



Painful lessons from Japan's nuclear nightmare

Bob Briton

The hearts of the people of the world have gone out to the people of Japan. The images of destruction from northern Japan have transfixed and appalled viewers across the globe. Ten thousand people are believed to have perished following Friday's earthquake, ten-metre high tsunami and the series of sizeable aftershocks. To add to the misery is the threat to the health and safety of survivors and, potentially, whole populations in the region from radioactive emissions from nuclear reactors damaged by the massive quake.

There are many lessons for the future of humanity to be learnt from both the natural disaster and the industrial disaster that has followed. Some of these lessons are directly relevant to Australia where a massive expansion of uranium mining has been underway and where nuclear power is being debated in connection with the country's future energy needs.

Responding to disaster

The Japanese quake is only the latest of a series of terrifying natural disasters that have struck around the world in recent years. It can be added to the list, which includes the quakes in New Zealand, China, Haiti and Chile, floods in Pakistan, the Indonesian tsunami of 2004, cyclones in Burma, hurricanes in Central America and the Caribbean, droughts in Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea and others. In Australia, this year's floods and storms in Queensland have left communities grieving and in ruin.

There is a growing consensus that the severe weather events are related to climate change and that any mitigation of the threat can only be achieved by a far more concerted effort to reduce carbon emissions. The Australian government has lagged in this effort and actually helped to derail proposals for appropriate binding targets at Copenhagen in 2009. The current carbon tax debate is unlikely to lead to a mechanism for significant reductions in climate changing emissions in Australia. Protecting corporate profits is the federal government's top priority.

Another issue that governments the world over are failing to take seriously is the general question of disaster relief and reduction. The United Nations declared the 1990s the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. It aimed to build resilient communities able to protect lives and livelihoods against disaster. Whatever the achievements of International Decade projects, the overall impact has been minimal.

In 2008, the UN sought to set up a US\$10 billion fund that aimed to help poor countries rebuild after natural disasters. The UN put economic losses from natural disasters at US\$83 billion in 2008 and the situation has been worsening. A fund of \$US10 billion is woefully inadequate. The current economic crisis



and the increased severity of disasters mean that even countries with developed economies could face economic ruin following one of these fearful events.

At the same time that survivors of disasters face homelessness and disease, global military spending has risen 49 percent since 2000. In 2009 alone, US\$1,531 billion was spent in the military sector. This scandalous waste must be converted to a good purpose. The needs of the survivors of the long list of recent natural disasters won't wait.

The cost of "cheap" nuclear power

As *The Guardian* goes to press, about 200,000 people have been evacuated from areas surrounding the two Fukushima power plants that house ten nuclear reactors. The radius of evacuation zone has been expanded from three to 10 kilometres. People living in a 20-kilometre radius are being told to stay indoors, seal up vents and to throw away the clothing they have worn outside since the onset of the emergency. Iodine pills are being distributed.

There is debate about whether number one and number three reactors have gone into "meltdown" but it was revealed that seawater has been pumped into them in a last-ditch effort to stop them overheating.

The brave workers who doused the

Fukushima reactors with seawater have been exposed to massive doses of radiation. One of these workers has already died in hospital. Populations are being tested for exposure. Three out of 90 chosen at random for tests were shown to have high levels of exposure.

Mistrust is rife. Government and Tokyo Power Co spokespersons denied and later confirmed that radioactive vapour has escaped from the damaged Fukushima facilities. It has also been confirmed that radiation has leaked from the Onagawa nuclear plant run by the Tohoku Electric Power Company. Eleven out of Japan's 50 nuclear reactors have been shut down.

Questions for Australia

Questions are being asked around the world about the decisions made over several decades to build nuclear power plants in such a seismically unstable area. Advocates of nuclear power in Australia have noted that most of its territory is not prone to this risk. Earthquakes are not the only danger, however. As Greens federal parliamentary leader Bob Brown noted, nuclear power plants can't be built in the flight path of an airport for fear of a double disaster. Plants are military targets and the technology has a close link to military uses. The commissioning of nuclear plants obliges workers and communities to be subjected to strict and intrusive security.

The drive for maximum profits by

corporations using nuclear technologies and materials is of grave concern. Australians have witnessed this with uranium mining which has led to radioactive pollution from sites like Olympic Dam in South Australia and the Ranger uranium mine bordering the Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory. Unions along with health, Aboriginal and conservation groups in WA are demanding an inquiry into the proposed expansion of uranium mining in that state.

There are other moral questions to consider. The Australian government, having caved in to pressure from transnational mining companies, is overseeing the sharp increase in the volume of the export of uranium – material that ends up in nuclear reactors around the world, including Japan. Pressure is mounting to export this hazardous material to India, which is not a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Its nuclear power industry has a questionable safety record.

As it stands, the drive for corporate profits from uranium mining in Australia is feeding a risk-taking nuclear power industry overseas that is also bent on maximum profits. These industries should not be in private hands. They should be publicly owned and operated and technologies deployed only when they have been shown to be safe. Events unfolding in Japan demonstrate what can happen when those two conditions don't exist. ✪

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The so-called guardians of free speech are silencing the messenger

The Guardian

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Gillard betrays Australia

Prime Minister Julia Gillard has just visited the United States. After betraying the Australian people and handing Australian independence and sovereignty over to the United States, perhaps she should stay there.

In Washington for the 60th anniversary of the ANZUS military alliance, the Prime Minister claimed there is "enthusiastic co-operation" for hosting more American troops on Australian soil.

Handing Australia over to US imperialism, which has gone to war every 14 months since World War II, Julia Gillard stated:

"We are well used to joint facilities in Australia, we have them now.

"We are well used to American visits including visits by ships.

"We're well used to joint exercises and so we are enthusiastic and I believe the United States is enthusiastic about looking at ways we can further that co-operation into the future."

This fawning delight at closer military ties with the Pentagon and greater co-operation in US bloody oil wars is not widely shared.

Over 70 percent of Australians want Australian troops pulled out of the killing fields of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But the Prime Minister committed Australian troops to yet more wars, declaring "You have an ally in Australia, an ally for war and peace".

Will Libya be next? Gillard certainly parroted the Obama line on keeping all options open – code for maybe bombing raids to set up no fly zones but maybe other military intervention too.

This subservience already costs \$80 million in military spending each and every day.

With public hospitals desperate for funds, public housing and public schools without the money they need, Queensland lives and infrastructure to be rebuilt and an environment in desperate need of repair, how much more public money will this puppet Prime Minister squander on preparations for US wars.

Gillard is working for US not Australian interests – and that is treason.

The Prime Minister was also careful to report in to media baron Rupert Murdoch. He may be a foreign national but Gillard seems to think the Australian government should report to him first, before it talks to the Australian people.

Successive Liberal and Labor governments have backed the US alliance but Gillard plumbed new depths of subservience as she turned Australia into a contingent of US predatory aims.

Before the US Congress Gillard made a speech so grovelling, so sycophantic that every self-respecting Australian must cringe.

In trembling tones she said: "I firmly believe you are the same people who amazed me, when I was a small girl, by landing on the moon.

"On that great day, I believed Americans could do anything, I believe that still. You can do anything."

One *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist described her address as making "all the way with LBJ' look like a cold shoulder".

Julia Gillard does not reflect the feelings of the Australian people. She is betraying their interests. It is time to end the ANZUS military alliance. Australia is not for sale.

PRESS FUND

Statistics are really important. For example, from 1975 to 2010 some 2,500,000 people migrated to Australia, but only 20,000, less than one percent, arrived unannounced in leaky boats. So much for all that the nonsense about Australia being "overrun by boat people"! The Press Fund statistics are also interesting, because contributions have picked up in recent weeks. Mind you, we still have a long way to go. A really easy way to raise some cash is just to drop your small change into a Press Fund tin every day. This week four contributors offered us the contents of their tins. You can follow their lead; just ring the Party and we'll send out a tin – and that includes all Party branches too. Many thanks to our contributors this week for their generous support, as follows:

Guardian tin: Central Branch \$47.60, Hannah and Denis \$20.35, National Organiser \$23.55, Mick Power \$90.75.

KM \$100, Mark Window \$20, "Round Figure" \$17.75.

This week's total: \$320 Progressive total: \$1,070

Vote for people's representatives

NSW will go to the polls on Saturday March 26. All the predictions are a crushing defeat of Labor by the Liberals.

The NSW Labor government is likely to be massively defeated because the people have been alienated by more than a decade of privatisation, over-development, and other policies supporting business instead of community interests.

NSW Labor has sold off our

State's retail electricity assets for peanuts. Public transport, public hospitals and public schools have been run down. Billions of dollars have been wasted in disastrous "public-private partnerships". Public housing has been run down while more and more people face soaring rents and house prices.

The result of right wing Labor policies will be the victory of even more right wing Liberal policies from an O'Farrell government. This

will mean more suffering for working people, including cuts to social services, undermining public housing, public health and public education, and much more.

We need as many left and progressive candidates as possible elected in order to build a force in the NSW Parliament, especially the Upper House, that can help defend working people from the Liberal attacks after the election.

How to Vote in NSW March 26

LOWER HOUSE – Legislative Assembly

Balmain	Vote 1	Jamie Parker (Greens)
Keira:	Vote 1	Paola Harvey (Socialist Alliance)
Marrickville:	Vote 1	Fiona Byrne (Greens)
	Vote 2	Pip Hinman (Socialist Alliance)
Newcastle:	Vote 1	Zane Alcorn (Socialist Alliance)
Parramatta:	Vote 1	Duncan Roden (Socialist Alliance)

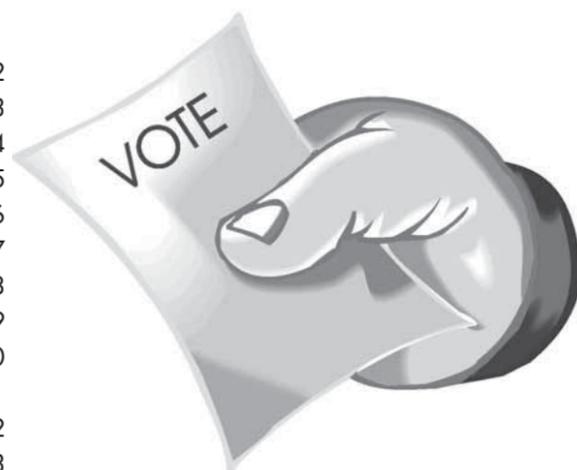
In all other seats, Vote 1 for Green or progressive independent candidates.

