



Defence posture review Refining plans for war

Bob Briton

Last week, Australian Defence Minister Stephen Smith released a progress report on a Defence Posture Review kicked off last year. Former defence secretaries Allan Hawke and Ric Smith were asked to consider:

- The rise of the Asia-Pacific as a region of global strategic significance;
- The rise of the Indian Ocean rim as a region of global strategic significance;
- The growth of military power projection capabilities of countries in the Asia Pacific;
- The growing need for the provision of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief following extreme events in the Asia Pacific region; and
- Energy security and security issues associated with expanding offshore resource exploitation in our North West and Northern approaches.

Or, at least, that's how the task was officially described. There is nothing humanitarian or defensive in the government's intentions or the recommendations made public. The final version of the review will be handed to the minister in April of this year and form part of the planning for a new Defence White Paper due in 2014.

The real intention is to help the US project its power in the Indo-Pacific; to prop up its capacity in the region as its declining economy begins to impose constraints and to further prepare for war on China. The US has begun a realignment of its forces prompted by a budget cut of \$US487bn over the next 10 years and a reduction in size of active duty army personnel from 570,000 to 490,000. Even with those cutbacks, the US will have a dominant military capacity worldwide.

The US intends to maintain or even heighten its aggressive stance across the globe and to contain the influence of emerging economies by the increased use of pilotless drone aircraft, more Libya-style wars and the ability to launch special operations from "lily pad" bases across the globe. As usual, Australia's government and military top brass are only too happy to oblige.

Obama's visit

US president Obama's visit to Australia late last year and the announcement of a base for 2,500 marines at Darwin were part of this plan for a growing US presence in the Indo-Pacific (Indian and Pacific Oceans). The interim report from the Defence Posture Review presents a long list of big-ticket items to be placed at the service of the Pentagon:

- Upgrades to RAAF bases at Tindal (NY), Learmonth (WA), Pearce (WA), Townsville (QLD) and Edinburgh (SA)
- A new air force base at Pearce



- Huge upgrades for navy bases at Cairns and Darwin
- Amphibious mounting base capacity for 27,000 tonne vessels out of Brisbane and Adelaide
- Expansion of Fleet Base West at HMAS Stirling near Perth to accommodate US nuclear submarines
- Learmonth is to get an extension to its runway to allow Airbus KC130s, Boeing P-8 surveillance aircraft and the massively expensive F-35 Joint Strike Fighter to access the base.

Placing a fig leaf

The review admits the danger of attack on Australia is "low". It is actually non-existent but, in order to justify this theft of Australian taxpayers' dollars to make up the US military budget, all sorts of nightmare scenarios are presented. Demand for resources is expected to grow by 35 percent by 2014. A piece in *The Australian Financial Review* entitled "Move to guard northern wealth" shows a map with multi-billion projects underway in the "energy belt" to Australia's north-west complete with their price tags.

The suggestion appears to be that a country has to have a massive military to stop an emerging power simply moving in and grabbing those

resources. Interestingly, the map shows the Joint Petroleum Development Area of the coast of Timor-Leste, which should serve as a reminder that it is Australia that has shown aggression to its neighbours regarding resources. The review also raises the possibility of terrorist attacks on these projects only to admit, "The level of vulnerability to such attacks can be exaggerated."

Lots of words were being used to skirt around the real issues but the main point was well taken by the media. Murdoch defence writer Ian McPhedran was frank; the point of the recommendations for a massive military build up is to "protect the nation from China".

China

Sino-phobia has a long and ugly history in Australia. A multi-pronged "hate China" campaign is underway in the corporate media. The fear of China is being exploited to usher in these plans to help the US project its power and maintain its presence in the region. The vague references to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief have a nice ring to them and there's no doubt there will be more need to provide such assistance as climate change brings on more extreme weather events.

But the real intentions of military strategists in Australia and the US can be seen by the sort of infrastructure and equipment they

are acquiring for Australia's armed forces. The submarines and warships now operating and on order must have the range to operate in Northern Asia, to threaten China. The irrationality of all this wasn't brought out by the corporate media last week but most people would be asking the question - "Why is the government so keen to rattle the sabre against China when we all know it is our biggest trading partner and has insulated us so far against the worst effects of the economic crisis?"

In other contexts, conservative economic commentators freely admit that if there were a marked slowdown in China's economy, it would have a disastrous impact on Australia.

China has not shown any aggressive intentions towards its neighbours, including Australia. It doesn't have bases dotted across the region, unlike the US. The problem for US ruling circles is that a strong China is a strong competitor on international markets and its prestige is growing. It is also a competitor in the global battle of ideas between socialism and capitalism. The goal of a weak, dismembered China might be in the twisted interests of the US ruling class but not that of its people, the people of Australia or the rest of the world. The war plans being aided by the Australian government must be defeated. ✘

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The Guardian

Issue 1534

February 8, 2012

Clash of visions

Two leaders, two speeches, described by the *Australian* newspaper as “clash of the visions”. Labor PM Julia Gillard was addressing the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce on February 1. Opposition Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott’s audience the day before was the National Press Club. Anyone listening to their long-winded, highly repetitive speeches could be forgiven for thinking they were written by the same spin-doctor. There was little difference in the language and the main thrust of each vision was more of the same neo-liberal, pro-business “free market” policies.

Gillard used the word “strong” or “strength” 36 times – strong economy, strong fundamentals, strong nation, strong dollar, strong future, strong fiscal framework,... Abbott used “strong” or “stronger” 29 times – strong economy, strong surplus, strong borders, stronger society, stronger community, ... Gillard referred to “new economy” or “new Australian economy” 18 times. Everything is going to be “better” in Abbott’s speech – a word repeated 16 times.

Gillard’s speech, “Building a New Australian Economy Together” was a sales pitch for her government and the Australian economy, as much directed to the Australian electorate as to her business audience. It portrayed Australia as a highly prosperous global “safe haven” for investors midst European sovereign debt, recession and failed economies. Australia, she said, is a “pillar of strength in the world” and that her government will deliver a budget surplus in 2012-13.

There will be “powerful, economy-wide transformations, perhaps best thought of as ‘growing pains’.” But the future is bright, bringing “a new economy which is prosperous and fair, creative and skilled; where mining and manufacturing flourish and services grow; where the government manages the economy for working people, for the future.” This will be achieved, according to Gillard by providing investors with a “strong and disciplined fiscal framework” (meaning budget cuts and surplus), a high tech framework (including the national broadband network), a highly skilled workforce and “co-operation between government and industry” and more corporate welfare.

Abbott’s speech, “My Plan for a Stronger Economy and a Stronger Australia”, was yet another election campaign speech. A cleaner environment, for stronger borders and for future infrastructure.” An Abbott government would abolish Labor’s carbon and mining taxes; slash government programs including to health and education; sack 12,000 public servants; slash corporate taxes; reduce the size of government. Classic neo-liberal, pro-business policies.

At the same time as planning to abolish union negotiated collective agreements, Abbott dishonestly claimed that the Coalition “supports a high wage economy”. Abbott makes references to social issues, the environment and Indigenous Australians, while covering up the true intent of the Coalition.

He also picks up much of the Labor Party’s language: “I know how important giving everyone a ‘fair go’ is to Australians. That’s why we need to ‘have a go’ to build a stronger economy.” His “aspirations” for the extension of dental services under Medicare from those with chronic conditions to all Australians outdo Labor, which is trying to abolish the existing program.

Gillard’s promise “to manage the economy in the interests of working people” is a cheap appeal to Labor’s lost and disillusioned working class “heartland”. Notwithstanding the important differences between Labor and the Coalition on collective bargaining, both major parties are strong adherents to neo-liberalism, which serves the interests of the private sector, in particular the transnational corporations. Private profits are put before the needs and interests of working people, small business and family farmers. The economic interests of the capitalist class and working class are diametrically opposed. It is nonsense to suggest that you can govern for both classes.

The interests of the working people can only be served by a government of a new type that puts working people’s interests before private profits. That means a government that is prepared to reregulate and plan the economy, build the public sector and protect trade union rights and workers’ interests.

The real clash of visions is seen between workers and employers in trade union struggles for higher wages, safe working conditions and the protection of jobs. It is seen in the struggle against the big polluters to halt climate change; in the battle between mining corporations and Indigenous Australians for land rights; in the actions of the Occupy Movement against the ills of capitalism; in the global campaign for a better world and in the struggles for peace, democracy and socialism.

PRESS FUND

During his State of the Union speech a couple of weeks ago, US President Barack Obama virtually apologised for his proposal to make the nation’s richest citizens pay a greater amount of taxation than the less well off. He more or less argued that the proposal was not, in fact, a communist plot! In contrast, the Press Fund appeal is far more modest, and is hardly a plot. It is, however, really worthy of your support, just like graded taxation to make the very rich pay up. So we ask that you send in something for the next issue. Many thanks to this week’s contributors, as follows:

Steve Cooper \$6, John Hale \$155, Mark Mannion \$10,
Christine Murray \$5, H North \$20, “Round Figure” \$10

This week’s total: \$206 Progressive total: \$246

Bringing War to our Doorstep



CPA General Secretary Dr Hannah Middleton addressed Politics in the Pub (Sydney) on the US decision to realign its war fighting machine to Asia and the Indian and Pacific Oceans and Australia’s support for this provocative and dangerous strategy through the decision to station 2,500 US Marines in Darwin. The other speaker was Dr Michael McKinley from the Department of Politics and International Relations at ANU. Audience members were urged to get active to stop this move to bring war to our doorstep. Copies of the speech are available on the CPA website in the “Topical” section.

Community mobilises against Harold Park overdevelopment



Denis Doherty

Residents of Sydney’s inner west suburbs of Glebe, Forest Lodge, Annandale and Glebe were out in force on Saturday February 4 to protest at the overdevelopment at Harold Park, formerly a trotting track.

Over 250 angry people turned up at the meeting convened by FLAG, a new residents group, and local Green State MP Jamie Parker. The meeting was also addressed by a representative of the Glebe Society.

The huge MIRVAC project is facing serious and determined opposition from residents who are concerned about the impact on traffic and local infrastructure from an estimated 1,200 new people.

