. He does not allow an opportunity to pass to portray the Chinese government as almost evil. However it is a shock to hear an interview on the Greens' website (6-12-10) where Brown states that "if all fails" (military) force may be needed" against China and that "most Australians are behind Rudd**

**for force".**

Brown is a fanatical believer in his "democracy" but his simplicity in understanding politics is frightening. And just to prove the point we could do a comparison with which political system is really "evil" by comparing China's lack of military invasions compared to Brown's political system which is constantly warmongering and invading other countries. But instead let's do a comparison with his "democracy" and China's in regards a subject he is most knowledgeable about - climate change.

Under the "guidance" of his democracy, it is accepted by all scientists that his system of western capitalism has heated up the planet by one degree and rising. Any secondary education in the laws of science explains to the teenager that creating gases on mass will alter the planet but has Bob Brown's democracy ever stopped to rationally investigate this over the last hundred years? No, by making decisions based on irrational greed it is already killing thousands of people mostly in the poor parts of the world before it acknowledges a problem. This democracy seems evil.

Not only is Brown's democracy held responsible for the chaotic weather conditions that everyone on the planet is going through today

because of its anarchic inefficient means of production but his dictatorial "democratic" system is deliberately preventing any response internationally. Both Australian and American "democracies" have sabotaged all international attempts such as the Kyoto Protocol to address this disastrous problem. This seems evil.

Today Brown's democracy next to America's is by far the greatest polluter per head of population on the planet. How much longer do we have to wait for Brown's democratic system to do something in terms of a sustainable future? Compare this in relative terms with China or Cuba, which are by far the leading countries in the world in combating climate change.

Brown believes that his democracy is based on a freedom to engage in democratic debate based on knowledge and this is what he believes does not happen in China. However his system in regards to this example - climate change - has done everything possible to suppress knowledge and hence democracy.

Both the Australian and American governments have demanded that state scientists not report information about the weather changing and threatened to sack them if they did not obey and eventually did sack leading scientists such as the Head of Atmospheric Research at the CSIRO.

However, by the year 2000 it became impossible to suppress all of the climate scientists around the world and so a new approach was taken to suppress the populations' ability to make a rational decision by confusing them. The bourgeois press (especially Murdoch's) for instance and the state ones controlled by Brown's democracies made sure equal or even more coverage was given to deniers that capitalism is the cause of climate change.

Bob Brown's naivety makes him part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

**H Patterson  
Vic**

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

*Write a letter to the Editor*

# Culture & Life

by  
Vanessa Baird

## In the halls of shame

**"Is this a joke?" asked one reader, commenting on an online article. "I've checked the date. It isn't April 1," responded another.**

It was no prank. Britain's new Con-Dem coalition government really was getting McDonald's and PepsiCo to help write the national health policy.

Just a few months earlier, while still in opposition, David Cameron had warned against the deleterious effects of corporate lobbying.

The next big scandal waiting to happen, he said, was one that had "tainted our politics for too long, an issue that exposes the far too cosy relationship between politics, government, business and money."

What a difference an election makes.

### A world of lobbying

Lobbying isn't new. The term's origins can be traced back to US President Ulysses S Grant who in the early 1800s used to hang out in the lobby of the Willard Hotel in Washington DC. In Britain it is said to refer to the vaulted hallways or lobbies of Parliament where individuals or special interest groups might enter discussions with MPs to try to influence their vote.

In theory, lobbying is just a part of the democratic process. Any groups with a special interest can lobby - be they trade unions, charities, environmental or business groups. Even representatives of foreign governments can do so.

But lobbying on behalf of business corporations has come to dominate - in terms of activity, money spent, and clout.

A sub-sector of Public Relations, lobbying (also known as Public Affairs) has become a multi-billion

dollar industry in its own right. You only have to look at attempts to regulate the finance industry in the US to see how corporate-driven lobbying has become. Nearly 1,000 lobbyists have been trying to influence Washington lawmakers. But lobbyists acting for the finance industry and against reform have outnumbered those from citizens' groups by eleven to one.

The sheer scale of lobbying activity today is mind-numbing, if not alarming.

Corporate lobbyists are at the heart of writing and determining policy. They operate outside democratic control, generally hidden from public view

British members of parliament may be contacted by lobbyists 100 times a week. The number of lobbyists in Washington is said to have doubled since 2000. In Australia lobbying spend is growing at three times the rate of inflation and is well over \$1 billion per year.