**Always put Labor before Liberals / Nationals.
Leave the ultra-right parties such as One Nation,
Shooters Party and Christian Democrats to the very last.**

UPPER HOUSE – Legislative Council

Vote below the line for at least 15 candidates

David Shoebridge	Greens	1
Jan Barham	Greens	2
Andrew Ferguson	ALP (no. 6 on ALP ticket)	3
Peter Boyle	Socialist.Alliance	4
Jess Moore	Socialist.Alliance	5
Susan Price	Socialist.Alliance	6
Simon Cunich	Socialist.Alliance	7
Ibrahim Barsi	Socialist.Alliance	8
Raul Bassi	Socialist.Alliance	9
Bea Bleile	Socialist.Alliance	10
Luis Almario	Socialist.Alliance	11
Rosendo Duran	Socialist.Alliance	12
Duroyan Fertl	Socialist.Alliance	13
Fred Fuentes	Socialist.Alliance	14
Kate Ausburn	Socialist.Alliance	15



Vote for people's representatives in the NSW Parliament on March 26

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Casualties of the grocery wars

Bob Briton

Dairy farmers in Queensland are already walking off their farms as a result of the grocery wars being fought by Coles and Woolworths. Independent grocers have been dragged into the battle. In the end, the manoeuvring of the grocery monopolies for even greater market share managed to dislodge the farmers from their traditional way of life where drought, storms and floods could not.

It all started with Coles' decision to reduce the price of its home brand milk to \$1 a litre. Woolworths, Aldi, Franklins and others were obliged to fall in behind. Bread, butter, toilet paper, breakfast cereal and other products have followed. However, it's not just bad news for farmers – consumers are being manipulated to strengthen the grip of the supermarket monopolies. Ultimately, they will join the other vanquished small players caught up in the grocery wars.

The Greens and the Coalition joined a push from South Australian Senator Nick Xenophon for a Senate inquiry into the dairy industry. The inquiry began last week. Coles submitted that it paid the going rate to processors for the milk it later sold at the discounted rate in a purchase concluded before Australia Day. In other words, it was absorbing the

cost of the lower price. Woolworths said the lower retail price was not sustainable but also that the "prices set a new benchmark, and can be expected to flow back to processors and farmers as new pricing agreements are negotiated."

Processing is another sector of the food industry dominated by monopoly players like National Foods. They have a whip hand in negotiations with farmers over the price per litre at the farm gate. Prices vary from state to state but there is a two-tier payment system across the country. In Queensland, for example, Italian food giant Parmalat pays 56-58 cents per litre for branded milk and 13 cents less for non-branded. Profits at that price are said to be as little as 2 cents a litre. Since home brand milk has been slashed to \$1 a litre, sales of branded milk have slumped by 30 per cent. Milk cheques to farmers are expected to be much smaller from next month.

Australian Dairy Farmers vice-president Adrian Drury wants the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to look into Coles' and Woolworths' pricing practices. A Senate inquiry into milk prices was also held in May 2010. It recommended the ACCC investigate milk pricing but nothing has eventuated. The ACCC cleared Coles and Woolworths of charges of predatory



pricing practices or running a duopoly following previous investigations. Critics maintain that the ACCC is far too cosy with the two big retailers.

Consumer group Choice wants a national food policy and a supermarket ombudsman. That might help. Consumers may well be manipulated by lower prices on items like milk only to be squeezed with higher prices on other lines. The cheaper milk, devastating to the livelihoods of dairy

farmers, might not mean a lower total on the docket after the weekly shop.

Chris Griffin, also from Australian Dairy Farmers puts it bluntly: "Dairy Farmers don't and shouldn't trust Coles. Neither should their customers. What Coles should do is stop being tricky," he told *The Australia Financial Review*.

That is not likely to happen in the current political climate. Neoliberalism reigns. Markets have been

deregulated and "market forces" were meant to produce the best outcomes for all players. The dairy industry was deregulated in 2000 with the promise of smiles all around. Farmers have not benefitted and their situation is set to get desperate. When the supermarket monopolies move to the next big marketing strategy and milk's shelf price soars once more, the current casualties will not be remembered in the boardrooms. ✪

International Women's Day – Perth

On Tuesday last week (08-03-2011), round 60 people joined the March through the malls of Perth being lead by Marianne Mackay from the deaths in Custody Watch Committee who acknowledged the march would transverse the lands of her grandfather. Marchers listened to speakers along the route on the history of International Women's Day, the role of Egyptian women in history and in the recent uprising, the realities of the treatment faced by refugee women and their children in Australian detention centres and the ongoing struggles today.

Along route marchers called for pay equity and attracted much attention from shoppers with colourful banners, balloons and whistles. The march ended to cheers from unionists as marchers in an act of solidarity joined up with the UnionsWA women's day gathering for pay equity. ✪



Photo: Elizabeth Hulm

Pete's Corner



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Union says APSC out of step on super and maternity leave

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has accused the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) of being out of step with government moves to lift retirement incomes by opposing advances in superannuation and maternity leave arrangements for public sector workers.

The union has slammed the APSC for ruling out superannuation payments on periods of unpaid maternity leave in any of the 70 plus new agreements set to be negotiated across the public service over the next few months.

The CPSU became the first union to secure superannuation payments on periods of unpaid maternity leave when it finalised new agreements at the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Comcare, the Northern Territory Public Service and the Fair Work Ombudsman last year.

This precedent was recognised when the CPSU won the ACTU's Jennie George Award for the Advancement of Women in Unions.

"The new provision addressed the longstanding inequity in retirement savings caused by the break in working history when women start a family," said CPSU national secretary, Nadine Flood.

"All the research tells us that helping employees build better retirement incomes now will prevent problems down the track. The government has acknowledged that the difference in retirement savings of men and women in Australia is a significant problem.

"It's clear that the break in women's employment to start a

family is a huge factor in that difference," said Ms Flood.

Despite this progress, the APSC is now requiring agencies that have this provision to seek to abolish it and move to stop any other agencies from adopting the provision. Its new policy states that "Agencies should not seek to make employer contributions during periods of unpaid leave that does not count as service."

Under the new APSC policy, agencies wanting to negotiate or retain conditions that are better than the government's new standard, must seek explicit permission from the Special Minister of State, Gary Gray.

"We are struggling to understand why the APSC is going backwards and trying to stamp out progress on this important issue," said Ms Flood.

She said that what has been achieved in those agencies is a significant precedent and the union is keen to include it in other new agreements.

"At a time when major private sector employers are creating new flexible working conditions to attract women, it's extraordinary that the APSC would move to limit these innovations in the public sector.

"If securing a better deal on super for women is a national priority, why is the APSC moving the other way?," Ms Flood asked.

Background: CPSU raised these concerns with the APSC and Special Minister of State, Gary Gray, in consultations about the recommended terms and conditions for Australian Public Service Agencies, but the APSC has proceeded to put these restrictions in place. ❖



Photo: Vinnie Molina

In Sydney on Saturday (12-03-2011) more than 1000 people marched through the streets of Sydney CBD. The CPA Central Committee joined the demonstration for Equal Pay and a few hundreds of the *Guardian* newspapers were distributed.

Unions push to bridge gender pay gap

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) men and women joined the march from the Sydney Town Hall through the streets under the banner Women Transporting the World.

The call for the rally was equal pay, fair pay. Women should get the same pay as men, not just for the same work, but for women's work like caring for the elderly, the ill, the young, cleaning and factory work.

A nurse has as many qualifications as a tradesman, said one speaker, but all the tradesmen I know own a house at 20 and nurses go without.

It's not about the glass ceiling but the gender pay gap of a whopping 18 percent – greater if the division is made along both gender and ethnic lines.

Speakers representing the ethnic communities spoke of how women laboured in factories on low pay in third world conditions.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions is redoubling efforts to achieve true gender equality with a test case now before the commission.

In the past year unions have campaigned and won paid and parental leave, carer's leave and family-friendly flexible working arrangements.

But ACTU President Ged Kearney said a continuous effort and commitment was needed to achieve gender equity.

Unions launched an equal pay test case for around 150,000 social and community service workers in Fair Work Australia in early 2010 to redress the pay discrepancy.

She called for employers to face stronger enforcement of equal opportunity laws.

The recent announcement of government reform of Australia's equal opportunity workplace laws after decades of inaction is welcomed by unions.

"Employers have had several decades to deliver equal opportunity in workplaces but have failed to do it, so it's now time for legislative enforcement," Ms Kearney said.

"We are pleased that the federal government is acting on recommendations made by unions to make reforms to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act.

"Equality in the workplace needs to be backed by accountability and enforcement." ❖

WA to rally for local jobs

New figures show the Western Australian public have been misled about the number of local contracts used in the Gorgon Gas Development. According to a document circulated by Chevron to the WA media in February, \$10 billion has been invested in local contracts. But the figure has been proved false by the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) and the Skilled Work Alliance.

"We have found \$7.4 billion of the \$10 billion of Gorgon contracts Chevron claim are local are instead largely done offshore. Only \$3 billion of the contracts are being sourced locally – things like earthworks, dredging and catering – contracts that involve little skills development," said UnionsWA secretary Simone McGurk.

AMWU WA secretary, Steve McCartney, said the analysis by UnionsWA was a damning insight into the amount of skilled work local trades people were missing out on.

"This Tuesday [as The Guardian goes to press], the people of WA will have an opportunity to declare their frustration with the Barnett government and their disregard for local jobs and skills investment," Mr McCartney said.

"For the first time, local

business owners, engineers, trades people and heads of industry will march together up St George's Terrace. They will call on the Barnett government to ensure the majority of skilled work for our major projects stay here in WA."

Mr McCartney said the government needed to take responsibility for Gorgon's skilled work going offshore.

"Chevron have tried to tell the Western Australian people and government that they're keeping the bulk of the project work here. It's not true and the people of WA won't be fooled."