Inadequate traffic management plans have got locals alarmed that

an already congested road system will not cope with the increased load from 1,200 new residents, leading to potential gridlock and massive parking and safety problems.

With stunning arrogance the developer has started selling units off the plan even before it has approval for the project. With two bedroom units going for about \$1.3 million, there is a large amount of money at stake.

The meeting heard that the size of the project is excessive for the site and will change the character of the area. The promised open space on the site has been cut down into a series of isolated small plots.

The site is bordered by a cliff and residents want to keep the height of the new buildings to the height of the cliff, about six storeys. With so much money at stake,

the developer of course wants to go a lot higher.

Another issue is that little or no thought seems to have been given to the social impacts that such a large injection of people will have on the hospitals, schools and other infrastructure in the area.

The developer is using tricks of trade that residents condemn. Development applications have been submitted for only parts of the site. There are no plans available yet for other parts, including a proposed large commercial development. Residents are demanding to know what the plan for the total development is.

The residents went away with a “how to” for lobbying State and Sydney City Council representatives to get major improvements in the project during the development application stage. ☘

Should trade unions struggle? Part 2

For unity in struggle

The following abridged article is the contribution made by trade union activist Elizabeth el Sayer at a meeting of trade unionists organised by the Communist Party of Australia towards the end of 2011. The theme of the meeting was "Should trade unions struggle?"

I would like to expose some ways finance sector workers struggle on a day-to-day basis. From my experience I could assert that the main issues affecting these workers are: job insecurity, unfair wages, pressure to perform, micro-management and bullying and harassment.

But why do finance workers feel insecure in their jobs?

I thought I would illustrate the answer to this question with some of the latest movements by finance institutions (from FSU updates). This is by no means an extensive list.

After declaring a \$7 billion profit Westpac announced nearly 200 job cuts. The job cuts are part of an 18-month program of reducing Westpac positions and replacing those positions with outsourced and offshore providers.

National Australia Bank declared a major restructure after announcing a rise in their earnings of 11.5 percent to give a \$5.5 billion profit. This restructure will result in more than 500 workers having to reapply for their jobs and 135 disappearing from the network.

Finally, at the same time as the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry is quizzing insurance bosses about claims processing and complaints handling, Suncorp is preparing to shift Australian insurance jobs offshore in search of higher profits. It has been reported in the *Australian Financial Review* that other insurers may follow suit. The number of jobs in scope for offshoring is still to be confirmed but some reports indicate that thousands of Australian jobs may be at risk.

Do you want me to go into the rationale given by the various finance organisations? At the end of the day, this is globalisation at its maximum splendour, where employers talk about efficiency and cost savings while people end up losing their jobs affecting

the whole internal economy, not only in their households but in the country, not only in the short-term but also in the long run.

Low paid

Moving onto the next issue, how do finance workers get paid?

The way most finance workers get paid is composed by their basic salary plus any bonuses they may get, determined by how they perform their work.

For example, when you go to a branch to do a transaction the teller may ask you if you want to open another account or even get a credit card. If you accept, that becomes part of their achievement, and if they get enough referrals in the buckets determined by the bank, then they'll be able to achieve their targets, thus get a bonus at the end of the month or the quarter depending which bank we are talking about.

Depending on the current agreement, usually between the employer and the union (there is one per institution and the union is not always part of it), workers may be entitled to a guaranteed pay increase, which allows their salary to keep up with the increase in the cost of living. In other finance institutions, in fact, most of them, workers have a stagnant pay which is complemented by any bonuses they may get if they achieve their targets.

The question is, is this mechanism to push debt into society ethical? The simple answer is NO, especially now in the current economic climate. Is it the workers' fault? The answer is NO again. At the end of the day workers are only trying to make a decent living. Finance workers are so-called white collar workers. The difference with other workers is in the colour of the collar. Every worker strives and struggles for decent working conditions and a dignified income.

Some people have the impression that finance workers earn a lot of money but dealing with them on a daily basis I can assert that this is not the case at all. If we compare a CEO's salary to other finance workers, CEOs earn 200 times the salary of a Customer Service Representative.



Photo: Anna Pha

How can a system allow a CEO to be worth 200 tellers?

So, what sort of indicators do finance institutions use to measure workers' performance?

Let's take customer satisfaction. The bank's rationale is that customer satisfaction indicates customer loyalty and predicts profitable growth. However, this is also used to measure workers' performance. The problem with this approach is that customers may give a low rating because they had to wait for too long (a clear indication of under-staffing) or are unhappy about the bank's decision to increase the interest rate, which is absolutely beyond the bank workers' control.

Also, finance workers' performance is assessed by both objective and subjective criteria. Apart from targets, which I've spoken earlier on, workers have targets like "being a team player", which is evaluated at their manager's discretion. I remember in one of my workplace visits to a branch, I learnt that one of the expectations for personal bankers was "to be a champion". When I asked what that meant, I was told that that was when the customer's response is "Wow!" because of the service they received.

Finally, the frequency with which members contact the union raising issues around bullying and harassment is enormous. How can we live in so much fear and apprehension? Workers in call centres get timed when they go to the toilet and they may get in trouble if they take too long. I remember one worker who was asked to specify in writing why she took so long at the toilet, she wrote "I did a poo".

Not only their jobs are constantly in the firing-line, their performance objectives increase at management's discretion, they don't have any certainty on whether they'll have a pay increase. Also they may be called into a meeting with no witnesses to be harassed and intimidated by seniors who want to see better dividends as these would count towards their own performance.

This is how finance workers struggle on a daily basis. They are constantly targeted, individualised, alienated and intimidated in this super competitive industry. And what do employers do? They organise, they talk to each other, they plan how to influence the new post-modern god, the market.

How do they do that? Do you think the latest NAB campaign about

breaking up with the other banks was real? Well, let me tell you it wasn't because the Big Four is a myth. Banks are not independent entities; they own each other and this becomes the conglomeration of capital at its best.

Conclusion

The only way for workers to struggle is to struggle in unity. When finance workers realise they are not the only ones affected by the issues I just mentioned (which are by no means the only ones) but also their colleagues sitting next to them, the ones they share their breaks with, then a new sentiment of solidarity will emerge and then the workers will be the ones conglomerating.

The point is workers ought to receive a larger percentage of the final product that is made as we are the majority in any society. We, the workers, demand social justice where the wealth of any nation is shared on an equal basis with all its members.

In conclusion, it is therefore imperative that we activists in the trade union movement maintain the rage, educate others and educate ourselves, continue being active and activating other members in the community wherever we are. ☘

Pete's Corner



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Equal Pay Vigilance required

Anna Pha

Fair Work Australia's (FWA) long-awaited Equal Remuneration decision for social and community services workers (SACS) was greeted with mixed feelings of jubilation and disappointment. The unions and their members were jubilant, having won an important victory, a new milestone in the ongoing struggle for equal pay. The disappointment is that the decision will not be fully implemented until December 2020, and that there are no guarantees that some of the increase will not be funded by cuts in employment, resources and services to the community.

There was one dissenting voice on the Full Bench, vice president Graeme Watson whose decision could lay the basis for a court challenge by several employer groups who opposed the claim.

The amounts awarded range from 19 percent for the lowest paid through to 41 percent for the highest paid. The decision falls short of the original claim, which was based on an equal pay decision in Queensland, but is still highly significant. The increases will be phased in over nine annual instalments, commencing on December 1, 2012 with the last one due on December 1, 2020. Over those years, it will require considerable vigilance and effort to prevent the decision being undermined by shortfalls in award increases from minimum wage decisions and outcomes of any collective bargaining agreements.

There is always the danger that future governments could have the decision overturned by FWA or under a new industrial relations system. The decision will need to be defended to ensure its full implementation.

Nonetheless, it is an important decision, which is the culmination of more than two years of campaigning and an incredible amount of hard work in amassing the evidence and presenting the case to FWA. The



more money stacking supermarket shelves.

Work undervalued

The average full-time wage in Australia is around \$68,000 per annum, yet it is not unusual for a highly skilled graduate working in the SACS industry, with five or more years experience to be earning \$45,000 to \$50,000.

The case is the first to test the equal remuneration section of Labor's Fair Work Act which "allows FWA to make orders to ensure that there will be equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal or comparable value." The key aspect of the new provision is the inclusion of the term "comparable" in addition to "equal value".

Although it affects a workforce that is predominantly female, the comparison of SACS workers is

all levels turn to the private sector, including religious institutions and charities, to provide service on a commercial basis.

The Commission, in an interim decision on April 16, 2011, confirmed that the work of social, community and disability services (SACS) staff in the non-government sector is undervalued. "We have found that employees in the SACS industry are predominantly women and are generally remunerated at a level below that of employees of state and local governments who perform similar work," FWA said.

While finding gender to be an important factor it also identified other contributing factors, and delayed a final decision until it heard further submissions on the extent to which gender was a contributing factor to the pay gap. The final decision handed down last week attributes around 60

In its submission to FWA, the Gillard government argued that FWA must discount comparators that are not gender based – such as the weak capacity of non-government workers in SACS to negotiate higher wages in EBAs.

This flew directly in the face of the union's application which argued that the inability of workers to bargain around wages (due to the nature of their employers being largely government funded) is one of the main reasons that an Equal Remuneration Order is required – this is the only way to increase wages in the industry.

The federal government also argued that Fair Work Australia must consider the government's strategy to return the budget to surplus, failing to make a commitment to fully fund any pay rises. "If any additional government funding is provided, it would likely come at the expense of other government funded services," it warned.

The Gillard government later made a commitment to fund the outcome of the claim to the tune of \$2 billion or more over four years. Gillard did not indicate what cuts will fund the \$2 billion. Victoria's Liberal Party Premier Ted Baillieu reflected the poor attitude of state governments saying, "The bottom line is the choice for state governments, and private sector bodies, to fund this or cut services."

Many of the smaller employers in the industry supported the claim, but Mission Australia, and several employer organisations strongly opposed it. The Australian Federation of Employers and Industries (AFEI) had a war chest of \$1.5 million dedicated to fighting pay equity for community workers. It used to go by the name, Employers First, implying workers last, but later changed it as it became too embarrassing. The AFEI told FWA that award rates of pay are good enough and already provide equal pay and that if SACS workers won equal pay other low paid workers might get a pay rise as well!