In India, the capital is bristling with a new generation of corporate lobbyists, many of which have international links with, for example, Washington PR giants Burson-Marsteller. According to journalist Praful Bidwai: "Corporate lobbying has become the highest embodiment of crony capitalism in India. It has developed into a formidable industry, with at least 30 major firms based in New Delhi alone."

In some cases, business interests have ganged together to form a massive lobby group - such as the 150-company strong Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) or the gargantuan BusinessEurope which represents 20 million companies from 34 countries.

Unsurprisingly, corporations are prepared to pay big money to win influence, especially if legislation that might affect their profits is in the pipeline.

Top of the big spenders in the US was the pharmaceutical and health industry which in 2009 invested almost \$200 million in derailing Obama's flagship health reforms. The insurance sector, with similar purpose, channelled more than \$122 million into defending its interests against American public health.

It was a success which PR guru Wendell Potter now confesses was achieved by peddling mass deception. Answering criticism from fellow lobbyists who have condemned him for

It took a while for investigative journalists to detect the close links between the Tea Party and its wealthiest corporate backer.



spilling the beans, he says: "After 30 years in the PR industry, I most certainly do have a right to call out the deceptive campaigns PR firms have orchestrated to obscure the truth and deceive the American public in the debate over healthcare reform and beyond. I detail these campaigns at length... based on my own participation in just these practices."

### Hidden hand at the Tea Party

Making donations to political parties is a traditional way of trying to influence policy-makers. Rules on disclosure and limits on funding vary from country to country.

In Australia, pharmaceutical companies Pfizer and Medicines Australia donated \$572,560 and \$392,386 respectively to the major parties. Similarly, a company can set up a front group. Tobacco giant Philip Morris, for example, created the Alliance of Australian Retailers to fight a law due to come into force in 2012 ruling that cigarettes be sold in plain non-branded packets.

But perhaps the most successful arms-length strategy has been employed by the oil-billionaire Koch brothers, heirs to America's second largest privately owned company. The Tea Party presents itself as a spontaneous, gutsy, grassroots organisation that is against conventional politics and corporate spin. Republican ex-governor of Alaska Sarah Palin is its poster girl.

It took a while for investigative journalists to detect the close

links between the Tea Party and its wealthiest corporate backer via a myriad of other organisations. David Koch co-founded Americans for Prosperity Foundation which trains and "educates" Tea Party activists, "channels" their political energy and provides lists of elected officials to target. Public tax records show that in 2008 the three main Koch family foundations gave money to 34 political and policy organisations, three of which they founded and several of which they direct.

### Like a cab for hire ...

The difference between a politician and a corporate lobbyist is becoming less and less clear these days. Politicians can move with ease between positions in government or opposition and high-level lobbying positions in corporations - and back again, through the so called "revolving door".

Sometimes politicians will try to operate on both sides of the revolving door at once. In March 2010 the British public were treated to a priceless glimpse into the grubby world of lobbying by former Labour Party transport secretary, Stephen Byers.

"I'm a bit like a sort of cab for hire," was Byers' admission to a fake PR professional who he took to be genuine. "I still get a lot of confidential information because I'm still linked to No 10."

His fee was "usually between £3,000 and £5,000 a day" (\$4,700-\$7,900).

Others fell for the "cash-for-influence" sting, mounted by *The*

*Sunday Times* and Channel 4's *Dispatches* program. Former health minister Patricia Hewitt was reported to have said that, for a fee of £3,000 a day, she could help "a client who needs a particular regulation removed" - a claim she later denied making. Former defence secretary Geoff Hoon said he was "looking forward to ... something that, frankly, makes money" and agreed that he would sit on an advisory board for £3,000 a day too. In December Byers and Hoon were barred from the House of Commons for two and five years respectively.

Byers was offering his services as a lobbyist while occupying a seat in parliament and at a daily rate higher than most people in his North Tyneside constituency could dream of earning in a month.

Strange as it may seem, the British system allows current members of parliament to be paid consultants to business interests and they are free to act as advocates for their employers, often doubling or tripling their income. Behaviour that would be classed as corruption in Africa or Asia or Latin America somehow passes as legal lobbying when it happens in the West.

The greed of British politicians must seem like chicken feed from the other side of the Atlantic. In spite of the recession, congressional members' personal wealth collectively increased by more than 16 percent between 2008 and 2009. Nearly half of US lawmakers are millionaires, a slight increase from the previous year. *New Internationalist* ☺



Sunday January 23 –  
Saturday January 29

**Bran Nue Dae** (ABC1 Sunday January 23 at 8.30 pm) was an Australian theatre phenomenon: an Indigenous stage musical that was a huge success with Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences alike.