Truth revealed

Contracts claimed by Chevron as delivering local content to WA include:

- KJVG Head Contract (\$2.7 billion) – the vast majority of engineering, procurement and construction management completed overseas.
- LNG Jetty & Marine Structures (\$1 billion) – most of the jetty manufactured in Malaysia and shipped to WA.
- Offshore Pipelay (\$1 billion) – steel pipes manufactured in Malaysia and shipped to WA.
- LNG & Condensate Tanks (\$600 million) – tanks made in Thailand with Japanese steel. ❖

Further evidence of education funding disparities

Financial data on the My School website shows that some private schools in wealthy areas are getting more government funding per student than public schools serving low-income communities.

Australian Education Union (AEU) federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said the revelations highlighted the need for a comprehensive overhaul of school funding arrangements.

"How is it that we have reached the point where private schools serving wealthier families receive thousands more in government funding per student than public schools serving low-income communities?" Mr Gavrielatos said.

"The funding system is clearly broken and needs to be fixed. Claims by the private sector lobby that public schools always receive more government funding have been proven to be totally false."

He said that there are examples across the country where public schools are receiving less recurrent funding from government, and that it is now known that private schools, on average, received more money from governments for capital works in 2009.

"This is an unacceptable situation especially when you consider that public schools are educating the overwhelming number of students with higher needs such as those from

low income families, those with a disability and those in rural and remote areas.

"The requirement to provide education for all, in every community, also drives up the cost of public education and that needs to be better recognised. The unfortunate fact is that the current funding system is blind to the real needs of students. We need to overhaul the federal funding arrangements with the central aim of ensuring that every child has access to a well-resourced public school.

"This can only be achieved by investing more in our quality public schools which are open to all children in every community across Australia." ❖

Trainworks: History on the rails

Peter Mac

It's pretty unusual for publications like *The Guardian* to review a museum. And that's a shame, because museums have a crucial role to play in explaining both natural and human history.

A really interesting museum is Trainworks, at Thirlmere, south-west of Sydney. The museum is run by Trainworks Limited, a not-for-profit company established by NSW Rail Corp, the state-owned corporation that maintains NSW rail facilities. The collection now on display at Trainworks grew out of the activities of the volunteer-operated NSW Rail Transport Museum (RTM), the accredited rail operator and maintainer for Railworks.

Rail was crucial in Australia's development. In NSW the last steam engines were withdrawn from use in 1968. RTM volunteers ran special steam engine tours and maintained redundant state-owned rolling stock, engines and artifacts at Sydney's Enfield rail depot until 1977 when they were relocated to a disused section of the former Great Southern Railway track at Thirlmere.

With assistance from Sydney's Power House Museum, RTM subsequently built a train hall to house the exhibits. A new turntable, workshop and exhibition building were recently constructed, as part of an upgrading of the exhibition site, now known as the Rail Heritage Centre.

A mighty industry

Rail transport was the nation's first heavy industry, and as Trainworks management has pointed out rail is the biggest single industry in Australia.

Rail systems have made possible the transport of both passengers and freight over long distances. The first rail line was used for industrial purposes in Melbourne in the early 1850s. In 1855 several locomotives were shipped to Sydney from Britain, to be used in the new passenger line. One of the exhibits at Railworks is the 1872 No. 78 locomotive, whose design was based on the 1855 model.

The growth of trade and the population growth that followed the discovery of gold stimulated the demand for efficient transport. The 1870s saw a rapid development of the NSW railway network, which involved the introduction of 30 passenger engines and 50 goods engines.

No. 1905 loco, on display at Railworks, was the first of these engines in service, and was also the first to cross Sydney Harbour Bridge at its opening in 1932. It was also, presumably, one of the locos that were used to test the strength of the bridge, by massing them on temporary tracks right across the bridge and from one end to the other. The bridge sagged a few inches but sprang back after they were removed!

The goods locos were amazingly durable. They provided invaluable service during World War II, hauling thousand of tons of coal, timber, crops and other vital supplies. Like many of its comrades, No 1905 operated until the end of the steam era in

1968. It had worked doggedly and faithfully for 91 years.

A focus of politics and militancy

The NSW rail system has mirrored political divisions throughout its history. The first passenger lines were privately operated, but fell into bankruptcy, and the NSW government was eventually forced to take them over. Among the Trainworks "curiosities" is prison van No BKD711, built in 1915. Sydney was founded as a convict colony, but ironically, the new rail system was immediately used to transport convicted criminals out of the city to distant sites such as Berrima Jail.

Australian railways were plagued by the stupidities of colonial rivalry, as illustrated by the use of different gauge rail lines in different states. Passengers travelling from Melbourne to Sydney used to have to change trains at Albury until well after the Second World War.

The passenger carriages were divided into price-differentiated classes. (You even had to pay to use the station toilets!) Henry Lawson wrote:

"Another rainy night on Petersham platform. I don't remember what I was doing there unless I had been out late to see about a job. The sickly gas lamps again, the wet shiny asphalt, the posters on the mean brick walls close at hand, the light glistening on the enamelled iron notice saying "Second Class Wait Here", and I alone and tired as usual and cold with a shoddy overcoat coarse as sacking and warm as a refrigerator. But it was here I struck the keynote or the keyline of 'Faces In The Street'".

As a complete contrast to the second class carriages, the 1911 State Governor's car, also on exhibition, utilised the finest craftsmanship. It had three bedrooms and two bathrooms for the governor and his guests, as well as dining and observation areas. Nothing's too good for the workers!

Rail contributed to the growth of trade unionism and working class politics. For example, before WW2 Sydney's Eveleigh railway yards were a centre for labour militancy. In 1931 this was acknowledged in the front page of the rabidly anti-communist *Sydney Sun*, which showed a sketch of injured men and wreckage alongside trains at Sydney's Central Station, under the screaming headline "If revolution came to Sydney"! In 1937 Eveleigh workers held mass meetings to protest against a visit by the pro-fascist German emissary Count von Luckner, and in 1957 the Eveleigh Loco Shop committee campaigned for rights for Aboriginal people.

A source of innovation

The NSW rail system has provided employment and training for hundreds of thousands of workers. It also prompted technical innovation. For example the very powerful Garratt locomotives of the 1940s, such as Trainworks' 6040, were designed with double engines for



No. 1905 loco, on display at Railworks, at Thirlmere.

maximum speed for passenger services. They were the last passenger steam engines in NSW.

The first double-decker trains in the world were introduced in Sydney in 1968. Built by adapting the old "red rattler" carriages, they seated 89 percent more passengers than the old carriages. Carriage C3804, on exhibition at Trainworks, was one of the first four carriages introduced.

Rail transport has always been the target of corruption from vested interests. In the 1950s US auto lobby groups convinced state governments that rail transport was outdated, and railways and tramways in Los Angeles and other cities were dumped. The NSW government stupidly followed suit, ripping up and discarding Sydney's 200-mile long tram system, the biggest in the world and superbly adapted to the city's very irregular street pattern. Victoria knew better, and Melbourne benefited immensely – at least until Premier Kennett sold off the rail and tram networks.

Several years ago the NSW Lemna Labor government argued unsuccessfully that Sydney's entire double-deck rail system should be progressively replaced with a new below-ground, privately-operated single deck metro rail system, even though double-deckers were being introduced in many European cities. Lemna's policy would have allowed all Sydney's railway land to be sold off. Privatisation and real estate deals on a truly stupendous scale – now that's what I call a real double-decker! Luckily, the idea got dumped by the feds.

Climate change is forcing a re-think on the relative priorities of road and rail transport. It is clear that electric rail is the way forward for public transport, and public ownership is the way to do it.

The Trainworks museum offers a wonderful insight into the technical development of the NSW rail system from its inception until the late 20th century, as well as the social and working conditions associated with it. That is why the museum is well worth a visit. ✪



The University of NSW attracted a lot of attention and a very hot debate when it decided to pulp its library books. Libraries do have to get rid of some of their stock to either allow for new ones or because the copies are not in good condition. Sales of library books attract a lot of customers and interest. But it was for the first time that the books were actually destroyed. The coming of the digital age and e-books should not exclude printed books. Besides, universities should look more carefully at what is being offered instead of books. For example, *The New York Times* reported that a large US publisher owned by Rupert Murdoch would sell e-books to libraries and those e-books could be borrowed a maximum 26 times. After that a library is not allowed to lend them. So will it have to pay for it again? When you or a library buys a printed copy of a book it can be kept a long time. Electronic books are a useful invention but it does not mean that printed books should be pulped.

Consumers are presently enjoying lower milk prices but it all happens at the expense of dairy farmers. It is ironic that the Coles managing director, Ian McLeod sent a letter to all MPs and senators saying that Coles did not intend to hurt farmers by cutting retail milk prices. Mr McLeod blames the multinational milk processors for getting fat profits and refusing to pay decent prices to farmers. "While retail milk prices are available on the shelf every day for everyone to see, there is lack of transparency about what the multinational milk processing companies pay Australian dairy farmers at the farm gate," the letter says. The Italian-owned Parmalat and the Japanese-owned National Foods are not very likely to worry too much about Australian farmers – after all, it was Australian governments which had allowed foreign companies (and continue to do so) to buy out Australian assets. It is crying over spilt milk, so to speak.

Trust the British to provide some light relief in a pretty grim situation. A British SAS unit was captured by insurgents in Libya as a junior diplomat who was also with them "tried to get into contact" with the government's opponents. In one sense the mission was successful as they did get into contact with the insurgents who proceeded to detain them and then kicked them out. Overt support by the West may play against the insurgents. But it is good to know that the proud traditions of the British "Carry On" films is valiantly played out by Mr Cameron and his government.

NSW state elections March 26

Vote left and progressive alternative

One of the big questions in the NSW state elections on March 26 is where disillusioned ALP voters direct their votes – to the Liberals and other extreme right-wing forces or to the Greens and other left and progressive candidates, including left ALP and Socialist Alliance candidates? Labor looks set for a crushing defeat after 16 years of unpopular, anti-people policies bathed in the stench of corruption.

The Communist Party of Australia and the Communist Alliance have decided not to stand candidates but instead work to help get as many left and progressive candidates as possible elected in order to build a force in Parliament that can help defend working people from Liberal and employer attacks after the election.

The CPA has decided that its members should work for the Greens, to help maximise their vote and increase the possibility of Greens being elected to the NSW Parliament.

In the Legislative Assembly (Lower House) the CPA recommends voting first for the Greens and then for best left and progressive candidates in their electorate.