Australian Business Industrial (ABI) said the modern award rates of pay are already appropriate for the skill, responsibility and conditions under which work is performed and

that differences in pay rates were not gender based.

Vice president Watson, who formerly worked for the legal firm Freehills that played a key role in drafting the Howard government's WorkChoices legislation, opposed increasing wages in the SACS sector. In his minority decision, he said, "Governments previously conducted many of these services themselves but have moved the delivery of the services to the not-for-profit sector because it was considered that the not-for-profit sector could deliver the services in a more efficient and cost-effective manner."

It might deliver them at less cost – that is because they pay low wages or the work is done by voluntary labour!

Watson found various aspects of the claim to be "highly unusual". For example, "An equal remuneration order is sought for both men and women workers... Not only is no comparison sought to be made with male employees employed by the same employer – no comparison is sought to be made with male employees of any other employer. The comparison that is sought to be made is with public sector employees who perform similar work."

Watson said it "would be inconsistent with relevant statutory requirements and an inappropriate exercise of the discretion of Fair Work Australia" to make such an order.

His objections go to the heart of the new provisions of the Fair Work Act, and the essence of the case.

As stated earlier, there is a real danger that his decision could be used for an appeal to the courts.

The struggle is not over. State and federal governments must fully fund the decision and not at the expense of jobs or other services. As contracts come up for renewal, governments should employ the workers carrying out those services on a permanent basis, on prevailing public sector wages and conditions. That would close the gap immediately. Contracting out and privatisation should be halted and reversed. The provision of social services should be provided on the basis of need, not commercial considerations by governments. ☘

State and federal governments must fully fund the decision and not at the expense of jobs or other services.

Australian Services Union and other trade unions in the sector are to be congratulated.

Around 80 percent of the 150,000 or more workers in the industry are women. The services they provide include family support, disability, youth and children's, women's, community legal centres, drug and alcohol, home and community care, specialist health, Indigenous, tenancy and mental health. They are highly qualified and skilled professionals carrying out extremely responsible and important work for the community without corresponding recognition, yet some of them could be earning

with men and women in the higher paid government sector, not just with men. It is not a direct comparison of female workers with male workers as in previous equal pay cases.

One of the key reasons for the wage gap between SACS and work of comparable value in other areas is the nature of their work – caring – which has historically been seen as "women's work" and, so, lower paid.

Another important reason for underpayment lies in a relatively recent shift in service provision from the public sector to the not-for-profit and for-profit private sectors. Neoliberalism has seen governments at

percent of the gap to gender, and has set the increases to meet that proportion of the gap. It does not attempt to fully meet the gap.

The decision also contains a loading of four percent to also be introduced in nine equal instalments to compensate for the fact that ongoing wage increases are larger in the government sector where union enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs) are the norm. In the SACS sector there is far greater reliance on awards, which only provide minimum rates. The FWA changes will be made to the award, and will be absorbed into higher pay rates under any EBAs in the sector.

CPA campaign sprints to the line

The Communist Party's campaign for the seat of Port Adelaide is peaking at the right time. The by-election caused by the resignation of controversial ALP local member and former state treasurer Kevin Foley is to be held on Saturday February 11 and, while CPA candidate Bob Briton does not expect to become the next member, the campaign has certainly attracted a lot of attention and support. Unity of the left in Adelaide has been strengthened and the working class alternative has been put to a wide audience in South Australia.

The campaign launch at the Port Dock Brewery Hotel was standing

room only. The reception to Bob's brief addresses at the Semaphore Workers' Club blues night has been warm and positive. Doorknocking by volunteers from Adelaide's Left Unity over successive weekends and street corner meetings in the Port have also helped take the word to the people of the electorate and beyond that a working class alternative is on offer at this election.

Media attention has been keen from the announcement of the campaign. A post on ABC election commentator Antony Green's blog on the Greens decision to put the CPA candidate number two on their how to vote prompted a lively debate in

the comments below his piece. Read it at <http://bit.ly/wgPy5H>

The most significant coverage came last Friday night with an item on ABC TV's 7:30 SA program. View in online at: <http://bit.ly/zr3LWb>

The program has a wide audience in SA and was commented upon very positively by viewers. An after-party at the Semaphore Masonic Hall is being organised by Left Unity and SLAAM (Semaphore Live Arts, Activism and Music) from 7pm. All welcome. Whatever the final count, members, friends and supporters will be celebrating a well-run, active campaign. ✪



CPA candidate Bob Briton.

Save Public Housing – Glebe



Denis Doherty addressing the public meeting in Glebe regarding the Cowper Street development.

A well attended public meeting held in Glebe (Sydney) on February 1 heard details of the state government's plans to privatise much of public housing land at Cowper Street in this inner city suburb. The meeting was unanimous that the government has to reinstate public housing on the site.

Speakers included local Green MP Jamie Parker and Michelle Fraser and Denis Doherty from the local residents group Hands off Glebe.

Housing stress in the municipality is up over 17 percent and this is repeated in many areas of

Sydney. Yet the Liberal state government does not even have a housing minister.

The numbers of homeless are rising yet the government is determined to do away with public housing through the fiction of "public private partnerships".

The meeting heard how the project will place the poorest public tenants in 10 storey vertical slums while the best parts of the block will go to the private sector. The project will not achieve the so-called "mix" of different economic groups but enhance division and discrimination against the poor.

The campaign for Cowper

Street demands that the demolished buildings be replaced with more and better public housing with no privatisation.

The campaign moves to the next stage when the Development Application goes before the Sydney Central Planning Committee this month. We plan to pack out the meeting.

The CPA Port Jackson Branch has been involved with Hands off Glebe since the 2010 federal election and has been campaigning with them to save and extend public housing in Glebe. ✪

Photo: Fiona Bymes

Disrespect sparks anger

Sophie Hickey

The current media attention of who said what to incite a riot near the Aboriginal Tent Embassy removes focus of the true issue at hand: the fact that neither Julia Gillard nor Tony Abbott came down to the Embassy to commemorate the historical event of its 40th anniversary. Having been down in Canberra myself, it saddened me to see Elders talking to a blue suede shoe instead of to our Prime Minister.

Both the Prime Minister and the Opposition leader were invited to attend, they were in proximity, yet did not attend. To me, the obvious absence of both Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott at the Embassy on January 26 represents the lack of importance given to the role Indigenous Elders share as Australian leaders. As an Australian citizen, I felt their absence was immensely disrespectful and is the true shame.

I can personally attest that the 40th anniversary celebrations were on the whole very peaceful. Not once did I feel threatened or scared for my own personal safety. Everyone was welcoming and respectful. People may not have agreed on every issue but a safe space was created to discuss, learn and share. As a middle class, educated, white Australian young woman, I found this experience invaluable. Sitting around a campfire or sharing a cup of tea, I learnt more about Australian Aboriginal people and culture that I could have ever learnt from history books. I listened to stories from Elders and supporters from all around Australia. This is what Gillard and Abbott missed out on.

Why did our Australian political leaders not attend this event? I invite our leaders to provide an explanation. The Prime Minister was angered that the events disrupted such a wonderful event for great people referring to the emergency services medal ceremony. With all due respect to the award recipients and their heroic contributions to the state, I wish to highlight that there was another ceremony occurring just next door

commemorating equally courageous people whose work also ought to be recognised: the original founders of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

Abbott's comments that a lot has changed since then [1972], and "I think it probably is time to move on from that" were received like a slap to the face. I think the Indigenous people of Australia can be very proud of the respect in which they are held by every Australian, stated Abbott.

By simply looking at the original demands of the four embassy founders, we can see that very little advancement has been made in terms of sovereignty and control of Aboriginal land and people. Mining continues on sacred sites. Black deaths in custody are still occurring 20 years on from the Royal Commission.

Pick up any Australian medical journal and you will see that health inequality continues. A second intervention in the Northern Territory is about to be launched that would take financial support away from families whose children are not attending school, instead of looking at the real causes, the material obstructions remote families may face from accessing education or even the disconnect in the education system and the traditional way of life.

The government chooses to remove basic human rights, instead of empowering and supporting its First People. How can we expect Aboriginal Australia to advance forward if constant obstacles are created out of ignorance and are constantly placed in front of progress?

So long as there is a lack of respect from mainstream Australia towards the original owners, so long as discrimination and institutionalised racism continues, so long as the general public is largely unaware of the true daily reality of hardship that many Indigenous Australians continue to face, so long as grief and loss of Aboriginal rights, land, culture and people is still in living memory, I feel that the Tent Embassy has every right to remain on the lawns in front of Old Parliament House, and that as an institution, remains every bit relevant in contemporary Australia. ✪

Sydney

Don't Shoot the Messenger: WikiLeaks, Assange and Democracy

WikiLeaks, a free press publishing and media organisation, has revealed human rights abuses, war crimes and corruption in governments across the world. Yet the US Administration wants to close WikiLeaks down and prosecute its founder Julian Assange. International financial services organisations have blocked payments to WikiLeaks, denying them vital income. The Australian government has failed to take a stand against the political persecution of Assange. Australian Prime Minister Gillard's assertion that WikiLeaks' activities were illegal was proved to be false by an Australian Federal Police investigation.

What does this say about our democracy?

Speakers: **Scott Ludlam**, Australian Greens Senator
Christine Assange, mother of Julian Assange
Humphrey McQueen, historian, ANU

Chaired by: **Mary Kostakidis**, journalist and Australia's first primetime anchorwoman

FRIDAY 17 February 6.30 pm to 8.15 pm

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What does Libya tell us about intervention in Syria and Iran?

Richard Lightbrown

As regional war threatens drastic and unforeseen consequences in the Middle East some commentators claim that humanitarian benefits justify Western intervention in repressive states. This claim is worth considering in the context of the events that have befallen Libya.

No one should be under any illusions about the intentions of Western governments in Libya following their activities throughout the 42 years of Muammar Gaddafi's rule. During this time there were 39 coup attempts inspired by US, British and French agencies, most of which were centred on Benghazi and the province of Cyrenaica. Many involved an attempt at assassination, as did the US fighter-bomber attack on Tripoli in 1986 in which eight of the 18 aircraft flying from Britain specifically targeted Colonel Gaddafi's private residence.