The film version, made by a collection of private and public production entities, was one of 2010's most successful local productions, taking over \$7 million at the Australian box-office alone.

Directed by indigenous filmmaker Rachel Perkins, the film version of *Bran Nue Dae* is an engaging, joyous romp put to music. It follows the travels of runaway Aboriginal schoolboy Willie (Rocky McKenzie). Willie has shot through from the harsh discipline of a Catholic boarding school in Perth and is trying to get back to Broome and his girl friend (Jessica Mauboy).

He is helped (and frequently hindered) by a layabout (Ernie Dingo) he meets under a Perth bridge. Meanwhile Father Benedictus (Geoffrey Rush) from the school, is in pursuit of his runaway pupil.

The music (mainly songs), by Jimmy Chi and his band *Kuckles*, came first (in the early '80s) along with some ideas for stringing the songs together. The stage production eventually appeared around 1990.

The long gestation period for this film project speaks volumes about the lack of support for Indigenous filmmaking. On the strength of this film alone there should be support for the concept of a permanent production fund for Indigenous features (white Australian filmmakers would benefit from one too, but that's another story).

Surely, if the Australian government can afford \$10 million a day on military hardware, it could spring for \$10 million a year for indigenous filmmaking?

Ernie Dingo is delightful, Geoffrey Rush as the Catholic martinet is wildly overdrawn (as he is meant to be), and Jessica Mauboy is most appealing. The group musical scenes, many of which were done on short notice using untrained amateur singers and dancers, are a testament to the skill of the director and crew and the enthusiasm of the local people.

The three-part series *Gandhi* (ABC1 Mondays from January 17 at 8.30 pm) began last week. It is a great disappointment.

The series is presented by London-based journalist and news-reader Mishal Husain. A Muslim, her family removed from India to Pakistan at the time of Partition (1947).

Ms Husain seems to think that absolutely everyone regards Gandhi as at least a saint and probably a god, and that if they don't they should. Her account of Gandhi's life is told in torturously high-blown language like this: "He's also an idealist who begins to glimpse his destiny as a force for good."

About another incident we are told: "This hints at the future great soul and saviour of India."

Gandhi was the figurehead and ideologue of the Indian National Congress. The Congress had a Left (Marxist) faction based in the working class, but that class was outnumbered by the supporters of the

*Salute* (ABC2 Wednesday January 26 at 9.30 pm) – Tommie, Peter, John.



landlord class which dominated the peasantry. Congress would in time become exclusively the party of the landlord class, and the bitter enemy of the Indian workers' organisations (especially the Communist Party).

For all her adulation, Ms Husain cannot avoid Gandhi's middleclass aspirations or his fondness for mysticism and religion (including theosophy). In fact, she rejoices in the latter: "Only non-violence" she tells us "would generate enough divine power to defeat the oppressor".

Why does the ruling class laud "non-violence" still today for revolutionary and national-liberation movements? Because they do not fear "divine power". That one they can handle. What they fear is militant working class power.

The 1960s were a turbulent time in the USA and elsewhere in the world. In Vietnam, the USA was bogged down in a war of its own making, which had given rise to a protest movement that was becoming increasingly strident and insistent. Attempts to claim that the war was in defence of American values had led to counter assertions "No Vietnamese ever called me nigger!"

At home and abroad, racism was

being challenged as never before, leading to assassinations and race riots. In the USA and Mexico, the poor revolted. Thousands of soldiers were used to quell the disturbances while cities in both countries burned.

It was against this background that the Olympic Games were held in Mexico in 1968, the same year that capitalism successfully fomented a short-lived counter-revolution in Socialist Czechoslovakia.

In Mexico City that year, 2,000 people were shot dead protesting against the Games being held in the midst of poverty. The massacre was largely buried by the bourgeois media.

Amongst the competitors, black US athletes were expected to win honour for "their" country while being subjected to racist indignities and even terror at home. The Black Power movement was encouraging African-Americans to fight back.

A worried Olympic establishment warned the athletes that any visible sign of protest would be severely dealt with. To no avail: everyone remembers the famous photo of two Black US athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, standing on the winners' dais with black-gloved hands raised in the Black Power salute, and with them

one white Australian athlete, Silver medallist Peter Norman.

Peter Norman did not give the Black Power salute, but only because the US athletes only had two gloves. He did wear the same anti-racist badge that they wore, and he supported their stand. And he suffered for it.