In the Legislative Council (Upper House), the CPA recommends voting first for the Greens, second for Andrew Ferguson (number 6 on the ALP ticket), and then for Socialist Alliance candidates. This means that ballots will have to be filled out below the line and for at least 15 candidates. (See page 2 for details)

As in past elections the CPA recommends voting Labor before the Coalition parties and other ultra-right wing candidates.

The Communist Party of Australia sees the NSW elections as an opportunity to weaken the stranglehold of Labor and the Coalition parties – what is known as the two-party system – and begin building a left and progressive political alternative in the parliamentary sphere.

The Guardian interviewed three candidates in the forthcoming elections: Jamie Parker from the Greens who is standing in the Lower House seat of Balmain, Andrew Ferguson who will be number six on the ALP Upper House ticket and Peter Boyle who heads the Socialist Alliance ticket for the Upper House. They were asked what they see as the key issues in the state elections on March 26.

Jamie Parker

Jamie Parker has been active in social justice and environmental issues for many years and was elected the NSW President and subsequently the National Environment Officer of the National Union of Students. He studied economics at Macquarie University and later did a Masters Degree with Honours in political economy at the University of Sydney. When he left university he worked in The Greens Parliamentary Office for several years, then left to establish his own business. He was first elected to Leichhardt Council in 1999 and has been mayor since 2008. He has also served as the Convener of The Greens NSW:

“My family immigrated to Australia in the late 1960s after my father had sailed into Sydney harbour when working as an engineer in the merchant navy.

“My father’s first job was as a fitter at Balmain ferries shipyards and my mother, the daughter of a dock worker in Liverpool England, took up employment in the local factories.

“My childhood experience of strikes and the difficulties of a hard working family influenced by views on life and encouraged me to speak

out to challenge the exploitation of people and the environment.

“I am into my third year as the Mayor of Leichhardt Council and was first elected to Council in 1999. I’ve served the community in a range of roles including Deputy Mayor for several years and the Chair of the Council environment committee.

“In September 2008 the Greens received the highest vote of any party and I was elected with five other Greens (total of 6 out of 12 Councillors). We were successful due to our principled position on development and social issues while both the ALP and Liberals suffered from their previous decision to preference each other and share the Mayorality between themselves and an independent from 2004-2008.

“I am the first in my family to have attended university and have an undergraduate degree in Economics and a Master in political economy from the University of Sydney.

“I am a great supporter of APHEDA (the overseas humanitarian aid agency of the ACTU) and for over 15 years travelled to the Thai/Burma boarder to support the Burma Labour Solidarity Organisation which works with exploited Burmese migrant workers. I am also a founding member of the Australian Coalition for Democracy in Burma.

“I am committed to social change, protecting the environment and defending workers rights.

- “Some of my key priorities are:
- “Opposing the privatisation and economic rationalist agenda of both the ALP and Liberals which has seen not only electricity but lotteries and our waste services privatised. I was proud to be a strong defender of Sydney Ferries after the ALP government attempts to “market test” the ferry services. I proudly display the framed letter of appreciation from the workers at Sydney Ferries (AMWU, MUA and ASU) in my Council office recognising my support for the campaign.
 - “Stronger public services by investing in public health, education and transport services. It is clear that our community services and workers need support for a fairer NSW.
 - “Clean economy and green jobs by fast-tracking investment in renewable energy, not new coal, to tackle climate change, in order to transform the NSW economy and create new jobs.
 - “Investment in public transport by prioritising public transport investment instead of toll roads, shifting more freight onto rail and extending the light rail to the CBD.
 - “Defending workers and trade union rights is a key element of my priorities. With the likelihood of a Liberal government we need strong advocates to work with unions to defend trade union and workers’ rights. The Greens worked tirelessly against the Coalition’s WorkChoices and continue to oppose the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC). There is an urgent need to oppose (federal) harmonisation of occupational health and safety laws in NSW which would reduce the rights of union officials and reduce workers’ entitlements.
 - “Planning for people, not for profit, by repealing Part 3A planning laws that allow the Minister alone to decide on developments and putting the needs of



Jamie Parker

communities before big developers and corporate donors.

- “Cleaning up of NSW politics by banning political corporate donations, ending the culture of secrecy and delivering more open government. In NSW we need a government that serves people’s interests not vested interests.

“I am proud to have many unionists working on my campaign and have been encouraged by the level of support for our progressive agenda. I recently attended a Save Sydney Ferries rally where I signed Unions NSW’s “Better State Plan”. I have also committed myself to the “Support for TAFE 5 Point Pledge” promoted by the NSW Teachers’ Federation.

Andrew Ferguson

Andrew Ferguson is the Vice President of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union and has been a member of the Labor Party for 40 years. He worked with the CFMEU and its predecessor the Building Workers Industrial Union for 30 years – 10 years as union secretary. Prior to that he was a union organiser, organising workers across building sites in Sydney and regional NSW. He is standing as an ALP candidate for the NSW Upper House. Andrew is also well known for his solidarity work with struggles in Chile, in Colombia and in support of Cuba. When asked about the state elections, Andrew said:

“I have been a member of the Labor Party for nearly 40 years. I joined as a teenager. My federal local Member of Parliament was Tom Uren and I was inspired by his leadership of the anti-war movement. I observed a Member of

Parliament who made a significant contribution inside the Parliament as Minister for Urban and Regional Development in the Whitlam Labor government. I saw a government intervene in the market to help improve the quality of life of our cities and promote regional development. Equally important, I saw a Labor MP lead a mass movement ‘outside of the Parliament’ against the war in Vietnam.

“I saw a government purchase the Glebe Housing Estate to allow thousands of working class people to live in the inner city of Sydney, rather than being displaced to the periphery. I was active as a university student supporting the Green Bans of the Jack Munday BLF [Builders Labourers Federation]. I have a great interest in the quality of life of our cities. A big part of my interest is fighting for affordable housing, also fighting for a better public transport system. We need to build a mass movement to fight for a better Sydney.

“Inevitably coming from a union background I am dedicated to the issue of workers’ rights. I think there will be a conservative victory at the March 26 elections and we will be confronted with a Liberal Coalition government that attacks in particular the public sector. Protecting the jobs of public sector workers, their wages, working conditions and their job security will be a major challenge for the union movement and Labor MPs who are committed to workers’ rights. Voting inside the Parliament against the attacks is five percent of the responsibility. The big challenge is to organise mass opposition.

“We also expect in the private sector an attack upon the benefits for injured workers. Most workers in NSW now work under federal

“My childhood experience of strikes and the difficulties of a hard working family influenced by views on life and encouraged me to speak out to challenge the exploitation of people and the environment.”

Jamie Parker

“A big part of my interest is fighting for a better public transport system. to fight for a b

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Andrew Ferguson



Peter Boyle

awards but their workers' compensation entitlements are governed by state legislation. We are specifically concerned that the Liberal government will please the employers by abolishing protection for workers injured and or killed travelling to and from work. That is a major issue for shift workers who often suffer from fatigue and for workers who travel long distances to and from work. It is also a big issue for workers in the building trade who work long hours in a physically arduous industry, often driving to work and going home late at night in the dark.

"I am disappointed with the decision of the NSW Greens not to preference Labor. I was very critical of the Victorian branch of the Labor Party when they preferred Family First, and in fact assisted in the election of a conservative to the federal Senate. I think the Greens and the Labor Party need to recognise the importance of working together. We need to stop the Liberal Party, the Shooters' Party and the extreme Right from controlling the Upper House of the NSW Parliament. The reality is this decision by the Greens will help the Liberals to win a number of Lower House seats in the Parliament. It may also help the extreme right to control both houses of the Parliament.

"The last time the Liberals controlled both houses of [Federal] Parliament, we got WorkChoices and some of the worst workplace laws in the world. I think that the parties to the left of the Liberal Party need to recognise the importance of the movement rather than the narrow interests of their own party. The reality is some of the leaders of the Greens have no class politics. However, I urge all Green

voters and socialists to preference and work co-operatively."

When asked about his membership of the Labor Party Andrew said:

"I've often found my membership of the Labor Party frustrating. On some occasions I've thought of leaving the Labor Party and joining a left political party. However I made a decision to stay inside the Labor Party and to fight for a progressive agenda inside the Labor Party. I've seen the left of the Party and the union movement successfully campaign against privatisation of electricity. If there had been no struggle inside the Labor Party with the support of a struggle outside of the Labor Party we would have seen the complete privatisation of electricity, Sydney Ferries and many other public assets and services.

"If I'm elected to Parliament I don't regard my job as simply to speak and vote on issues in the Parliament. I'm interested in being a left political leader that is very active in the mass movement, be it at the workplace or in the community. I intend to make a difference and urge socialists to assist me being elected to the NSW Parliament.

Peter Boyle

Peter Boyle is the national convenor of the Socialist Alliance, and will be standing as the lead candidate on their Legislative Council ticket. The Socialist Alliance is running a full ticket of 21 candidates. Peter has spent most of his working life on the paper *Green Left Weekly* and before that at *Direct Action*. He has worked in a number of jobs, including for what used to be Telecom and as a metal worker

before becoming a full-time political activist. Peter outlined what the Socialist Alliance sees as the key election issues:

"We are running under the slogan 'NSW not for Sale', first of all making clear our opposition to the privatisation agenda which we see as the shared agenda of both the ALP and of the Coalition.

"More generally we are using this anti-privatisation message to highlight the perils of the whole profit orientation that lies behind it. That basically treats the assets of the state as something to be used to enhance corporate profit instead of enhancing the needs of the people of the state and most importantly, the future of our country in the face of the threat of climate change.

"So basically that's our slogan: 'New South Wales – Not For Sale! Community Need Not Corporate Greed!'

"We do use the privatisation of the power industry as the focus point for what we see as the most important issue to take to this election because we believe that it is very important that the power industry be kept in public hands. In fact we think the privatisation that has been carried out should be reversed in order to make a very dramatic investment in renewable energy resources to set the target of doing the transition in ten years to complete renewable energy.

"It has been shown that it is entirely technically possible today, in the NSW context, to achieve such a transition by building major solar and thermal power stations in the inland and banks of wind power along the coast. So we think there is a plan for this, it has been

put forward by the Beyond Zero Emissions campaign.

"We are also using it to point out that we are opposed to the market-based approach that the federal Labor government, together with Greens support, are trying to implement through the carbon pricing scheme.

"We don't believe it will achieve the necessary transfer of investment into renewable energy that is needed to meet the challenge.