Gaddafi's overthrow began as an uprising in Benghazi which followed a Facebook call, from London on February 17, 2011, to commemorate the 2005 massacre at Abu Salim prison. In response to the ensuing fighting the UN Security Council unanimously approved resolution 1970 on February 26. Calling for an end to all violence, it required all member states to apply an arms embargo which also prohibited the provision of technical assistance, training, finance and all other assistance related to military activities. It soon became clear that British forces were in breach of the resolution when six members of the SAS were taken prisoner by opposition forces in Benghazi on March 4. What the troops were trying to achieve, and what went wrong with the operation has never been revealed.

Arming the opposition

Following reports of civilian massacres by Libyan aircraft the Security Council responded by approving resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011, although this time one-third of the 15 members abstained. (The claims concerning civilian massacres were later refuted by Amnesty International, along with allegations that the Libyan regime had been employing foreign mercenaries.) This called for an immediate cease-fire and for all sides to seek a solution to the crisis while requiring them to protect civilians. Responding to a call from the Arab League it authorised the enforcement of a no-fly zone.

A US-drafted amendment allowed for "all necessary measures [to protect Libyan civilians] under threat of attack". The American Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, promptly claimed that this allowed for arming the opposition under the terms of the resolution. Jose Cabral, the chair of the Sanctions Committee, disagreed and declared that "the resolution [1973] imposes a full embargo on arms." The US and NATO however had no interest in legal formalities and large quantities of arms were subsequently supplied to the opposition from Qatar via the Egyptian border. France also shipped in some supplies direct, while NATO Special Forces supplied training and expertise.

On the following day and in response to resolution 1973, the Libyan Foreign Minister announced an immediate ceasefire and a stoppage of all military operations against opposition forces. The next day, March 19, French aircraft carried out an airstrike which was followed by the launch of 110 Tomahawk missiles by US and British warships against air defences in Tripoli and Misrata. Thus only two days after its approval, the Security Council resolution was rendered a sham by NATO forces which placed civilian lives unnecessarily at risk when they ignored the offer of an immediate cease-fire and refused to seek a solution to the crisis.

All subsequent calls for a ceasefire by the Libyan government were summarily dismissed by either the opposition or NATO. By March 29 the Russian Foreign Minister was moved to comment "We consider that intervention by the coalition in what is essentially an internal civil war is not sanctioned by the UN Security Council resolution."

Apart from coverage of the murder of



Muammar Gaddafi and his contemptuous secret burial there has been little mainstream reportage of the results arising from this international banditry. Even casualty figures are vague. (NATO does not do casualty figures: they have still to produce accurate figures for the number of civilians killed during the bombing of Kosovo in 1999. Sorting out the carnage is always someone else's responsibility.)

Civilian casualties

The lowest estimate of casualties came from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) which claimed in September that "between 50-100 civilians had perished from air strikes in the six months of the campaign". Considering even the National Transitional Council has estimated 30,000 dead and 50,000 injured, RUSI's claim is an insult to intelligence. One of the highest estimates has come from Thomas Mountain, who used the NATO figure of 9,658 strike sorties flown to estimate that 30,000 tons of explosives were used, and by allowing two deaths per ton arrived at a death toll of 60,000.

Failing any details from the perpetrators themselves some of the vocal supporters for this war might have provided details on their behalf. Brian Whitaker of the UK *Guardian* has written extensively on the subject, and like a barrack room lawyer picked over the Security Council resolutions to claim that NATO forces on the ground were legal. (Jose Cabral's statement was not amongst the information he considered.) However Mr Whitaker's personal website al-Bab, stopped writing about the Libyan war in August, and has therefore not covered the devastation left in the wake of the bombardment.

The veteran peace campaigner Uri Avnery also supported the war (and proposed a similar intervention in Syria) suggesting that opponents of the action were driven by a hatred of the US and NATO rather than any concern for the people of Libya. He added that he was "ready to support even the devil, if that is necessary to put an end to this kind of atrocities".

For the people of Sirte this might sound bitterly ironic, particularly since Mr Avnery has not returned to the subject to write about

their once prosperous city that now resembles war-torn Stalingrad or Fallujah. Uri Avnery wondered whether opponents of the NATO operation were really concerned for the well-being of the Libyan people. Bassam Haddad, writing on the *Jadaliyya* website, had similar concerns about criticism of the Syrian regime, while expressing his desire to see an end to the abuse of human rights in Syria. But Professor Haddad is under no illusion about the duplicity and self-interest driving foreign interference, and appears to draw an opposing conclusion:

"... the actors that are amassed to benefit from the fall of the Syrian regime are, in the final analysis, no less problematic than the Syrian regime itself. In sum, these actors are certainly more violent, discriminatory, and anti-democratic in terms of their collective and/or individual long-term vision for the region."

Rape of Libya

But if one did need to have an object to hate, then the calculating planners of the Libyan rape, who appear indifferent to all the misery they have caused, would make as good an object as any. Prior to the bombing, Libya had the best health care and the best education in Africa, free of charge. Essential food staples were heavily subsidised, while fuel was plentiful and cheap.

Having bombed to kingdom come schools, hospitals, electricity and water supplies, oil installations, men, women, children, black Africans and Arabs, the planes and warships have departed. Reports of the use of depleted uranium and cluster bombs suggest that they will have left some areas dangerously polluted as well as poverty stricken. An occupation army is now preparing to arrive: according to former US Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, 12,000 US troops in Malta are about to move into Libya, while trigger-happy NATO troops already occupy the petroleum platforms and ports.

There have been victory speeches from Nicholas Sarkozy (who received Colonel Gaddafi as a guest of honour in France only two years ago), David Cameron (who visited Egypt peddling British arms immediately after the fall of Hosni Mubarak) and Barack Obama.

(What greater irony could befall those who were conquered, injured or even killed, at the behest of a peace prize laureate? What greater folly could the Nobel Prize committee have concocted?)

And still the misery continues. The entire 31,000 population of Tawergha are said to have fled their homes during the war and it is not clear how many have returned. IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Network) has reported that the delivery of emergency humanitarian aid has been hindered by a lack of funding, despite the fact that NATO countries control over US\$100 billion worth of frozen assets belonging to the people of Libya. In mid-December the International Crisis Group reported that more than 125,000 Libyans now carry arms, while estimates on the number of militias range from between 100 to 300.

Rivalry exists among the different bands which issue their own identity cards, apply their own investigation techniques and issue arrest warrants (and reportedly in Misrata continue to kill black Libyans). Feuding is commonplace. Meanwhile senior officials who defected from the former regime (possibly after payoffs from NATO) expect to retain positions in the new leadership.

It must be acknowledged that Gaddafi the tyrant is dead. In a perfect world he most certainly would have faced trial in the International Criminal Court, following even worse criminals such as George W Bush and Tony Blair. In this context it should not be forgotten that the crimes of Barack Obama, which include greatly expanding the drone attacks on civilian areas in Pakistan, might have earned the death penalty at Nuremberg. In our imperfect world Colonel Gaddafi brought stability and prosperity to Libya along with considerable benefits to other parts of Africa. No less an eminence than Nelson Mandela paid homage to this. Above all, Gaddafi's nefarious crimes do not justify the savage assault that has befallen his people.

Re-colonisation

With the re-colonisation of Libya completed, NATO and its allies are looking for the next

Lorenzo Torrez, copper miner, Communist leader, dies at 84

Tim Wheeler

Lorenzo Torrez, leader of the Communist Party, a staunch yet quiet spoken fighter for union rights and Mexican American equality, died New Years Day in Tucson. He was 84.

Torrez was born in Gila, New Mexico, May 18, 1927. He went to work in the underground copper and zinc mines at age 16 and toiled there for 25 years with a break during World War II when he served in the US Army in Europe. After the war, he returned to the non-ferrous mines in New Mexico enduring with his fellow miners brutal exploitation and racist discrimination.

Torrez and his wife Anita, and scores of other miner families starred in *Salt of the Earth*, a film about a bitter 1950 strike at the Empire Zinc Corporation mine in Bayard, New Mexico led by the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union (MMSWU).

The miners played themselves. Lorenzo had a speaking role in the film, and Anita and their children also appeared on-screen.

Later, Torrez described the conditions that drove the miners to strike, humiliated by racist discrimination, consigned to the dirtiest, most dangerous and lowest paid work underground: "Even the pay lines were segregated with Mexicanos on one side and Anglos on the other," he told *People's World* in an interview.

"We couldn't sit together. The swimming pool was segregated. There was one day a week that the Mexicanos could go swimming, and then they would drain the pool and refill it."

The segregated company housing was miserable with no running water for the Mexican American workers' shacks.

When the striking miners were barred from picketing under a Taft-Hartley injunction, their wives took their place, were arrested and filled the jail, yet returned to the picket lines every day for seven months. Their courage and militancy was key to winning the strike.

That strike battle – and the making of *Salt of the Earth* – were turning points in Torrez' life. He and Anita were married and both joined the Communist Party USA. Juan Chacon, a copper miner who played the leading role in the film, also joined the CPUSA. He served as president of that local of the MMSWU for many years. Chacon and his wife Virginia were lifelong friends of Lorenzo and Anita Torrez.

The film was banned from movie theatres during the years of the Cold War witchhunt. The actors were blacklisted and the MMSWU was expelled from the CIO. The union later merged with the United Steelworkers of America.

Unemployed, hounded and harassed by the FBI, Torrez moved from job to job struggling to support his family. He landed a permanent job as a Communist Party organiser in California, organising in Los Angeles' Latino community.

In 1974, Torrez moved with his family to Tucson where he served as chair of the Arizona CP for more than 30 years. He also led the party's Chicano Equality Commission and was a member of the CPUSA National Committee.

He built the Arizona CP into an influential organisation in all the progressive movements of Arizona. He also wrote and raised money for *People's World* and its predecessors.



Torrez helped establish the Salt of the Earth Labor College in Tucson, which continues today.

Steve Valencia, president of the Labor College told the *World*, "Lorenzo changed the political landscape of Arizona. For him, the liberation of the working class and equality for the Mexican American people were inherently tied together."