The US coach refused to send Smith and Carlos home, but the IOC insisted so they had to go. Spitefully, they were also banned from future Olympic competition. Apparently, it's OK for the glory of sport to be marred by racism but not by protesting against it.

Peter Norman was never formally banned, but when the Munich Olympic Games rolled around, despite being the fourth fastest man in the world and qualifying half a dozen times for the Games, Norman was not selected. In fact, rather than have Norman represent us in track and field, the Australian selectors chose to send no one.

Gutless, or what?

The story of this famous incident at the Mexico Games is told in an excellent documentary, *Salute* (ABC2 Wednesday January 26 at 9.30 pm) by Norman's Nephew Matt. 🌟

**SPECIAL OFFER**  
all 4 books \$25 incl p&h

From Progress Publishers:  
**What is Socialism?**  
**What is Revolution?**  
**What is Communism?**  
**What is Democratic Socialism?**

\$5 each plus postage & handling (\$5 for up to 2 books, \$10 for 3 or more)

Some of the many books available at  
**Shop@CPA**

74 Buckingham Street, Surry Hills, NSW 2010 Ph: 02 9699 8844 shop@cpa.org.au  
Please make all payments by Cheque or Money Order out to "CPA"  
Credit Card – minimum purchase \$20 (include card type, name, number & expiry date)

**POLITICS**  
*in the pub*

February 4  
**THE EMPOWERED GREENS AND PROGRESSIVE POLITICS**  
John Kaye, Greens NSW MP;  
Tad Tieze, Dr, political commentator & former Green

February 11  
**CLIMATE CHANGE & THE FORGOTTEN PEOPLE OF THE PACIFIC – WHAT IS AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSIBILITY?**  
Phil Glendenning, Director Edmund Rice Centre;  
Maria Tilmon Kiribati, representative Pacific Call Partnership

February 18  
**HOLDING ISRAEL ACCOUNTABLE – BOYCOTT/ DIVESTMENT/SANCTIONS (BDS) CAMPAIGN**  
Samah Sabawi, Human Rights Campaigner;  
Sally McManus, Secretary Australian Services Union

February 25  
**WIKILEAKS – PERSECUTION: ASSANGE – COURAGE, POLITICIANS – COWARDICE**  
John Pilger, independent journalist & filmmaker;  
Stuart Rees, Director, Sydney Peace Foundation

March 4  
**THE IMPACT OF RISING INTEREST RATES ON HOUSING AND JOBS FOR YOUNG AND OLD**  
Mary Rawlings, President Lane Cove Retirement Unit Assoc;  
Alan Morris, Dr, Housing Analyst Social Policy Research Centre UNSW;  
Louis Christopher, real estate analyst, Principal SQM Research

March 11  
**WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MENTAL HEALTH UNDER THE GILLARD GOVERNMENT?**  
Ian Hickie, Professor, Director Brain Mind Institute University Sydney;  
Anne Deveson, filmmaker, author of *Tell Me I'm Here*, story of her son's schizophrenia

**Every Friday 6pm 'til 7.45**  
**Gaelic Club**  
64 Devonshire Street Surry Hills

Pat Toms 02 9358 4834  
patandbruceatoms@gmail.com  
[www.politicsinthepub.org.au](http://www.politicsinthepub.org.au)

**Special offer subscription to The Guardian**  
 10 issues: \$10  12 MONTHS: \$88 (\$80 conc.)  6 months: \$45 (\$40)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
POSTCODE: \_\_\_\_\_

Pay by  Cheque  Money order (Payable to "Guardian Publications")  
**Phone in details on 02 9699 8844**  
Or send to: Guardian Subscriptions  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010, Australia  
or by credit card:  Mastercard  Visa

Card# \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**The Guardian**

Editorial Office  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833  
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Editor: Tom Pearson

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

Printed by **Spotpress**  
24-26 Lilian Fowler Place  
Marrickville 2204

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

# Setting the record straight on Venezuela and Hugo Chávez

Eva Golinger

**With so much misinformation circulating in different media outlets around the world about Venezuela and President Hugo Chávez, it's time to set the record straight. Venezuela is not a dictatorship and President Chávez is no dictator. Just last evening the Venezuelan head of state participated in a meeting with a group of housing activists, who not only criticised – live on television – government policies and inaction on tenant and housing issues, but also proposed laws, regulations and projects that were received with open arms by Chávez himself.**

And last week, the Venezuelan President vetoed a law on higher education that had been approved by the prior year's majority pro-Chávez legislature, calling for more "open and wide" debate on the subject, to include critics and those who had protested the bill. That is not the behaviour of a brutal dictator.