"Just as importantly it will not guarantee, no market measure will guarantee, a just transition for all the workers whose jobs are in the coal and other fossil fuel-related sectors that should be protected. So we think if you leave this to the market you are going to jeopardise the future of a lot of people, consumers are going to be made to pay while the big corporations come with the hand out. So we say this scheme just doesn't work. Politically it won't work because it is alienating the majority of ordinary people and because of corporate interests who are blocking addressing climate change.

"We acknowledge that it is highly likely that we will have a Coalition government and we will be facing a big attack on workers' rights and jobs in the next few years. So we see our election campaign not just as electioneering but as part of a process of preparing broad alliances to help carry out the fightback based on workers and the workers' movements, fundamentally against the impending attacks." ✪

**for affordable housing, also fighting
We need to build a mass movement
better Sydney."**

Ferguson

**"We are running under the slogan 'NSW not for Sale', first of all making
clear our opposition to the privatisation agenda which we see as the
shared agenda of both the ALP and of the Coalition."**

Peter Boyle

Wis Gov believes he's following orders from the Lord

Matthew Rothschild

The dogmatic unwillingness of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker to negotiate or to compromise with Democrats or unions has surprised many people in the state. One explanation for his attitude may be found in his religious convictions.

In a talk to the Christian Businessmen's Committee in the capital Madison on November 13, 2009, Walker, who was raised by a Baptist preacher, spoke about his personal relationship with God, his "walk to Christ," and his belief in the need to "trust and obey" the Lord.

He told the group that when he was 13, he committed himself to Jesus. "I said, 'Lord, I'm ready ... not just in front of my Church and the world but most importantly at the foot of your Throne, I'm ready to follow you each and every day ... I'm going to trust in you Christ to tell me where to go. And to the best of my ability I'm going to obey where you lead me,' and that has made all the difference in the world to me, for good times and bad."

Walker said that God has told him what to do every step of the way, including about what jobs to take, whom to marry, and when to run for governor.

When he had first met his wife, he said, "That night I heard Christ tell me, 'This is the person you're going to be with.'"

He said he was trusting and obeying God when he took a job at IBM and then at the Red Cross. "Lord, if this is what you want, I'll try it," he said. It was all about "trust and obey."

Then he recalled how he got into the race for governor in 2006, only to withdraw, which he said was a difficult decision.

"My wife and I prayed on it," he said. "I remember feeling so torn: I just didn't want to let people down. I said, 'Lord, I can't do this. I can't let people down.'"

But he says he found divine guidance from the daily devotion, which "was about a guy who was a sailor.



Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker.

One of his buddies came along, they were in choppy waters, and the guy was throwing up. He was told, stop looking at the waves, find a point on the horizon. And he did this and it worked."

Walker explains the meaning: "I was focused all too much on the choppy waters of my life, about how uneasy it would be to look people in the face. I wasn't trusting and obeying my Saviour. That morning Christ said to me through that devotion, 'This is what you're going to do. Look at me. Find that point on the horizon, and you're going to be just fine.'"

He added: "God had a plan further down the road. Little did I know I just had to trust in Christ and obey what he calls me to do and that was going to work out."

He then qualified that statement a little: "I don't mean that means it's going to work out for a win ... I don't believe God picks sides in politics. I believe God calls us to be on His side."

He urged everyone in the room "to turn your life over 100 percent to what Christ tells you what to do."

Once you do that, he said, your life will be complete:

"The way to be complete in life is to fully and unconditionally turn your life over to Christ as your personal lord and saviour and to make sure that every step of every day is one that you trust and obey, and keep

looking out to the horizon to the path that Christ is calling you to follow and know that ultimately he's going to take you home both here at home and ultimately far beyond."

Fourteen months later, at his inaugural prayer breakfast, Walker said, "The Great Creator, no matter who you worship, is the one from which our freedoms are derived, not the government."

Walker's views disturb Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

"It is frightening that the highest executive in our state suffers from the delusion that God dictates his every move," she says. "Consider the personal and historic devastation inflicted by fanatics who think they are acting in the name of their deity." *The Progressive* ✪

On the brink of meltdown: The Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant

Robert Alvarez

In the aftermath of the largest earthquake to occur in Japan in recorded history, 5,800 residents living within 12 kilometres of six reactors at the Fukushima nuclear station have been advised to evacuate and people living within 35 kilometres of the plant are advised to remain indoors.

Plant operators have not been able to cool down the core of one reactor containing enormous amounts of radioactivity because of failed back-up diesel generators required for the emergency cooling.

In a race against time, the power company and the Japanese military are flying in nine emergency generators. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the US Air Force has provided cooling water for the troubled reactor.

The plant was operating at full power when the quake hit and even though control rods were automatically inserted to halt the nuclear reaction, the reactor core remains very hot. If emergency cooling isn't restored, the risks of a core melt, and release of radioactivity into the environment is significantly increased. Also, it's not clear if piping and electrical distribution systems inside the plant have been damaged. If so, that would interfere with reactor cooling.

A senior US nuclear power

technician said the window of time before serious problems arise is between 12 and 24 hours.

Early on, Japanese nuclear officials provided reassurances that no radiation had been released. However, because the reactor remains at a very high temperature, radiation levels are rising on the turbine building – forcing the plant operators to vent radioactive steam into the environment.

The devastating Japanese quake and its outcome could generate a political tsunami here in the United States. For instance, it may become impossible for the owners of the San Onofre and Diablo Canyon reactors to extend their operating.

These two California reactors are sitting in high seismic risk zones near earthquake faults. Each is designed to withstand a quake as great as 7.5 on the Richter scale. According to many seismologists, the probability of a major earthquake in the California coastal zone in the foreseeable future is a near certainty. The US Geological Survey reports the largest registering 8.3 on the Richter scale devastated San Francisco in 1906.

"There have been tremblers felt at US plants over the past several years, but nothing approaching the need for emergency action," Scott Burnell, a spokesman at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission told Reuters.

As the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe

approaches next month, Japan's earthquake serves as a reminder of the risks of nuclear power, when things go seriously wrong. The Chernobyl accident required nearly a million emergency responders and cleanup workers. More than 100,000 residents from 187 settlements were permanently evacuated because of radioactive contamination. And an area equal to half of the State of New Jersey was rendered uninhabitable.

Fortunately, US and Japanese reactors have extra measures of protection that were lacking at Chernobyl, such as a secondary concrete containment structure over the reactor vessel to prevent escape of radioactivity. In 1979, the containment structure at the Three Mile Island reactor did prevent the escape of a catastrophic amount of radioactivity after the core melted. But people living nearby were exposed to higher levels of radiation from the accident and deliberate venting to stabilise the reactor. Within one hour, the multi-billion dollar investment in that plant went down the drain.

Meanwhile, let us hope that the core of the Japanese reactor can be cooled in time. We should not need yet another major nuclear power accident to wake up the public and decision-makers to the fact that there are better and much safer ways to make electricity. *IPS* ✪

India: Tea workers celebrate IWD

Over 1,000 people came to the Nowera Nuddy tea estate on March 8 to celebrate International Women's Day 2011. With more than 18 months of struggle to resolve a dispute that started over the right to maternity leave, women on the estate know first-hand the importance of campaigning for their rights in the workplace.

The event was kicked off by an introduction to International Women's Day and its history – 2011 marks the 100th anniversary of this of the first march celebrating a struggle whose roots are in the socialist labour movement. This was followed by traditional songs and dances of the Indigenous Adivasi tea community with a film about organising women workers in a spice factory in rural India.

Women workers and women activists spoke about women's struggle against discrimination and violence and for dignity and equality. Two women workers spoke

about how their campaign and struggle over the last 18 months had given them the confidence to speak out in public and how they have resolved to continue their struggle until their demands are won.

- The Nowera Nuddy workers and their union continue to demand:
- Payment of full wages and rations to all workers for the period the plantation was closed from mid-September through mid-December 2009;
 - Reinstatement of Sudhir Xalxo and Kishor Toppo, the two workers terminated for their alleged roles in the protest surrounding the mistreatment of the pregnant Mrs Oraon;
 - Withdrawal in writing of the management police complaints which led to the criminal charges against 12 workers;
 - A letter of apology and compensation to Mrs Oraon. ✪

Gaza truckers protest Israel's commercial crossing closure

Rami Almeghari

On March 2 Israel announced the complete closure of Karni, the principal commercial crossing into the Gaza Strip, prompting protests by Palestinian traders who rely on the crossing to bring goods into the territory.

Karni, known by Palestinians as al-Muntar, has functioned intermittently for the past 16 years, since Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation signed the Oslo accords in 1993.

The Gaza Strip has four crossings through which vital supplies can be brought in from Israel – Sufa, Nahal Oz, Kerem Shalom and Karni. Only Kerem Shalom, a small crossing located right at the south of Gaza, is allowed by Israel to function to capacity.

Nahal Oz, east of Gaza City, and Sufa in the southeast, have been kept shut by Israel almost without exception since Israel tightened its siege of the territory almost five years ago, severely choking the commodities available to Gaza's 1.5 million residents. Sufa was briefly reopened last week to allow for the transfer of a small amount of construction materials for a UN crossing.

"The closure of Karni further tightens the blockade of Gaza and makes us lose hope that the siege will ever be eased," Dr. Maher al-Tabaa of Gaza's chamber of commerce said. "Israel's makeshift crossing at Kerem Shalom does not handle large shipments of goods and Kerem Shalom's capacity amounts to only about 10 or 20 percent of Karni's," al-Tabaa added.

In 2006, after Hamas decisively won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in the occupied Gaza Strip and West Bank, Israel began to close Karni from time to time, reducing the flow of goods into Gaza. In 2007, after Hamas ousted US-supported militias loyal to Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah party, Israel tightened the siege even further.

According to al-Tabaa, Karni – which is best equipped to handle Gaza's once-thriving export and import trade – has received only essential goods like wheat and animal fodder.

"Karni crossing, Gaza's largest, has the capacity to handle 500 truckloads of imports and 250 truckloads of exports daily. It is close to Gaza City and controlled by Palestinian officials. Yet with [Israel's] imposition of the blockade on Gaza in 2007, Israel has directed many shipments to the makeshift Kerem Shalom crossing which is 30 kilometres from Gaza City," al-Tabaa said.