Torrez called on the labour movement to organise undocumented immigrant workers. Even as his health declined, "Lorenzo urged us to join every action against SB-1070 and struggle to repeal that racist law," Valencia said.

Voters last November recalled Arizona Senate President Russell Pearce, the author of the anti-immigrant racial-profiling law.

In 1981, Valencia was a copper miner, recording secretary of United Steelworkers Local 6912. "Lorenzo suggested that I write a letter to AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland urging him to host Solidarity Day, which I did," Valencia said.

Other local labour leaders also urged the federation to act. More than 250,000 marched in Washington Solidarity Day, September 19, 1981, to protest President Reagan's smashing of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organisation.

Valencia continued, "Lorenzo taught me how to work in the labour movement and work in coalitions. He told us to forget about our feelings of inadequacy and address problems that are shared by all workers."

Torrez was also a pioneer in the struggle

for Mexican American political representation, Valencia added. "I always say: Before Ed Pastor and Raul Grijalva, there was Lorenzo Torrez."

Pastor and Grijalva are Arizona's first two Mexican Americans members of the US Congress. But Torrez ran for Congress before they ran, and also boldly ran against Republican Senator Barry Goldwater.

"Lorenzo told us it is time for these majority Latino districts to be represented by a Mexican American," said Valencia. "He wanted voters to see a Latino name on the ballot."

When Pastor declared his candidacy, Torrez rallied the Tucson CP club to join in the effort. Pastor's victory in 1991 set the stage for Grijalva's election in 2002. Pastor and Grijalva are members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

In 2004, the 50th anniversary of the release of *Salt of the Earth*, Lorenzo and Anita Torrez spoke at public meetings across the nation about the film. They were hailed as working class heroes. The Library of Congress in 1992 selected *Salt of the Earth* for inclusion in the National Film Registry as one of the greatest films produced in the United States.

Lorenzo Torrez is survived by his wife, Anita, and their three children Yolanda, Roberto, and Sally and by eight grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Joe Bernick contributed to this article *People's World* ✪



conquest. In this they are being encouraged once again by some sincere peace activists. These people would be well advised to do the arithmetic. In eight months between 30 and 60 thousand Libyans are believed to have been killed. By contrast in eleven months the estimated death toll in Syria is between five and seven thousand. In addition Syrian buildings and infrastructure appear to remain largely intact and there is no danger from the remains of depleted uranium or cluster bombs.

At the present time amidst the chaos and the mayhem it is still Syrian citizens who control Syrian assets. This is not the case in Libya, where NATO troops control the nation's desirable assets, and the imminent arrival of US occupation troops, according to evidence from Iraq and Afghanistan, is to be feared rather than welcomed.

The jokers in the pack this time are Russia and China who, duped and angered by NATO's shameful misuse of resolution 1973 and excluded from future trading deals in Libya, are more minded to apply a proactive stance on behalf of Syria and Iran. This is likely to mean support for the existing repressive regimes, such as the shipload of munitions that Russia recently sent to Syria. The problem is that outside interference reduces the opportunities for internal compromises that could herald new freedoms.

During the 20th century both Syria and Libya experienced the brutal repression and racism of European colonialism, while Iran was invaded by British Empire forces a few years before Anglo-American meddling imposed a brutal puppet regime. For Libya a parallel experience has now returned. For Syria and Iran the same fate awaits the unwary and the unprepared. The dark shadow of colonial occupation has made an unexpected and unwelcome return. Richard Lightbown is a researcher and writer who has volunteered with Viva Palestina, International Solidarity Movement, Golan for Development and as a forester with Voluntary Service Overseas. globalresearch.ca ✪

Obama's refinancing swindle

Mike Whitney

Barack Obama's new housing refinance plan has nothing to do with "lowering monthly mortgage payments so responsible borrowers can stay in their homes". That's all public relations bunkum. The truth is the banks want to offload their garbage mortgages onto Uncle Sam to avoid hundreds of billions of dollars in losses. That's what this refi-ruse is really all about.

The administration estimates that 3.5 million people with private label mortgages will be eligible to refinance into loans backed by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Many of these are high risk mortgages that will eventually go into foreclosure which is why the banks want to get them off their books. Regrettably, Obama is only too happy to help them achieve that goal. Here's a little background from the *Christian Science Monitor*:

"The nation now has about 30 million mortgages backed by government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs), mainly Fannie or Freddie ... About three million of those are 'under water', meaning the loan is now bigger than home value. Another 20 million or more have been underwritten entirely by private lenders. Some 35 percent of those, seven million or more, are under water."

Why are so many more "private label" mortgages underwater than loans that were issued by Fannie or Freddie?

Because the banks were lending money to every Tom, Dick and Harry who could fog a mirror. It was all

a big joke. The banks didn't really give a hoot if the borrowers were creditworthy or not because they were bundling the mortgages together into mortgage backed securities (MBS) and selling them off to investors around the world, so documentation and loan standards didn't really matter to them. They got their pound of flesh whether the loans blew up or not. Here's a little refresher from the *Washington Post* on how we got to where we are today:

"The biggest culprits in the housing fiasco came from the private sector, and more specifically from a mortgage industry that was out of control. These included lenders who originated home loans, investment bankers who packaged them into securities, rating agencies that misjudged these securities, and global investors who bought them without much, if any, study..."

"Between 2004 and 2007, private lenders originated three quarters of all subprime and alt-A mortgage loans. These were loans to financially fragile homeowners with credit scores under 660, well below the US average, which is closer to 700. But only a fourth of such loans were originated by government agencies, including Fannie, Freddie and the Federal Housing Administration."

"The dollar amount of subprime and alt-A loans made during this period by the private sector was jaw-dropping, reaching nearly US\$600 billion at the height of the lending frenzy in 2006. By contrast, government lenders made just over US\$100 billion in subprime and alt-A loans in 2006. Even in 2007, when the housing



market was beginning its free fall, private lenders still handed out more than US\$300 billion via these very shaky mortgage loans."

The vast amount of bad mortgages were generated by privately-owned banks, not government-sponsored entities. Keep that in mind the next time your loudmouth brother-in-law starts spouting off about how the GSE's or the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) caused the financial meltdown. The banks were 100 percent responsible. And now they're back for a double-dip because

they still have tons of these wilting loans in their vaults and they need to get rid of them pronto. And that's where Obama comes in. The banks are counting on the dissembler in chief to make it look like this refi-claptrap is really an effort to "provide a bit of relief for an ailing economy" or "to help working folks make their mortgage payment". It's all hogwash.

The reason the banks have waited this long (for another bailout) is because the 50-state robo-signing case has dragged on longer than they'd anticipated. They figured the 50 state Attorneys General would roll over and play dead like the other politicians they deal with. But that hasn't happened. The legal fight continues with no end in sight. What the banks are hoping for is a ruling "that prevents states from effectively challenging future foreclosure actions that are based on faulty prior assignments." In other words, they want to be able to boot you out of your home whether they have proper documentation or not.

Meanwhile, the backlog of homes (that are in some stage of foreclosure) continues to grow to record levels. When the sluice-gates finally open, an ocean of distressed homes will surge onto the market sending prices plunging and leaving bank balance sheets deep in the red. Here's more from CNBC's Diana Olick:

"To give you an idea of just how much the 'robo' scandal is toying with the numbers, LPS compared states that require foreclosures to go through the courts versus states that don't (judicial versus non-judicial) and found the following: 50 percent of loans in foreclosure in judicial states have not made a payment in two years, as opposed to 28 percent in non-judicial states."

Foreclosure sale rates in non-judicial states are about four times those in judicial states."

The backlog of distressed homes is much greater than the data would indicate. Neither the official nor the shadow inventory accurately accounts for the bulging number of homes (10 million) currently in the pipeline.

That's why the administration is looking for creative ways to whittle down the supply. One idea is to sell foreclosures in bulk to deep-pocket investors with the proviso that they convert them into rentals. But why give Wall Street fatcats the privilege of buying foreclosures at a discount when mom and pop investors are already scarfing them up like hot-cakes? How fair is that?

The driving force behind the foreclosures-to-rental scam is that the banks want to remove the GSE's stock of distressed homes from the competition so they can fetch a better price when their REO's hit the market. Once again, the policy is being tailored to meet the needs of the banks not the people. Here's more from Olick about the risks this poses to FHA:

"Critics will also argue that the FHA, which now has an inordinately, historically large share of the mortgage market, is in no position to take on any more risk. The FHA could be considered 'underwater' itself, guaranteeing about US\$1 trillion in mortgages but sitting on just a US\$1.2 billion dollar cushion to cover losses."

"To that end, officials say they could create a separate fund for these loans, not the regular mutual mortgage insurance fund (MMI). This would be a special risk fund, designed to handle high losses."

How do you like that? The FHA is already leveraged at 100-to-1 and the banks want to add even more debt. And they want to do it in the most deceptive way possible, by creating an off-balance sheet investment vehicle where the red ink can be hidden from public view.

To be eligible for Obama's refi-program, borrowers will need a credit score (FICO) above 580 (which is extremely low), they'll have to be employed, and they'll have to be current on their mortgage payments (for the last 6 months). In other words, lending standards are being eased so the banks can dump as many high-risk mortgages on the FHA as possible. Obama breezily refers to these abysmal lending standards as "cutting through the red tape."

Applicants will also be able to refinance under Obama's program with loan balances up to (get this) 140 percent of the value of their home. So, even if you owe US\$560,000 on a home that is currently worth US\$400,000 – and you don't have a dime's worth of equity in the house – have no fear – you can still get money from Uncle Sugar. This isn't a good way to keep people in their homes. It just turns them into debt slaves.

