



# Defusing the aged care time bomb

Peter Mac

**The National Aged Care Alliance, a peak body of organisations involved in aged care, has warned that urgent action is needed to deal with the care of Australia's older citizens. The aged care system is certainly failing, with many people unable to gain access to care services, or unable to afford an appropriate level of care. Many aged care facilities are chronically under-staffed.**

Most aged people prefer to live out their final days at home. The government provides some help in this respect by funding community care services provided by church organisations or private firms. However, staying at home is usually only practical in cases where one or more family members are willing and able to provide ongoing care most of the time.

In most cases, sooner or later the person being cared for must be transferred to full-time aged care facility, i.e. either a nursing home or a hostel, run by a "service provider".

The federal government provides aged care accommodation funding for people with minimal income or assets. However, in other high-care cases a deposit or bond is required to gain a place in the facility. The bond may be paid in full as a lump sum or a monthly fee, or as a combination of a part sum and part fee. As well, the service provider charges a government-regulated fee for basic care, plus a tax deductible fee based on income and in some cases an additional fee for extra services or facilities.

On the death or discharge of the resident the deposit is refunded, but only after subtraction of an administration charge. Interest earned on the deposit goes to the service provider, not the resident or their estate. Periodic fees have to be paid by the patient, and/or family members and supporters. In many cases the family home has to be sold in order to meet these costs.

Moreover, the provision of government assistance is limited to 113 care places for every 1000 people over 70. As Martin Lavery from Catholic Care remarked bluntly: "...if you are 114 on the list, bad luck."

Last year the federal Productivity Commission released a report on the current situation and prospects, with regard to aged care in Australia. By 2050 the number of people over 65 will have risen from 13 to almost 25 percent of the population, and the number seeking access to home care or nursing home beds may be expected to rise in proportion.

### A maze of problems

One of the biggest problems concerns the staff to patient ratio in aged care institutions. Last week newspaper columnist Adelle Horin cited the experience of an 84-year old friend who booked her dementia-affected husband into

a nursing home but was shocked to find that staff were almost impossible to find when needed.

Ms Horin's friend spoke of: "residents roaming around, looking for a way out; residents left for hours unattended and with no members of staff in sight. The place looked abandoned, as if no one was in charge."

The number of nurses was simply inadequate to look after the patients. Afterwards Ms Horin's friend transferred her husband to a more luxurious and expensive nursing home, only to find that the problem was exactly the same.

Ms Horin observed "There is no mandated staff-to-patient ratio in aged care facilities ...". Struggles have been waged to gain compulsory staff to child ratios in childcare institutions "but in aged care, apparently, staff numbers are irrelevant. ... There are caring staff ... but they are run off their feet. All work for slave wages and there is high turnover."

### Reaching the "ageing well" objectives

The National Aged Care Alliance (NACA) claims that its program entitled Agewell will implement all the reforms outlined in the Productivity Commission's report, "Blueprint for Aged Care Reform".

Specifically, it claims that the Agewell program will enable older people and their families to gain information and be assessed for their aged care needs more easily, and will enable people to stay in their homes with community care help for longer periods. It will enable older people to retain the family home, and give families a wider choice of payment for aged care accommodation and services.

These reforms are certainly worth supporting. However, even if they are achieved (which is still under a question mark) they do not constitute fundamental reform, and many of the supporting statements raise major concerns.

For example, a massive deposit would not be required on admission, as it now is, but a fee would be charged in the form of an equity owed to the service provider. This would presumably be claimable from the patient's estate after their death, and could still lead to loss of the family home.

The system is still based on privately-run services, dominated by the profit motive. Ian Yates, chief executive of COTA (Council of the Aging) declared: "In the new system the accommodation price will reflect the cost of providing it and the market in which it is offered. The price would be publicly advertised. Currently what you pay is very often determined by what assets you have rather than the actual price of the accommodation."

That sounds very much as though the less well-off would have to pay the full market rate, with no concessions, under the reformed system.



Aged care organisations are arguing that the aged care crisis could be dealt with by a continuation of the user-pays principle to meet nursing home running costs, an increase in the current level of government subsidies for construction of new facilities, and the lifting of the current government-imposed limit on accommodation charges.

### The outstretched hand

Implementing the Productivity Commission recommendations would undoubtedly require massive extra government funding, and the private sector already has its hand out for a hefty slice.

Martin Lavery from Catholic Care complained: "Current laws limit a high care resident's accommodation charge to \$32 a day. Even at the Sydney Backpackers at Central Station the daily charge is \$69 per day. ... an average high care bed built to contemporary standards operates at a loss of \$62 each day. (This) is the reason that some providers are not building new services to meet growing demand."