The extra distance that the few goods allowed in to Gaza must travel imposes major additional costs on local traders. Dozens of Gaza truck drivers have protested against the closure and the high customs fees they are charged, by parking their trucks at the Palestinian side of the crossing.

Transactions between Palestinian traders and their Israeli counterparts have carried on for decades, but this trade has been severely affected by political developments. In order to travel to Israel to do business, for example, merchants from Gaza must

obtain special Israeli permits which Israel can delay or refuse to issue at any time.

Traders will now be forced to pay higher costs and wait longer times for shipments to enter Gaza due to the closure of Karni, according to the chamber of commerce's al-Tabaa.

Truck drivers strike at Kerem Shalom

On March 9 scores of truck drivers gathered at Sufa crossing which Israel reopened to allow for the transfer of concrete for a housing project being built by UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestine refugees. But according to the Private Courier Companies Association, only ten truckloads were allowed in.

Nahed Shehaibar, a spokesperson for the association, told *The Electronic Intifada* that he and hundreds of other truck drivers have been on strike at Kerem Shalom crossing in the south since the previous weekend, but many drove up to Sufa to help transfer the cement which is in devastatingly short supply.

"We are heading back to Kerem Shalom to continue our protest at the closure of Karni and the skyrocketing customs imposed jointly by Israel and the Palestinian Authority [in Ramallah] for the transfer of shipments," Shehaibar said after having overseen the movement of the ten truckloads of cement.

"Customs fees at Karni were approximately \$100 per truckload, but at Kerem Shalom they are approximately \$500," Shehaibar said. "That's why we will keep striking."

The Electronic Intifada ✪



No-fly zone: An act of war

"If it is ordered, we can do it. ...And let's just call a spade a spade: a no-fly zone begins with an attack on Libya to destroy the air defences. That's the way you do a no-fly zone".

That was US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates explaining what a no-fly zone is.

A no-fly zone is a territory over which aircraft are not permitted to fly. In Australia, for example there is a no-fly zone over the Pine Gap Joint Military Facility – no Australian aircraft is allowed to fly over what is really a US military base.

During high-level international meetings a no-fly zone may be temporarily established for security reasons. After the event the restrictions are removed.

What Robert Gates talked about is different. A no-fly zone in relation to Libya is an act of aggression against a sovereign state. In other words, an act of war.

It is not the first time the US and its clique of followers have tried to invoke "humanitarian" concerns in order to pursue their political and military goals.

Iraq is a recent example where this tactic was used.

In 1991, claiming a false authority under UN Security Resolution 688, the USA, UK and France started to patrol the skies over northern Iraq, thus excluding Iraqi planes from this zone. A second no-fly zone was established several months later in southern Iraq. France eventually withdrew from the no-fly zone process while the US and Britain continued. Maybe this

is why the current French president is so keen to be at the forefront of establishing a no-fly zone for Libya.

In Iraq, the US-UK no-fly zone turned into an aggressive operation after 1998, with regular bombing of ground targets and substantial civilian casualties.

We all know what happened to Iraq – it has been bombed into the Middle Ages with hundreds of thousands killed and wounded, thousands made refugees, its infrastructure destroyed and a puppet government propped up by the USA established.

The Iraqi people are rising in protests against corruption and poverty but the mass media hardly reports this. Seven people were killed in Iraqi Kurdistan recently as they were protesting against official corruption and poverty. Again, no news coverage of those protests.

Last week in Yemen protesters were gassed – according to doctors treating the victims, it was some kind of nerve gas, not tear gas usually used to disperse crowds. Again, no indignant speeches from western powers. In Egypt people are being killed once again and Egyptian Christians murdered.

The US and its allies are not interested in any humanitarian outcomes – that is not the name of the game. Preserving capitalism and super profits by exploiting, pillaging and thieving was, is and will be the aim.

The US is in deep economic crisis and is really looking to engage some patshies in paying for it. It cost the US \$1.4 billion to maintain a no-fly zone in northern Iraq. ✪

Global actions, backlash during Israeli Apartheid Week

The 7th annual Israeli Apartheid Week launched last Friday with more than 75 cities across six continents participating in educational events and direct actions in support of the Palestinian-led boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.

With events taking place from Boston to Zurich, Durban to Perth, and Montreal to Gaza City, on college campuses and in conference halls, thousands of activists, students and analysts are strengthening anti-apartheid solidarity networks while calling attention to the ongoing struggle for Palestinian liberation.

The Israeli Apartheid Week coordination website (apartheidweek.org) says that these annual events "have highlighted the role that could be played by people and governments across the world in providing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle by exerting urgent pressure on Israel to alter its current structure and practices as an apartheid state."

Since its launch by the Arab Student's Collective at the University of Toronto, Canada in 2005 – following the call by 170 Palestinian civil society groups for a global boycott movement – Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) has

played an important role in unifying opposition movements against Israeli apartheid.

Worldwide events include lectures by prominent Palestinian activists, poets, academics and analysts, as well as a myriad of direct actions, such as mock Israeli checkpoints, protests and concerts centred around expanding anti-apartheid activism.

Arab participation in IAW

In Beirut, hundreds are participating in this week's IAW events.

Hazem Jamjoum is a contributor to *The Electronic Intifada* and a founding member of IAW. As a current graduate student at the American University of Beirut and an organiser with this year's second annual marking of the global week of action in Lebanon, he said that IAW's expansion can be seen as a barometer to measure the growth of the global BDS movement over the last six years.

"IAW is generally organised by the youth wing of the BDS movement," Jamjoum said. "What this year's IAW events mean is that the younger generation has adopted an approach that sees Israel as an apartheid state and a colonial project in addition to the ongoing

occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands. This has become the base analysis to inform their BDS action strategies."

Jamjoum said that South African anti-apartheid activist Salim Vally opened the schedule in Beirut by giving an analysis of Israel from his perspective. He was followed by Lebanese activist Rania Masri who talked about the boycott movement as a vehicle against global and local neoliberalism. For International Women's Day, Jamjoum said that iconic Palestinian freedom fighter Leila Khaled spoke at an event with Hana Ibrahim, an Iraqi anti-occupation activist.

Specifically, the Palestinian experience in Lebanon is a major highlight of this week's IAW events. With widespread denial of civil rights to Palestinian refugees, including the prevention of refugees to work or own property, Jamjoum said that IAW lectures and actions will confront these various "taboo subjects" in Lebanon. Discussions about the current state of anti-government revolts in the broader Arab world are also planned for this week, incorporating local social movements for justice and self-determination into the broader regional conversation.

The Electronic Intifada ✪

Sydney

The Fight for Workers' Rights in Chile

The Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union, Amigos de Cuba and the Pablo Neruda Cultural Association are organising a tour to Sydney of Cristian Cuevas, President of the Confederation of Copper Workers in Chile.



Cristian is also a member of the Executive of the CUT – Confederation of Workers of Chile (equivalent of the ACTU) and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Chile. He led the 2007 strike of sub-contract workers at Codelco.

Saturday April 23
Casa Latina, Hut 47,
142 Addison Road, Marrickville
12.30pm Concert and BBQ
3pm Forum, *Workers' Rights and the Challenge for the Left in Chile*

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Experiments in torture

Last week came the news from Japan that excavations are taking place in Tokyo to retrieve the remains of the victims of the most horrific biological and medical experiments ever performed during WWII. Chinese, Korean, Russian prisoners of war and civilians were carved up alive and dissected, frozen to death, infected with viruses – and all that was performed by doctors and surgeons. Some of them were tried after the war; many escaped retribution in exchange for their “research” which was taken to the USA. It was the notorious Unit 731 which was responsible for that.

The role of doctors in wars and armed conflicts does not seem to be too complicated – they are supposed to provide assistance to the wounded and in return enjoy a certain degree of protection from the armed protagonists. However things are not always as simple as that.

Recently there were reports accusing the Guantanamo administration of carrying out medical experiments on the inmates there. It is not surprising that calls for accountability at US detention centres and the role of medical personnel present in interrogation cells is now under scrutiny.

A Physicians for Human Rights report last year accused the former Bush administration of conducting illegal and unethical experiments on prisoners in CIA custody.

Former detainees who had survived the detention are reluctantly starting to tell their stories – and many of them are as horrific as the ones the older veterans of WWII had experienced.

Tarek Dergoul, a British resident held in Bagram, Kandahar (Afghanistan) and later Guantanamo was caught up in a US strike in Afghanistan. The injuries he sustained led to an arm amputation. Four weeks later he was captured by Afghans and sold to the Americans for \$500. He finished up in Bagram and during his five weeks there he got only one dose of painkillers despite being in terrible pain all the time. He even asked the British security personnel during his interrogation to help him. They refused.

In all those places medical personnel was present and their complicity in abuse and torture should become public.

Mati English
Sydney

Deaths in custody Senate inquiry needed

The Australian Senate knocks out one Senate inquiry after another, such as the Senate Inquiry on Changes to Australian Noise Exposure Forecasts. Some homes have been insulated to minimise airport “noise”. My God, on a needs-first basis what should have been called first? Where is the Senate inquiry into Australian Deaths in Custody?

We have one of the world’s most horrific records. April 15 will be the 20 year anniversary of the Final Report and its 339 recommendations from the 1987 to 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. There is little to celebrate 20 years later; there are more deaths in custody, an increasing prison population and Aboriginal disadvantage and Australian inter-generational poverty have not been eliminated.

I am doing my PhD (Law) from a criminological aspect into the extensiveness of Australia’s deaths in custody. There have been 2,056 deaths in custody, police and prisons, between 1980 to 2008. Add another around 160 since. Deaths in custody have increased to a national average of 77 per year. I, and others, including the Australian Human Rights Commission, according to outgoing Race and Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes, have campaigned for Australian Senators to initiate an inquiry.

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write a letter to the Editor

Many of us are calling for a Joint Senate inquiry with the inclusion of experts on the Committee. It is disgraceful, and it is discrimination and racism, that the Australian Senate can have inquiries on just about everything that can improve the lives of people who are pretty much the “haves”. It is well overdue for Senate inquiries into Australian Deaths in Custody; to remedy the treatment of our asylum seekers; to eliminate homelessness; to support the inter-generationally poor; to unveil the racial layers in pursuit of the advancement of Aboriginal peoples. Any Senate Committee must include expert panellists.

We will continue to pursue the Australian Senate to initiate an inquiry into Australian Deaths in Custody. I call upon our 76 Australian Senators to focus on a triage basis, on a needs first basis, from the most downtrodden upwards and find the moral propriety to call for the inquiry.