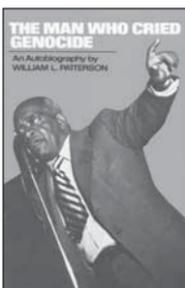
One last thing, all the talk about a "bank tax" is pure blather. The banks will be more than happy to cough-up US\$5 billion or so if it means they'll be able to jettison the hundreds of billions in crappy loans on their books. As far as they're concerned, that's money "well spent".
Counterpunch ☘

Three great fighters



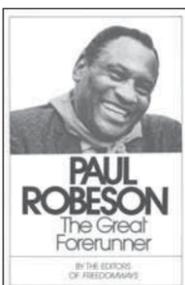
JOHN BROWN: The Cost of Freedom
Louis A DeCaro Jr

"John Brown's Body" is a well known American marching song. It was sung during the US civil war and is still sung today by many progressive political activists. But how many people know much about John Brown's life, his anti-slavery activities or the conditions of the time that shaped such a fighter's thinking and determination? DeCaro's book contains a wealth of interesting material, based on extensive research. The book contains a number of interesting illustrations.
International Publishers, NY, 2007, 185 pp
\$20 plus \$6 p&p



The Man Who Cried Genocide: An Autobiography
William L Patterson

This is an absorbing story. Patterson was the son of a slave mother, a friend of Paul Robeson and founder of the Civil Rights Congress which led mass campaigns to save the victims of racial oppression. He initiated the Petition to the UN charging the US government with genocide against Black people. His rich and dramatic life, his passionate struggle for human dignity, equality and socialism, make this book thoroughly contemporary.
International Publishers, NY, 1991, 234 pp
\$15 plus \$6 p&p



Paul Robeson: The Great Forerunner
The Editors of Freedomways

Paul Robeson was a great sportman, orator, actor, singer, and political leader, one of the great world figures of the 20th century. Part 1 contains 16 sketches of Robeson's life including by his son Paul Robeson Jr. Part 2 is a selection from his writings and speeches. Part 3 has tributes in poetry and prose, including by Nazim Hikmet, Pablo Neruda and Pete Seeger. There are a number of photos, including his visit to the former Soviet Union and German Democratic Republic.
International Publishers, NY, 1998, 396 pp
\$25 plus \$10 p&p

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GPs urge PM: Scrap Health Bill before it's too late

Will Stone

Family doctors rounded on PM David Cameron over the "damaging, unnecessary and expensive" health reforms they argue will cause "irreparable damage to patient care and jeopardise the NHS."

The Royal College of General Practitioners wrote to the Prime Minister stating that the Health and Social Care Bill should not be amended but scrapped altogether.

"We remain unconvinced that the Bill will improve the care and services we provide to our patients," college chairwoman Clare Gerada said.

The college represents more than 44,000 family doctors who will find themselves at the centre of the major NHS shake-up, which hands them the lion's share of the health budget to spend on commissioning services.

Three-quarters of the college have already stated the Bill should be withdrawn in a recent poll.

The college wrote to Health Secretary Andrew Lansley to voice members' concerns but decided

to take action after receiving his response and following the government's tabling of amendments.

Mr Lansley said the government had been "carefully listening" to opinions about the Bill and the series of amendments would "address these remaining issues." But Dr Gerada said the college's position has not changed and concerns expressed when the Bill was still at its white paper stage 18 months ago have not been addressed, including the role of private companies.

She said: "Competition and the opening up of our health service to any qualified providers will lead not only to fragmentation of care, but also potentially to a two-tier system with access to care defined by a patient's ability to pay."

"We cannot sit back. Instead, we must once again raise our concerns in the hope that the Prime Minister will halt this damaging, unnecessary and expensive reorganisation which, in our view, risks leaving the poorest and most vulnerable in society to bear the brunt."

She added that the college could

not support a Bill that would "ultimately bring about the demise of a unified national health service."

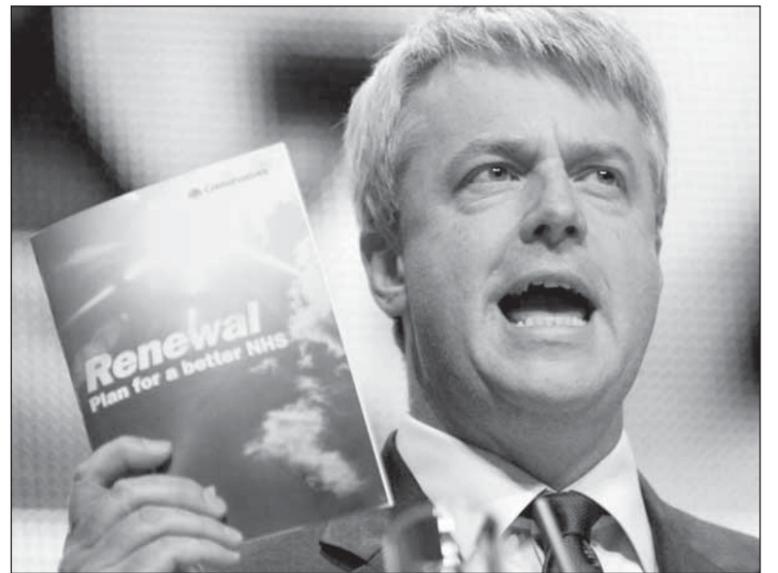
Health Emergency campaign director John Lister reiterated demands for Mr Lansley to come clean on the government's "risk register" on the NHS reforms compiled over a year ago.

A blog has published a leak saying the risk register included concerns of "a surge in health-care costs," that privatisation could make the NHS "unaffordable" and that GPs lack experience and skills in managing costs if the reforms went ahead.

Mr Lister added: "For 12 whole months he has denied MPs and peers information they needed to form a proper evaluation of the Bill. He has even admitted his fears that publication could swing opinion against his unpopular and controversial proposals."

"Above all, it's a Bill to empower the private sector, not patients or clinicians. That's why the Bill cannot be amended. It must be defeated or withdrawn."

Morning Star ✪



Health Secretary Andrew Lansley.

Trade Union Industrial Federation takes shape for Europe

A joint Executive Committee meeting of three European trade union federations on January 31 put the final touches on statutes, a political program, and nominated candidates for leadership in what is to become a united eight-million-member industrial workers' federation. The meeting, held near Mechelen, Belgium, was attended by 150 national union leaders from 25 nations.

The European Mine, Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation (EMCEF), European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF) and the European Trade Union Federation for textiles, Clothing, Leather and Footwear (ETUF-TCL) are now geared to formally merge on May 16 in Brussels, with dissolution Congresses coming a day earlier.

The joint Executive decreed that the new federation will strive to become a fighting force for a dynamic economic framework that allows industry to thrive as the motor for jobs and sustainable growth across Europe. The three current federations vowed that "social progress and the European social model cannot be sacrificed at the altar of ultra-liberal dogma."

Although the new grouping has yet to formally adopt a name, its temporary moniker is the European Industrial Workers' Federation (EIWF).

Michael Vassiliadis, President of Germany's IGBCE, was nominated to serve as President, while current EMF General Secretary Ulrich Eckelmann was nominated

to be General Secretary. Anders Ferbe of IF Metall, Sweden, Renzo Ambrosetti, UNIA, Switzerland, and Valeria Fedeli, CGIL FILCTEM, Italy, were nominated as Vice Presidents, while Sylvain Lefebvre, EMCEF, Bart Samyn, EMF, and Luc Triangle, ETUF-TCL, were nominated as Deputy General Secretaries.

The new federation will consist of four policy committees – Collective Bargaining and Social Policy, Company Policy Committee, Industrial Policy Committee, and Social Dialogue Policy Committee. It will also be composed of eight regions: South, Benelux, Central, South-East, Eastern, British, Nordic/Baltic, and South-West. ✪

Regulator to probe "cartel behaviour"

Switzerland's Competition Commission has announced that it has launched an investigation into alleged "cartel behaviour" by a dozen of the world's biggest financial institutions.

The banks are suspected of colluding to influence interest rates through manipulating "Libor" and "Tibor" – the London and Tokyo Interbank Offered Rates.

Libor and Tibor are based on central bank interest rates and determine the level of interest paid by participating banks on the London and Tokyo stock exchanges.

In turn this underlies many of the rates charged by commercial

institutions on financial products such as mortgages.

"Derivative traders working for a number of financial institutions might have manipulated these submissions by co-ordinating their behaviour, thereby reducing these reference rates in their favour," the commission stated.

It said it will also look into claims that they illegally influenced market conditions for derivatives based on the two rates. Libor alone is used as a benchmark for setting rates on financial products worth around US\$350 trillion worldwide.

The country's two largest banks, UBS and Credit Suisse, are among

those under scrutiny – as are British-based giants Royal Bank of Scotland Group and HSBC Holdings and a range of foreign banks including JP Morgan Chase and Deutsche Bank.

The Swiss investigation follows similar action in other countries. In December Japan's financial watchdog suspended trading activities at Japanese subsidiaries of US bank Citigroup and UBS.

US, EU and British regulators are currently investigating whether banks may have understated the rates at which they lend to each other to pull the wool over investors' eyes during the 2008 financial crash.

Morning Star ✪

Pakistan generals profit from mayhem, communists say

Teresa Albano

Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said last week that US forces would end their combat role in Afghanistan in 2013, ostensibly ending the 12-year war there. With financial and budget crises in Europe and the United States, war spending has become a major issue among the NATO allies.

In a recent analysis, the Communist Party of Pakistan says the Obama administration is interested in working out a political settlement in Afghanistan "in order to cut down its colossal expenditures there."

A US-friendly government in Kabul is one of the White House goals, the Party says. But that would mean a big blow to Pakistan's military-industrial complex, which is profiting mightily from "jihad dividends," says the statement.

The statement, issued by the Party's international department, paints a picture of two power centres in Pakistan: the military and the civilian government.

This "tussle among its top institutions" has grievous consequences for Pakistan, Afghanistan and the region, the Party says. Despite withholding some US\$700 million from Pakistan last summer, the US has over the past decades supported the Pakistan government with billions of dollars in military aid.

"Under US imperialism's patronage, for the last 40 years or so, almost all five-star generals and major generals have become billionaires," says the Pakistan CP. "Down to the rank of major, they have become millionaires."

The Party calls the Pakistani military an "industrial and business corporation," in direct competition with the civilian government, which the military seeks to control.

These financial interests have fuelled the policy that supports

Taliban extremists and other shady networks in Pakistan and the region, the Party suggests.

The attitude towards India is another reason. The civilian government wants to normalise relations with its neighbour, while the military wants to justify its budget by keeping alive security fears over Kashmir, and the perceived encirclement of Pakistan by India. (India is playing an enhanced role in Afghanistan and that means Pakistan would be surrounded by the military's long-time enemy.)

One regional policy where there may be agreement between the elected government and the military is the US war threats towards Iran.