As someone who has been living on and off in Venezuela for over 17 years, I can testify to the extraordinary transformation the country has undertaken during the past decade since Chávez first was elected in 1998. He has been re-elected by landslide majorities twice since then.

When I arrived in Venezuela for the first time in 1993, the country was in severe turmoil. Constitutional rights had been suspended and a nationwide curfew was imposed. Repression was widespread, the economy was in crisis, several newspapers, television and radio stations had been shut down or censored, and the government had imposed a forced military draft targeting young men from poor communities.

There was an interim president in power, because the actual president, Carlos Andres Perez – hailed by Washington as an "outstanding democrat" – had just been impeached and imprisoned for corruption. Perez eventually escaped confinement and fled to Miami, where he resided until his death last month, living off the millions he stole from the Venezuelan people.

Even though a new president was elected in 1994, constitutional rights remained suspended on and off for years, until the elections in 1998 that brought Chávez to power. Since then, despite a short-lived coup d'état in 2002, an economically-shattering sabotage of the oil industry in 2003 and multiple attempts against his government during the following years, President Chávez has never once limited constitutional rights nor imposed a curfew on the population.

He hasn't ever ordered a state of emergency that would limit rights or shut down any media outlets. He even issued a general pardon in 2007 giving amnesty to all those involved in the 2002 coup, with the exception

of individuals directly responsible for crimes against humanity or homicide.

Under the Chávez administration, poverty has been reduced by half, universal, quality free healthcare and education have been guaranteed for all Venezuelans, new industries have been created and more and more political power has been placed in the hands of "ordinary" people who were previously excluded by the elite that ruled the country throughout the 20th century.

So why do so many newspapers and broadcast media classify him as a dictator?

You may not like Hugo Chávez's way of speaking, or the fact that he was born into poverty, comes from the military, is a leftist and doesn't fit the stereotypical image of a head of state. But that doesn't make him a dictator.

In Venezuela, more than 80 percent of television, radio and print media remain in the hands of private interests critical of the government. So, despite what some international press claim, there is no censorship or violation of free expression in Venezuela.

Calls to overthrow the government or to incite the armed forces to rebel against the state, which would clearly be prohibited in most nations, are broadcast on opposition-controlled television channels with public concessions (open signals, not cable). Just last month, the head of the Venezuelan chamber of commerce, Fedecamaras, gave a press conference broadcast live on television and radio stations, during which he called the armed forces "traitors" who would "pay the price" if they didn't disobey government orders and "obey" the dictates of business operators.

I can only imagine if a business leader in the United States were to go on television and call the US Army "traitors" if they didn't disobey the federal government. The secret service would arrest the man immediately and the consequences would be severe. But something like that would never happen in the US, since no television station would ever broadcast anything that constituted a call to rebellion or disobedience against the government. That's illegal.

So, not only is there no censorship in Venezuela, there is an excess of "free" expression. One positive aspect of the permissive attitude assumed by the Chávez government with regards to media has been the proliferation of community and alternative media outlets throughout the nation, which have provided space and voice to those ignored by mainstream corporate media. During governments prior to the Chávez administration, community and alternative media were banned.

Recently, the Venezuelan legislature passed a law called the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Digital Media. The law does not censor internet or any other form of media. What it does



The exchange of hands and smiles stabilised an escalation in tensions between both nations.

do is disallow calls to assassinate the president or other individuals, as well as prohibit incitement to crime, hate or violence on websites operated from Venezuela. This is a standard in most democracies and is a sign of civility. The law also instils on media a responsibility to contribute to the education of citizens. Media have a huge power over society today. Why shouldn't they be responsible for their actions?

Another issue widely manipulated in the mass media is the Enabling Act that was approved last month by the Venezuelan parliament. This law gives "decree" powers to the Executive to legislate on specific issues as stipulated in the bill. The Enabling Act does not usurp, inhibit or limit legislative functions of the National Assembly, nor is it unconstitutional or anti-democratic.

The parliament can still debate and approve laws as usual within its authority.

The Enabling law, which is permitted by the Constitution, was requested by President Chávez in order to provide rapid responses to a national emergency caused by torrential rainfall that devastated communities nationwide at the end of last year and left over 130,000 homeless. The law will not affect any constitutional rights nor impose a "dictatorship" on the country; it is merely a valid, legitimate response to an emergency situation that needs quick solutions.