Gerry Georgatos
Convener
Human Rights Alliance

All the way with Obama

It’s sometimes said that there’s not much new under the sun. When watching the nightly news reports of Julia Gillard pledging allegiance to the American Empire, my thoughts go back to 1966 when the then Prime Minister Harold Holt was telling us, we are all the way with LBJ.

That was President Lyndon Baines Johnson and the war was Vietnam. That war took the lives of five hundred young Australians, mostly enforced conscripts. Many more died later from war related causes.

Anti-war demonstrations had been going on for nearly two years and culminated with the moratorium campaigns in 1970.

Ron Barrett.
Sydney

Culture & Life

by

Giedre Steikunaite

The beauty myth... and madness

“Our aims aren’t modest. They are ambitious,” said psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, writer and social critic Susie Orbach at the opening of the recent Endangered Species Summit in London. “We want girls and women to see their bodies as a place they live from, not as a complicated place of fear.” Endangered Species: Preserving the Female Body is an international summit to challenge the toxic culture that teaches women and girls to hate their bodies.

“The human body is now a product,” said photographer Wendy Hicks. “So we buy and sell ourselves, constantly remake our bodies, blindly believing we are ‘improving’ them. This commercial exploitation of the body has become a norm; once normalised in a society, it’s taken for granted. The funny thing is, we’re desperately trying to live up to a fantasy – and a fantasy, by definition, does not exist.”

So why are we doing it? Because we’ve been sold a myth, a beauty

myth. And because it makes somebody very, very rich. “People without problems are not commercially viable,” said Rosi Prescott, CEO of YMCA. A happy person is a bad consumer. Thus, a business lesson: create a problem, convince me I have it, and then sell me the solution – voilà!

Indeed, the world has gone mad: a *Grazia* magazine poll found that an average British woman worries about the size and shape of her body every 15 minutes; a Harvard University study found that only a tiny one percent of women are completely happy with their body; in the US, 8 to 12-year-old girls are the biggest growing market, spending \$40 million a month on cosmetics. Having smelled more profits, the Walmart megachain is launching its new Geogirl cosmetics line, dedicated exclusively to young girls; everywhere you look, you are bombarded with images of “perfect” bodies – and looking back to one’s own *real* body only brings about misery and self-loathing.

The fantasy world wins.

Of course, men are not immune to this. But the pressure on women to look a certain way is much more intense.

Corporal colonisation

The problem is not limited to the Global North. “Body hatred is becoming one of the West’s hidden exports,” Orbach wrote in her book *Bodies*. It’s a new form of corporal colonisation. “We’re sending body hatred all around the world,” she said at Endangered Species.

The (fake) Western image of “beauty” has been successfully enforced all across the globe – from poisonous skin-whitening treatments in India to surgical nose corrections in Iran. “We are living in Marshal McLuhan’s global village, sharing many of the same images worldwide. They become identity markers, framing our streets, our magazines, our look, providing a sense of continuity in a befuddling and fast-changing environment,” Orbach wrote in *Bodies*.

Sharon Haywood has lived in Argentina for seven years. She says its visual culture is contaminated with massive ads of women in lingerie in



sexualised poses, billboards depicting older men in suits and half naked young women next to them... you get the picture. Haywood says Argentine women tend to identify with Western models (*Sex and the City* type), not with their Latin culture; it’s an atmosphere of competition under the all-powerful neoliberal agenda.

Argentina is also a country which has the second-highest rate of eating disorders in the world, where cosmetic surgery is often covered by health insurance, and 70 percent of women can’t find fashionable clothes in their size.

Faced with pressure from women’s organisations, in 2005 Argentina passed its first Size Law, which requires retailers to stock all items in sizes 38 to 48 (UK 10-20/US 8-18). But only around one in five stores bothers to comply with it – and even those only partly. They argue it’s too expensive.

As a result, there are very few “women-friendly” stores in Buenos Aires, Haywood says. In Argentina, “we are slaves to image. Appearances are more important than who a person is. We have to look a certain way, be a certain person. This is our cultural imperative,” she quoted Dr Mabel Bello of Argentina’s Association Against Bulimia and Anorexia.

Fightback!

There have already been victories: an anti-wrinkle cream advert featuring heavily photoshopped Twiggy was withdrawn for misleading audiences;

clothing chain Primark withdrew padded bikinis for seven year olds after parents’ outrage; some fashion players pledged to include more “size plus” models...

But it’s not enough. In a heart-breaking video, young women are asked what they like most about their natural selves. Confused silence is followed by an uncertain “I don’t know...” Surely there’s something wrong with a culture which treats its people like that?

The trouble is, even if we know all those images of “perfect women” (and six-pack-belly men) are airbrushed, they still affect us. “A study by the American Psychological Association found that after three minutes spent looking at a fashion magazine, 70 percent of women felt ‘depressed, guilty, and ashamed,’” wrote Johann Hari in the *Independent*.

Constant exposure to perfected images results in body dissatisfaction; but, as Kirsten de la Horra’s research shows, warning labels on altered images, such as “Smoking Kills” on cigarette packs, do not have a significant influence. Perhaps stating “This model is 10 kilograms underweight” or “Her skin was perfected with computer software” would work?

But these are only crumbs. “When interviewing young girls I found that they felt there was just no alternative, only the mainstream image,” said Natasha Walter, author of *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*. “It’s an issue of diversity: you’re in trouble if

you can’t see your own reflection out there; it affects you negatively. We have to mainstream the ‘alternative’ (ie the *real* image).”

Beauty? No thanks

Has body become our only asset? Many of us are forced to think so. A beautiful body, that is – whatever that means. But why are we so obsessed with it? “I have an issue with beauty. There’s so much more to women than that,” said Kiki Kendrick, writer, producer, and head of the Liberated Theatre. It was a really brave statement. Not a very popular one, though.

And all the things we do to ourselves to “look better” which will magically make us “feel better”... For Kendrick, it’s the Matryoshka case: the smallest doll (and best-hidden) is the real you, while others are only masks. If they are smashed, we feel vulnerable – so we keep quiet and carry on.

And then, of course, there is money. “Tell a woman she’s old, fat and ugly, and she’ll spend a fortune to look thin, young and beautiful. Tell a woman she’s perfectly fine, and she won’t spend a penny,” Kendrick says. Beauty industries would prefer it if you are never completely satisfied, because when you are, you won’t want more. Similarly, the diet industry breeds on body hatred. Ironically, it gets fat on our failure.

The best thing about the beauty myth? It is only a myth. Only a myth. *New Internationalist* ☺



Sun 20 March –
Sat 26 March

The first series of *Whitechapel*, shown last year, starred Rupert Penry-Jones as a well-bred rising star of the police service being fast-tracked towards some high administrative office. This socially desirable career path was derailed when he was parachuted into a gritty unimpressed team of career coppers just in time for an outbreak of copycat Jack the Ripper murders.

By the time the case was wrapped up, Penry-Jones' character had proven himself to the team, and he himself had decided to forego the illustrious career in favour of remaining a relatively humble but real DI.

The series was made by Carnival Films for British commercial network ITV. When the first series (about a Jack the Ripper copycat) was a success, they must have decided that a suitable subject for a second series would have to be similar. In the way of commercial television, they have plumped for a Kray Brothers copycat.

Ronnie and Reggie Kray were the leading gangsters of the East End of London in the 1960s, noted for their violence and ruthlessness. A couple of "hard men" in the worst way.

Having now used up the two most notorious London killers, I can only think that should *Whitechapel* run to a

third series writer Ben Court is going to have trouble finding an appropriate subject for his next "copycat" to emulate.

In the meantime we have series two (ABC1 Fridays from March 25 at 9.30 pm), and I must say I simply could not get with it. Penry-Jones and Phil Davis return as the two main coppers with Steve Pemberton as the amateur "London killers" expert who contributes his not always welcome advice, but even more than in series one, the new series lacks human warmth, which makes the drama sterile and for me at least tending towards tedious.

It was inevitable that BBC Earth, having spent 50 years making outstanding programs about Nature, would eventually make a series about the most successful animal on the planet: humans. That series is *Human Planet* (ABC1 Sundays from March 20 at 7.30 pm).

In eight episodes, narrated by John Hurt, the series concentrates on indigenous people having a close and often profound relationship with nature. Each episode focuses on a particular habitat and the ways humans have found to overcome or take advantage of the natural extremes of that habitat.

In the first episode, Inuit beyond the Arctic Circle capture and kill a four metre Arctic Shark on a baited line that goes some 800 metres straight down under the ice. Little is known about any of the deep ocean sharks. The Japanese fish for them assiduously as though they can last forever, but we know (or should know by now) how mistaken that approach is.

While this program shows our Inuit hunters crowing about how this is the biggest Arctic shark they have ever seen, it never raises the question of whether they will see any more in the future, or whether fishing for deep

ocean sharks should be phased out or at least restricted.

The assumption seems to be that Indigenous people are doing it, so it must be all right. Elsewhere in the Arctic, Canadian Inuit hunt the tusked whale, the harmless Narwhal. But they are restricted by law: they must use traditional methods (kayaks and hand harpoons) so as not to deplete the stocks of the animals. It is an interesting contrast.

The most goose-bump raising sequence however is the search for mussels *on foot under the sea ice* in a brief period when the tide is at its lowest. I don't think any shell-fish would be worth the risk!

It's a fascinating program that would have been even more valuable if it had included some historical background on why humans chose to live in some of these inhospitable regions.

The Canadian-made *Reel Injuns* (ABC2 Sunday March 20 at 8.00 pm) is a survey of the changing ways Hollywood has depicted Native Americans over the decades since the beginning of the 20th century.

In the early years of Hollywood, there were plenty of genuine "Red Indians" on the scene, working as



extras in the fledgling movie industry. Every studio had a ranch with its own stock of horses and a collection of authentic vintage wagons, coaches and sulkies, culled from the surrounding district.

Westerns were popular, as they could be shot outdoors, taking advantage of California's prevailing sunshine. The portrait they presented of the Native Americans however was strictly from a white perspective.

And while real Native Americans might be able to be extras, with only a couple of exceptions, any Indian who had a significant part had to be played by a white actor in make-up. The exceptions were so rare they could not be seen as any sort of threat and so were adopted by white society and fêted at elegant soirées.