The Pakistani Party suggests that – as in Pakistan with its two power centres – the military (along with extremist religious forces) and the civilian government (that includes the presidency and Parliament), there are two power centres in the United States regarding Iran. One is the White House and the other is the Pentagon.

The Pentagon is seeking logistical support and help from the Pakistan army in the wake of possible military action against Iran. On the other hand, the Party says, Pakistan's civilian government is trying to tactfully manoeuvre the White House to divert any impending US military action against Iran.

While it is not clear how the generals will respond to Pentagon pressure, there is a significant possibility they will strongly object.

Much of Pakistan's current crisis over Afghanistan is directly related to Cold War politics and the United States' unrelenting drive for military and economic supremacy over any rival. The US and Pakistan formed an alliance during the 1980s to build up far-right forces cloaked in religion to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

People's World ✪

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



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Facts about the Tent Embassy incident

I have just returned from the Aboriginal Tent Embassy where I had travelled to in my capacity as a journalist for *The National Indigenous Times*. I was at the Lobby restaurant within minutes of the first trickle of humanity guided there by the PM's office.

It is fact that the ceremonial award giving of the function was done and dusted. It is fact that the Aboriginal people, including veterans from 1972, and supporters were civil. It is fact I spoke to the minder, who later toppled the PM in that ludicrous and unwarranted run, and who should be brought to some account for his actions, and I asked him not to manifest the civil outrage into a confrontational predicament where people may be arrested for no good reason. It is fact he described something altogether different to police

while on radio – I was listening. I said to him, “What are you doing?”

It is fact that there was no threat of physical violence to the PM or the opposition leader. It is fact police perambulated swinging arms and theatrics in that ridiculous wedge that rammed its way into the national consciousness. It is fact that some of us threw ourselves between police and protestors, long after the PM and her counterpart left, to stop the violence from some police officers and to mediate. It is fact some police over reacted.

It is sad that aspersions were cast on the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and many good people. It is tragic that the PM's office has not owned up to its role.

Can the PM step up to the questions rather than skirt around the facts?

Let us remind ourselves that 26 percent of the Australian prison population is Aboriginal, that there is the military intervention in the Northern Territory, and that poverty is acute, abject and inter-generational for many Aboriginal peoples.

Gerry Georgatos
WA

Abbott stirred the trouble

The Australia Day events in Canberra have turned into a political circus with the main clowns still at it. An insensitive remark

by the leader of the Opposition caused a subsequent confrontation between the police and protestors. The people in charge of security provided a lot of interesting footage for the media but their actual actions were not very professional, to say the least.

Situations like that are possible to avoid but no attempts were made to do that. The saddest thing about it all is that the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, a great achievement in anybody's book, was marred by an insensitive, improper and quite insulting remark by Mr Abbott. In saying that that it's time “to move on” he showed no respect – he was not asked for his opinion on what other people should do.

The Tent Embassy is still serving as a reminder of things not done – Indigenous children are still being taken from their families, deaths in custody are still happening, the 20-year gap in life expectancy between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population is an absolute shame, land rights issues are not resolved, the intervention policies of both major parties are an attack on human rights and dignity.

And do we see and hear the media and commentators discussing these serious issues? No. Opportunists from both sides of politics prefer to sling mud at each other instead of dealing with serious problems. Shame.

T Southern
Qld

No fracking good

I am encouraged to see that public concerns in Bulgaria about the environmental risks associated with hydraulic fracking has led to it being banned (*Guardian* February 1). Fracking is a process of pumping high pressure water and chemicals into gas seams deep underground to release gases trapped in rock fractures and minor cavities. In a world scrambling for alternative energy sources to oil – notably USA and Europe – financiers are backing the development and extension of fracking coal seam and shale gas deposits.

Gas may be a cleaner energy than coal or oil but it is not a clean energy, and environmental activists have pointed out that the leeching of methane gases (also ethane, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, sulphur oxide, nitrogen, etc) into the

atmosphere adds substantially more to the greenhouse effect than anything that may have been saved by using gas. Its net greenhouse effect is in fact worse than oil or coal.

Some of the chemicals used in fracking are highly dangerous neurotoxins and carcinogens, and several studies have shown that groundwater can be contaminated in the fracking process. Despite these concerns, the minerals industry in WA with the support of the state Liberal government, are pushing ahead with fracking projects throughout the shale gas deposits in the Mid-West.

As is so typical of this pro-mining state, nothing can stand in the way of corporate freedom to exploit mineral resources to the hilt – no matter what the cost might be to public health and the environment. We could learn a lot from the people of Bulgaria.

Robin Stevens
WA

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

US on the outer, Hungary in turmoil

So far, 2012 has not turned out to be a resounding success for the USA, despite the way it likes to define itself as “the world's only superpower”. Sure, it knocked off defenceless oil-rich Libya, but had to do so through NATO, with the unwelcome result that now it has to share Libya's riches with European rival and periodic critic France.

Meanwhile, France's European ally Germany has been lobbying the other EU states to accept a treaty that would enhance Germany's economic position in Europe and automatically impose sanctions on countries that violated the terms of the treaty. The US felt this proposal did not assist US interests, and sent Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner to Europe to get the Germans to fall in with US preferences.

In a sign of the times, Geithner was ignored in Bonn and Chancellor Merkel's government is continuing with its plans. As if that wasn't ignominious enough, Cuba's principal daily *Granma* noted that when the countries of the Western Hemisphere met in Venezuela to form the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), every single country in the region signed the agreement except for those that were not invited: the United States and Canada.

And closer to home, even Obama's open challenge to China – issued in Australia – in the form of an assertion of America's commitment to “devoting the necessary resources to maintain a strong military presence in the region”, fell rather flat when it received only a subdued reaction from China.

Australia eagerly jumped in to welcome hundreds (probably soon to be thousands) of



US marines to Darwin, but China has simply continued with the low key modernisation of its naval forces, including the addition of a distinctive new aircraft carrier to its fleet of surface vessels.

Then there was the embarrassing case of the top secret US drone that apparently landed in Iran, having been hijacked by computer while in flight. The US says it is not possible, but *Granma* cites Debka, “the internet voice of Israeli hawks” as saying it is true. Apparently, Iranian scientists are now busy deciphering the workings of the deadly US remote-controlled flying weapons-systems.

And the year has only just begun!

As readers of this paper will know, the world's first fascist state wasn't Nazi Germany or even Mussolini's Italy. It was Horthy's Hungary, a clerical fascist state in which the Catholic Church enjoyed extraordinary power, wealth and privileges. It joined with its ally Hitler Germany in persecuting Jews and other minorities (as well as Communists and socialists, of course), and seized territories from its neighbours when Germany overran them.

It gleefully joined the Nazis' invasion of Russia in 1941, with dreams of a “Greater Hungary” as part of Hitler's new world order. Hitler's defeat was also Hungary's defeat, but although the country's socialists were able to emerge from exile or hiding and take over the country, Hungarian nationalism remained a potent force and many pre-war fascists simply put away their green jackets and kept their heads down, waiting for the Reds to go away.

In 1956, with US support, a combination of Church and aristocracy tried to stage a coup and oust the Reds. Former landowners hurried back from exile to tell the peasants to return everything they had “stolen”. The peasants decided they preferred to keep the land they had been given by the socialist state and asked the army for guns to defend their farms.

The counter-revolution collapsed to the dismay of students in Budapest, who had been told by *Radio Free Europe* and *The Voice Of America* that they were part of something big and wonderful.

When socialism in Eastern Europe was eventually defeated in 1989, Hungary's right-wing not only rejoiced, but set about imposing laws to make sure it could not resurface.

Today, with Hungary reeling from the effects of the European sovereign debt crisis, two-thirds of the deputies in the Hungarian Parliament are from the Right-wing Fidesz party (which won the last election on a lying platform promising full employment and social services). On January 1 they put a new constitution into effect. Naturally, they claim to be champions of democracy (and even passed a law equating Communism with fascism) so they were a trifle peeved when on, January 2, thousands of people took to the streets of Budapest to protest against the new Constitution.

Hungarian capitalism divides its support between right-wing social democrats and equally right-wing neo-liberals. The new constitution strengthens the position of the neo-liberals at the expense of the social democrats, who organised the protest rally. The Hungarian Communists (who are not allowed by law to display the

red star or the hammer and sickle) denounced the protest as bogus. None of the trade unions supported the rally.

However, the European Commission (EC) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – whose schtick is to champion bourgeois democracy – felt obliged to break off negotiations on a bail-out for the country.

Whatever they decide to do is bound to be cosmetic rather than fundamental, but the Hungarian people seem determined to force some fundamental changes.

Finally, now that the last US troops have left Baghdad, how many US troops are still in the city? No, it's not a trick question.

Officially, all the US troops have left. All that remain are US military advisers and instructors and a private army of military “contractors” – a mercenary force some 20,000 strong!

There is a lot of whinging in the US media and Congress about the deficit and European sovereign debt, but the mind-numbing expenditure by the US government on the military, the staggering waste of the country's wealth and resources on this colossal distortion of an economy, is such an obvious source of impoverishment of the country as a whole. The question must be asked: how long can the US hold out before their economy turns turtle and we witness a collapse that will dwarf the Great Depression that began in 1929, that will in fact make the Depression look like a pleasant day out? ☺



Sun 12 Feb –
Sat 18 Feb

The police – virtually any police – do not react well when a copper is killed. Any murder is bad, but it seems that murdering a policeman is utterly beyond the pale, and police feel honour-bound to nail the culprit at all costs. Making sure they have the right culprit isn't necessarily top of their list of priorities, unfortunately.

They are of course under tremendous pressure to "solve" such a case, as Errol Morris' 1988 documentary feature *The Thin Blue Line* (ABC2 Sunday February 12 at 8.30pm) showed only too well.

The film sets out to document a case from 1976, when a Dallas police officer, Robert Wood and his partner pulled over a car for driving without its headlights on. As Wood approached the car he was shot five times and killed.

The teenage driver had an extensive criminal history, and bragged to his friends about killing a cop, but when arrested he said that the killer was a hitchhiker he'd picked up, Randall Adams. Adams had a blameless record, but the police let the teenager go and arrested Adams. He was tried, convicted and sentenced to death. The sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment.