And speaking of the Venezuelan legislature, there is a lot of deceitful information repeated and recycled in media worldwide about the composition of this year's new parliament. Venezuela had legislative elections in September 2010, and opposition – anti-Chávez – parties won 40 percent of the seats. Some say this is a majority, which is very strange. The pro-Chávez PSUV party won

60 percent of seats in the National Assembly, as the Venezuelan legislative body is called. That's 97 out of 165 seats, plus 1 more which was won by the pro-Chávez PCV party, for a total of 98.

On the other hand, the opposition bloc won 65 seats represented by 13 different political parties that don't necessarily agree on most issues. Two other seats were won by a third, independent party, PPT. So, the PSUV party won 97 seats in parliament and the next party in line is Accion Democratica (AD) with 22 seats. Who has the majority?

In 2005, the opposition parties boycotted the electoral process, and lost the near 50 percent they had in parliament from the year 2000. Now, their bloc has been reduced to 40 percent, yet they claim to have "grown" in numbers. This perspective has been reiterated in mainstream media, despite its erroneous and manipulative nature.

The opposition bloc has already announced it will seek foreign intervention to help overthrow the government. Not only is this illegal, it's incredibly dangerous. Many of the candidates and most of the parties that form the opposition in Venezuela have already been receiving millions of dollars annually in funding from several US and international agencies, such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), both financed with US taxpayer monies.

The stated purpose of this funding has been to "promote democracy" in Venezuela and help build the opposition forces against Chávez. This is a clear violation of Venezuelan sovereignty and a waste of US taxpayer dollars. US citizens: Is this the way you want your hard-earned money to be spent?

This week, opposition leaders will meet with their counterparts in Washington. They have already said their mission is to seek more aid to help remove President Chávez from power. Unfortunately, their undemocratic actions have already been welcomed in the US Capitol.

Republican Representative Connie Mack, now head of the House Sub-Committee on Foreign Relations for the Western Hemisphere, announced on the first day of Congress that his one goal this year is to place Venezuela on the list of "state sponsors of terrorism". And Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, now head of the House Foreign Relations Committee, has backed that objective, even going as far as to publicly state she would welcome the "assassination of Fidel Castro or any other repressive leader" such as Hugo Chávez.

On January 1, President Chávez held a brief, informal and amicable encounter with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Brasilia, during the inauguration of Dilma Rousseff, Brazil's new president. No agreements were reached, but the exchange of hands and smiles stabilised an escalation in tensions between both nations, which had produced a diplomatic crisis at the end of last year. But upon her return to Washington, Clinton was severely criticised by media, particularly *The Washington Post*, which accused her of being too "soft" on Venezuela.

*The Washington Post's* calls for war against Venezuela are dangerous.

It's time to stop the escalating aggression against Venezuela and accept the facts: Venezuela is not a dictatorship, and while many of you may not like Hugo Chávez, a majority of Venezuelans who voted for him do. And in this scenario, they're the ones who matter. ✚



Communist Party of Australia

Website: [www.cpa.org.au](http://www.cpa.org.au)  
Email: [cpa@cpa.org.au](mailto:cpa@cpa.org.au)

The Guardian

Website: [www.cpa.org.au/guardian](http://www.cpa.org.au/guardian)  
Email: [guardian@cpa.org.au](mailto:guardian@cpa.org.au)

**Central Committee:**  
**General Secretary:** Dr Hannah Middleton  
**Party President:** Vinnie Molina  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833  
**Sydney District Committee:**  
Tony Oldfield  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833

**Newcastle Branch:**  
303 Hunter St  
Newcastle NSW 2300  
Ph: ah 02 4926 1752  
**Riverina Branch:**  
Allan Hamilton  
2/57 Cooper St Cootamundra 2590  
[riverinacpa@live.com.au](mailto:riverinacpa@live.com.au)

**Melbourne Branch:**  
Andrew Irving  
PO Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall  
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053  
Ph: 03 9639 1550 Fax: 03 9639 4199  
**West Australian Branch:**  
Branch Secretary: Andrew Hayward  
PO Box 98 North Perth WA 6906  
Ph: 0421 982 719 Email: [perth@cpa.org.au](mailto:perth@cpa.org.au)

**Brisbane Branch:** David Matters  
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152  
Ph: 0419 769 129  
[cpabris@live.com.au](mailto:cpabris@live.com.au)  
**South Australian State Committee:**  
Bob Briton, PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,  
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366  
[www.cpasas.blogspot.com](http://www.cpasas.blogspot.com)  
Email: [sa@cpa.org.au](mailto:sa@cpa.org.au)