Ironically, when one of these early "Native American" stars was discovered to be of mixed race (Native American, White and – gulp – Black) the resulting scandal was going to be so great he committed suicide.

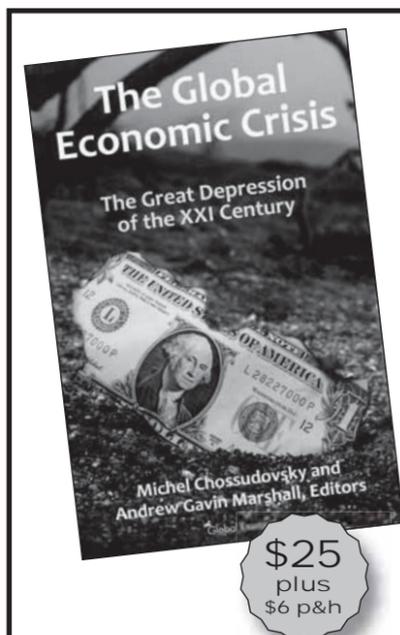
Meanwhile, Hollywood went on treating the American Indian the same way it treated Africans in Tarzan movies: as natural hazards like crocodiles. The few movies that tried to show the genuine plight of the Indigenous Americans, albeit with a generous

dollop of sentimentality, could not compete with the tidal wave of shoot 'em up excitement in movies where the Injuns were just a generalised foe to be thwarted, defeated or somehow overcome, in order to make the West safe for civilisation and to Build America!

Written and directed by Native American filmmaker Neil Diamond, *Reel Injuns* looks at the contributions to creating and perpetuating phoney myths about the true history of the American West by people as diverse as director John Ford, actor John Wayne, actor/director Clint Eastwood and assorted other actors, poets, hippies and activists.

One sequence that stands out is the account of the splendid moment when Marlon Brando, told that he would be receiving an Oscar, asked a Native American woman activist to go up on stage and *reject it* on his behalf in protest at the way Hollywood had portrayed her people over the years and the way the US government was still treating them (it was at the time of the Wounded Knee killings by the FBI).

"John Wayne had to be forcibly restrained," she says. "He wanted to come up on stage and strangle me." ✪



The Global Economic Crisis The Great Depression of the XXI Century

Editors: Michel Chossudovsky and Andres Gavin Marshall
Publisher: Global Research, 390 pages

This just published compilation of articles by 16 researchers, authors and others on the left gives a comprehensive analysis of the present economic crisis. The book is divided into five parts: The Global Economic Crisis; Global Poverty; War, National Security and World Government; The Global Monetary System; and The Shadow Banking System.

The book is rich with detailed information that digs beneath the surface and exposes the lies and distortions of media, politicians and bourgeois economists. The language is very accessible, technical terms are explained clearly. Links are made between the economic, political, military and social developments. It exposes the myth of economic recovery, who was behind the crisis, who benefits and the horrendous impact it has had on millions of people around the world.

It is a must read for political activists, trade unionists, peace activists and anyone else wishing to learn more about the global economic crisis and 21st century imperialism.

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POLITICS in the pub

March 18

US/AUSTRALIAN FREE TRADE TREATY – ANOTHER ALMIGHTY DECEPTION?

Pat Ranald, Research Associate Sydney Uni and Campaigner Australian Fair Trade & Investment Network;
Jane Kelsey, Professor of Law, Auckland Uni, NZ

March 25

NO MEETING

NSW State election eve

April 1

PRISON LAW REFORM – THE NEW CAMPAIGN

John Dowd, Chancellor, Southern Cross Uni, former NSW Attorney General,
Brett Collins, Coordinator Justice Action

April 8

THE NSW STATE ELECTION – AN ANALYSIS

Jamie Parker, Mayor Leichardt & Greens Candidate for Balmain Electorate;
Jo-Anne Schofield, Catalyst (Left Think Tank)

April 15

SRI LANKA – DESCENT INTO DICTATORSHIP

Bruce Haigh, Centre Peace & Conflict Studies;
Bani Jagan, Convenor Human Rights Project at CPACS, Sydney Uni.

April 22

NO MEETING

Easter

April 29

THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL SYSTEM – WHAT IS HAPPENING AND HOW WILL IT AFFECT AUSTRALIA?

Stephen Long, ABC economic correspondent;
Gerard Minack, Morgan Stanley/Research.

Every Friday 6pm 'til 7.45

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How the so-called guardians of free speech are silencing the messenger

John Pilger

As the United States and Britain look for an excuse to invade another oil-rich Arab country, the hypocrisy is familiar. Colonel Gaddafi is "delusional" and "blood-drenched" while the authors of an invasion that killed a million Iraqis, who have kidnapped and tortured in our name, are entirely sane, never blood-drenched and once again the arbiters of "stability".

But something has changed. Reality is no longer what the powerful say it is. Of all the spectacular revolts across the world, the most exciting is the insurrection of knowledge sparked by WikiLeaks.

This is not a new idea. In 1792, the revolutionary Tom Paine warned his readers in England that their government believed that "people must be hoodwinked and held in superstitious ignorance by some bugbear or other". Paine's *The Rights of Man* was considered such a threat to elite control that a secret grand jury was ordered to charge him with "a dangerous and treasonable conspiracy". Wisely, he sought refuge in France.

The ordeal and courage of Tom Paine is cited by the Sydney Peace Foundation in its award of Australia's human rights Gold Medal to Julian Assange. Like Paine, Assange is a maverick who serves no system and is threatened by a secret grand jury, a malicious device long abandoned in England but not in the United States. If extradited to the US, he is likely to disappear into the Kafkaesque world that produced the Guantanamo Bay nightmare and now accuses Bradley Manning, WikiLeaks' alleged whistleblower, of a capital crime.

Should Assange's current British appeal fail against his extradition to Sweden, he will probably, once charged, be denied bail and held incommunicado until his trial in secret. The case against him has already been dismissed by a senior prosecutor in Stockholm and given new life only when a right-wing politician, Claes Borgstrom, intervened and made public statements about Assange's "guilt".

Borgstrom, a lawyer, now represents the two women involved. His law partner is Thomas Bodstrom, who as Sweden's minister for justice in 2001, was implicated in the handover of two innocent Egyptian refugees to a CIA kidnap squad at Stockholm airport. Sweden later awarded them damages for their torture.

These facts were documented in an Australian parliamentary

briefing in Canberra on March 2. Outlining an epic miscarriage of justice threatening Assange, the enquiry heard expert evidence that, under international standards of justice, the behaviour of certain officials in Sweden would be considered "highly improper and reprehensible [and] preclude a fair trial".

A former senior Australian diplomat, Tony Kevin, described the close ties between the Swedish prime minister Frederic Reinfeldt, and the Republican right in the US. "Reinfeldt and [George W] Bush are friends," he said. Reinfeldt has attacked Assange publicly and hired Karl Rove, the former Bush crony, to advise him. The implications for Assange's extradition to the US from Sweden are dire.

The Australian enquiry was ignored in the UK, where black farce is currently preferred. On March 3, the UK *Guardian* announced that Stephen Spielberg's Dream Works was to make "an investigative thriller in the mould of *All the President's Men*" out of its book *WikiLeaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy*. I asked David Leigh, who wrote the book with Luke Harding, how much Spielberg had paid the *Guardian* for the screen rights and what he expected to make personally.

"No idea," was the puzzling reply of the *Guardian's* "investigations editor". The *Guardian* paid WikiLeaks nothing for its treasure trove of leaks. Assange and WikiLeaks – not Leigh or Harding – are responsible for what the *Guardian's* editor, Alan Rusbridger, calls "one of the greatest journalistic scoops of the last 30 years".

The *Guardian* has made clear it has no further use for Assange. He is a loose cannon who did not fit Guardianworld, who proved a tough, unclubbable negotiator. And brave. In the *Guardian's* self-regarding book, Assange's extraordinary bravery is excised. He becomes a figure of petty bemusement, an "unusual Australian" with a "frizzy-haired" mother, gratuitously abused as "callous" and a "damaged personality" that was "on the autistic spectrum". How will Spielberg deal with this childish character assassination?

On the BBC's *Panorama*, Leigh indulged hearsay about Assange not caring about the lives of those named in the leaks. As for the claim that Assange had complained of a "Jewish conspiracy", which follows a torrent of internet nonsense that he is an evil agent



of Mossad, Assange rejected this as "completely false, in spirit and word".

It is difficult to describe, let alone imagine, the sense of isolation and state of siege of Julian Assange, who in one form or another is paying for tearing aside the façade of rapacious power. The canker here is not the far right but the paper-thin liberalism of those who guard the limits of free speech. The *New York Times* has distinguished itself by spinning and censoring the WikiLeaks material.

"We are taking all [the] cables to the administration," said Bill Keller, the editor, "They've convinced us that redacting certain information would be wise." In an article by Keller, Assange is personally abused. At the Columbia School of Journalism on February 3, Keller said, in effect, that the public could not be trusted with the release of further cables. This might cause a "cacophony". The gatekeeper has spoken.

The heroic Bradley Manning is kept naked under lights and cameras 24 hours a day. Greg Barns, director of the Australian Lawyers Alliance, says the fears that Julian Assange will "end up being tortured in a high security American prison" are justified. Who will share responsibility for such a crime?

Information Clearing House ✪

PUBLIC MEETING

ALBERT HALL WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2011, 7:30pm

SAVE THE LAKE SHORE

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REMEMBER THE IMMIGRATION BRIDGE ?
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NOW IT'S LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN



Operating behind closed doors and indifferent to overwhelming public opposition, a group called the Memorials Development Committee has been allocated land on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin to construct two unsightly, unnecessary monoliths.

Intended as memorials to World Wars I and II, these monoliths have been rejected by many veterans. They would undermine the significance of the existing inspirational Australian War Memorial, and destroy one of Australia's most important and beautiful vistas.

PLEASE HELP BY ATTENDING THE PUBLIC MEETING

THERE WILL BE A PANEL OF EMINENT SPEAKERS, AND A CHANCE TO PRESENT YOUR VIEW

THE LAKE WAR MEMORIALS FORUM WAS ESTABLISHED BY A GROUP OF CONCERNED ORGANISATIONS AND PEOPLE (SEE OUR WEBSITE) TO OPPOSE THIS ILL-CONSIDERED PROJECT
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