But is it? Lavery enthusiastically endorsed the bond system, which he said had facilitated the provision of services for low-care residents. What he didn't mention is that the system has also yielded service providers with remarkably handsome returns from the interest on huge capital reserves.

NACA claims that the reforms will rectify the nursing shortage by providing decent wages for nursing staff. But will they? In a distinctly ambivalent statement, Ian Yates commented that aged care workers would be paid "fair and competitive wages".

Lavery totally dismisses the idea of the government using special levies or taxes to provide long term funding for aged care.

He recently declared: "The taxpayer cannot fund it all - particularly in years ahead with fewer taxpayers, more people needing aged care and increased health and age pensions costs as the population ages. ... German Chancellor Angela Merkel is proposing ... a generational tax to be imposed on those aged 26 to 60 to fund the care needs of older Germans. A tax like this in Australia would be impossible to sell to the electorate."

But would it? Australian taxpayers certainly resent their taxes being used for unpopular initiatives, such as never-ending wars in Afghanistan and elsewhere. However, they're overwhelmingly in favour of the Medicare levy, whose single, stated purpose is to fund universal medical care. A similar levy to fund universal aged care would provide adequate protection against population ageing, and would undoubtedly gain widespread approval.

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## The Guardian

Issue 1543

April 18, 2012

### Undemocratic outcome under single seat system

In the Queensland state elections last month, the conservative Liberal National Party (LNP) almost made a clean sweep, taking 78 out of 89 seats – close to 90 percent of the seats. Yet nothing like 90 percent of the electorate voted for the LNP, not even after distribution of preferences. Its primary vote was just under 50 percent. The LNP more than doubled the number of its seats from 37 to 78 while its vote only increased by eight percent from 41.6 percent in 2009 to 49.7 percent! Labor with 26 percent of the vote has only seven elected representatives – just under eight percent of the seats. The Australian Greens with no seats and 7.5 percent of the primary vote and Bob Katter's The Australian Party with two seats and 11.5 percent were also short-changed. So why such a huge discrepancy between voting sentiments and the outcome in seats?

The key question is the electoral system itself. The Queensland state parliament is based on a single seat, preferential voting system, similar to that used in the federal sphere and other state parliaments, with the exception of Tasmania.

With such a system it makes no difference if a seat is won with 80 percent or 51 percent of the vote. Likewise it matters little if a seat is lost with 49 percent or one percent of the vote. There is no recognition for the 49 percent. This is the underlying reason why the electoral system can produce such extreme distortions as occurred in the Queensland elections.

The system does not recognise in parliamentary outcomes support for parties not receiving majority support in specific electorates, even though they might have quite substantial support in that seat, within a region or across the state. The situation is made more serious in Queensland in that it only has one chamber, there is no second "house of review" with members elected under a far more democratic system of proportional representation as exists federally and in other states.

While perhaps their most dramatic in Queensland, the undemocratic outcomes of the single seat, preferential system are not confined to that state. In the Victorian state elections, the National Party with 6.75 percent of the vote took 10 seats and the Greens with almost double their vote (11.2 percent) won no seats. In NSW, the Greens won one seat with ten percent of the vote, under a proportional system they would have been entitled to around nine seats. The Liberals with 38.8 percent (hardly a majority) won over half the seats. In the federal system, the Greens with 11.76 percent of the vote only won one out of 150 seats in the House of Representatives – a proportional system might have resulted in 17 or 18 seats. Similar analyses can be made of electoral outcomes in the other states. In all instances, one or both the major parties were beneficiaries, with seat numbers well beyond their proportion of the vote.

The present system is in urgent need of replacement by a more democratic method of election. It results in huge distortions in parliamentary outcomes. In particular, it serves to perpetrate the two-party system, despite the growing disillusionment and opposition to the two major parties. The Communist Party of Australia is calling for a system of proportional-preferential voting with larger, multi-member electorates.

Proportional representation means the election of representatives in accordance with the proportion of votes they receive. The preferential component means voters still have their priority ranking of candidates recognised and counted, should their first choice not be elected. The Hare-Clark system used in Tasmania has five, five-member electorates incorporating proportional-preferential representation. It is a desirable option for Australia as a whole. The results give a far more accurate representation of voting intentions.

Electoral reform is becoming more urgent than ever as state and federal governments cut services, sack public sector employees and take away our rights and social gains won in years of struggle. The ruthless global drive of capital to maximise profits while destroying jobs, seizing public assets, crushing unions and destroying the environment has produced a wave of public anger, in Australia, and around the globe.

In Australia, the two-party system has served big business well for over a century, guaranteeing "stability" – code for the best political and economic environment for profit-making by corporations. A more democratic electoral system would greatly assist in the struggle to break the two-party system and elect representatives and a government that would be prepared to challenge corporate interests and defend workers' rights, social justice, sustainable development and environmental protection.