There have been quite a few films about miscarriages of justice, but not so many successful ones. Morris' film

was successful, helped in part by the sober but shrewd way it was made. As *Variety* said at the time: "It employs strikingly original formal devices to pull together diverse interviews, film clips, photo collages and recreations of the crime from many points of view."

The title refers to the police, who the trial judge declared were the only thing that separates the public from "the rule of anarchy".

Another film about a legal case, in this instance an on-going one, is *Dancing With Dictators* (ABC1 Sunday February 12 at 10.00pm). It is about the difficulties experienced by Ross Dunkley, an Australian capitalist living in Burma, and trying to run a newspaper company there and in Laos.

The Burmese military regime deports his partner, then foists a local capitalist on him as a replacement partner, subjects his paper (*The Myanmar Times*) to heavy censorship, then arrests him for alleged visa irregularities, then adds a charge of assaulting a prostitute.

After seven weeks in prison, his bail is posted by his unwanted "partner", and he suspects a "deal" is in the offing. But at the conclusion of the film he is still trying to clear his name and regain control of his newspaper.

As one of his staff comments, "Ross is no saint", and that is clear from the details of the incident with the prostitute. Nor is he a revolutionary. He is what he seems to be: a bourgeois democrat businessman. He's just chosen a bad place in which to do business.

It has long been known that going swimming in Sydney Harbour is a risky business. After watching *Shark Harbour* (ABC1 Tuesday 14 February at 8.30pm) you will probably decide that the risk is simply too great.

Despite occasional lapses in the commentary, misguided attempts especially early in the film to spice



Family Confidential (ABC1 Thursdays at 8.00pm) – Ernie and Sally with their children, Jurra and Wilara.

up the "danger" element, the film is mainly a sober record of a fisheries research team catching and tagging sharks in the harbour. The three dangerous species are found – Great White sharks, Tiger sharks and Bull sharks – but it is the Bull sharks that are most common.

Equally happy in fresh or salt water, Bull sharks preponderate in the harbour, the other species being more often found out to sea. The conclusion, that the harbour is not more dangerous than it was, does little to distil the effect of seeing all those sharks cruising around within spitting distance of people's waterfront homes, public baths, beaches and fishing spots.

I was once berated by some angry visitors from the USA, who were almost incandescent with rage when told that they had to wear their seat belts, that it was the law. A great many Americans have been raised with that mindset: "No government is going to tell me what to do!"

They are the same people who oppose gun control (for the same

reason). They are people who may grumble about the amount a private company charges for its goods or services, but they will never question its right to charge for them. In fact they seem to think such a question unpatriotic!

They think the "free enterprise" system is ordained by God, and see the idea that government has a responsibility to use the wealth of the country for the benefit of all as a sort of Communist plot against America's basic freedoms.

They are the backbone of the Tea Party movement, an extremely reactionary US political movement to the right of the Republican Party, a movement that claims Barack Obama is a Communist (and a "Progressivist"). If only!

The ideas espoused by these woeful, middle class (and working class) dupes would have had Hitler licking his lips. They are perfect fodder for reactionary demagogues: workers who have lost any job prospects with the closure of all local manufacturing, small business

owners whose businesses have gone to the wall, etc.

And as the BBC documentary *Tea Party America* (ABC2 Wednesday 15 February at 9.30pm) shows, they talk the most appalling political gobbledegook, and believe it passionately.

Finally, this week *Family Confidential* (ABC1 Thursdays at 8.00pm) deals with *The Dingos* – that's Ernie Dingo and his wife Sally Butler, and their two adopted children.

It's a very frank depiction of a close knit family that has had its share of trials and tribulations, usually in the glare of the media spotlight, and too often the result of Ernie's philandering.

The director, Laurie Critchley, has been making family history documentaries for ten years now and has clearly mastered the genre, making the story of the Dingos interesting without having to gild it, and moving without the aid of artificial mawkishness. ★



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The Guardian
 Editorial Office
 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
 Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833
 Email: guardian@cpa.org.au
 Editor: Tom Pearson
 Published by
Guardian Publications Australia Ltd
 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
 Printed by **Spotpress**
 24-26 Lillian Fowler Place Marrickville 2204
 Responsibility for electoral comment
 is taken by **T Pearson**,
 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

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A lasting symbol of Indigenous unity

Kirstie Parker
Koori Mail Managing Editor *

On a cold and rainy morning 40 years ago, four young Koori men erected a beach umbrella on the manicured lawns outside Parliament House in Canberra and dubbed the modest structure "the Aboriginal Embassy".

In doing so, they sent a blunt and powerful message to politicians, the media and news watchers around the

Amongst the crowd will be others who were there in the very beginning, and their descendents. And, like 40 years ago, there'll be supporters from the unions, churches, student bodies and more.

Uttered in deferential tones will be names like the late Chicka Dixon, Gary Foley, Paul Coe, Isabell Coe, Dennis Walker, the late Pearl Gibbs, Gary Williams, the late Kevin Gilbert, the late John Newfong, the late Shirley Smith (Mum Shirl), Pat

"The Embassy has played a huge role in the introduction of Aboriginal Land Rights and the struggle to end racial discrimination in this country."

country and the world: That, although the then McMahon Liberal government had effectively rendered them landless, Australia's First Peoples had never ceded their sovereignty. And that Australia – with its violent colonial past and the ongoing dispossession, discrimination and disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal people – had a black history.

Only one of those four men, Michael Anderson, will be at the Aboriginal Embassy (or the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, as it has since become widely known). Tragically, the other three – Billy Craigie, Bert Williams and Tony Coorey – are gone, a stark reminder that even today black Australians can generally expect to live much shorter lives than their fellow, white Australians.

But their legacy will live on, with thousands of people expected to make the pilgrimage to the nation's capital to mark 40 years of the Embassy, making it Australia's longest standing site of political agitation.

They'll attend a three-day "Corroboree for Sovereignty" celebration beginning on January 26.

Eatock, Gordon Briscoe, Cheryl Buchanan, Alana Doolan, the late Roberta (Bobbi) Sykes, Tiga Bayles and Sam Watson.

The efforts of those behind the Aboriginal Embassy will also be remembered at Sovereignty Day, Invasion Day, Survival Day and even Australia Day events elsewhere around the country.

"The Embassy has played a huge role in the introduction of Aboriginal Land Rights and the struggle to end racial discrimination in this country," Pat Eatock's daughter Cathy, now a member of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy 40th Anniversary Organising Committee, said.

"There really is no equal in terms of an Aboriginal icon. The Embassy is an international symbol for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike.

"When you think about the path Land Rights has taken in places like the Northern Territory and the successful model that now operates in New South Wales ... that was all born out of the Embassy.

"It's these sorts of advancements that have helped shape the lives of Aboriginal people for the better, and it



Embassy stalwart Lyllal Munro, right, leads protesters at the Canberra Convergence opposing the NT Intervention, especially the setting aside of the Racial Discrimination Act. The convergence took place on 12 February 2008, the day before the National Apology to the Stolen Generations. Photo by Wayne Quilliam, for the Koori Mail

all began with four young Aboriginal men camping under a beach umbrella 40 years ago.

"I think we need to remember also; the Aboriginal Tent Embassy site is a living one. Activists have manned the site permanently for many, many years. This year's Corroboree for Sovereignty is also in honour of their continuing fight for Aboriginal justice and a tribute to their tenacity."

Over time, the Aboriginal Embassy has also inspired others elsewhere, including at Mrs Macquarie's Chair on the Sydney Harbour foreshore in the lead-up to the 1988 Bicentenary, Sandon Point on the NSW south coast, Victoria Park at the University of Sydney, and in Brisbane and Melbourne.

Since 1992, when the Embassy was formally re-established in Canberra, the site has weathered both political and literal attacks, as well as

criticism from within the Aboriginal community.

Some local traditional owners of the Canberra region have objected to the Embassy's appearance, insisting that it disrespects them. Respective governments have conducted reviews on the site's future and made varying proposals, from replacing the Embassy with a presumably more palatable information centre to getting rid of it altogether.

Even when the Aboriginal Tent Embassy site was registered on the National Estate by the Australian Heritage Commission on April 9, 1995, the then federal Opposition spokesman for Regional Development, Senator Ian Macdonald, said he found the listing "incredible" declaring that "nothing should be done to make permanent that collection of ramshackle and illegal buildings".

And over time, cowardly arson attacks have damaged or destroyed some key buildings and other structures on the site.

Nevertheless, the Aboriginal Embassy today remains a lasting symbol of Indigenous unity on land rights and sovereignty. And it has morphed into a broader platform to protest, campaign and lobby in relation to other issues too.

Ongoing disadvantage in health, housing and child mortality, discrimination and racism, deaths in custody, mining on Aboriginal land, native title, threats to Aboriginal heritage and sacred sites, the mainstreaming of Aboriginal programs and – most recently – the Northern Territory Intervention have all been dissected and passionately debated there. Current moves to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people in Australia's Constitution will no doubt get the same treatment.

In the past, some amongst the Embassy "old guard" have expressed concerns that the vision of the place has been lost or the fire in the belly has gone out in some Indigenous people. During the Embassy's 20th anniversary celebrations in 1992, Michael Anderson ventured that some Aboriginal people would describe him and other activists as "just trouble-makers" or "leftovers from the 1960s and 1970s", criticising them for "not advancing our thinking".

"The trouble is our way of thinking back in the 1970s, which put this Embassy up, hasn't been caught up to by the rest of Indigenous Australia," Anderson told the Koori Mail back then.

"I think the sad thing is that not enough Aboriginal people in this country are as politically aware as they were in the 70s."

There can be no doubt that the Indigenous political landscape in Australia has changed markedly in the past four decades. And there are plenty of people who argue that the fight has become more sophisticated and nuanced than in days gone by. But no matter whether that fight is fought in the streets, boardrooms, sporting fields, or parliamentary chambers, those stepping up should know and respect our collective history.

The 2012 National NAIDOC celebrations will also honour the 40th anniversary of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, with the theme Spirit of the Tent Embassy: 40 years on.

* This article was written in the lead up to the January 26 anniversary. ★

Sydney

TJ Hickey

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