#### Press Fund

Electricity prices are up again. Petrol is going through the roof. Which ever way you turn costs are rising. Unfortunately *The Guardian* is not immune to rising prices. Our costs continue to rise and we do our utmost to keep the price of *The Guardian* as low as possible. That is why the Press Fund is so important. Every dollar we raise with the Press Fund helps. The Fund is well behind schedule. May Day is fast approaching, so why not a special May Day contribution to the Press Fund to show you appreciation for the *Workers' Weekly*. Send your contribution today. Our warmest thanks go to the following for their contributions:

D Anthony \$20, Les Bromfield \$10, Shayne Talbot \$50, Round Figure \$10, Alice Johnson \$50, Brian McGee \$5, Robert Dumpf \$10, CGJ & PJJ \$10.

This week's total: \$165 Progressive total: \$2,405.00

# A little gem in the Party office



Denis Doherty

For many years a picture of clasped hands has hung in the CPA office in Sydney. Recently it was found that it was not a print but a lino cut block which was showing some signs of decay. Award winning print maker Trish Yates was called to bring her expertise to bear.

Trish was excited by the find and showed it to the other print makers in her circle. They all commented on its excellence and insisted its history should be researched and the block preserved. Trish undertook the restoration of the lino cut block and its mounting.

Then the research began. Lino cut prints have often been used as a working class art form as they can depict in a powerful way the emotions present in the struggle for liberation. The most

famous Australian print maker of the last century was communist Noel Counihan. The CPA has some prints of his Eureka studies.

The research revealed a most significant and precious gem. The lino cut block was carved by artist Len Gale, a life long Marxist and member of the Socialist Party of Aotearoa (SPA New Zealand). It shows the hands of a pakeha (white Kiwi) and a Maori clasped together in struggle.

It was created during the 1951 New Zealand waterfront lockout when Len was involved as part of the underground media group and was used for banners and placards.

It was given to the CPA during a visit to the party from members of the SPA(NZ) in 2008. The SPA members chose it because the image symbolised the new CPA-SPA relationship.

Len Gale is known in Australia for the artwork he produced for

the 100th anniversary of Eureka – reprinted by the CPA for 150th anniversary (2004).

Trish Yates used the block to print three copies of the image. They are hand printed on acid free Japanese kozo paper which means they will not yellow.

Trish mounted and framed the lino cut for the CPA where it sits proudly in a prominent part of the party office. This is a precious piece of working class history and the party is proud to be its owner.

The other two have also been mounted and framed. One is currently a prize in the May Day Guessing Competition 2012.

The Party would like to thank Trish Yates for her advice and generosity.

The prints mounted and framed are worth over \$300 each. ✪

## New Peace Coalition launched

"The US military have brought disaster to both the Middle East and South Asia, and they are now eyeing up our part of the world for their next destructive adventure. Key decisions are being made without parliamentary debate or community consultation, and they risk souring our relations with other countries around the region, and ultimately plunging us into war," said Professor Jake Lynch, Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney, at the launch of a new peace coalition called Keep War from our Door – Wave of Hope (Wave).

The group was launched on April 17 at NSW Parliament House. The launch was timed to coincide with the Global Day of Action against Military Spending.

Professor Lynch was joined at the launch by Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon, Professor Stuart Rees from the Sydney Peace Foundation, academic Dr David Palmer, military historian Paul Ham and Jane Brock from the peace movement.

In its mission statement, Wave stresses that current Australian and US military arrangements are upsetting China and other regional states and urges co-operation to build an Indo-Pacific region based on friendship, trust and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

The coalition of anti-war, human rights, social justice and environment groups is challenging the Labor government's decision to invite 2,500 troops to be permanently based in Darwin. US marines stationed in Darwin will increase Australia's chance of being attacked.

Wave opposes the continuing military build-up in our home region, which threatens to bring war to our doorstep and calls on the nations of the Indo-Pacific to reduce their force levels and military spending.

Wave also stresses Australia's positive history of involvement in

global peace efforts such as the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and urges continuation of such efforts instead of the present rush to militarise the north of our country.

The CPA welcomes the new coalition and supports its determination to resist the new focus of US imperialism on our region, the militaristic stance of the Australian government and its subservience to the US, and the excessive military spending of the Australian government, making Australia the sixth largest spender on the military in the world. ✪



# US Marines arrival flouts demands for peace

Bob Briton

The Global Day of Action on Military Spending was due to take place as *The Guardian* goes to press. April 17 was set down for events across the globe as the people of the world call for cuts to military spending, the scrapping of the 23,000 nuclear weapons held in stockpiles around the world and the reining in of the rapid proliferation of conventional weapons in recent times. A scandalous coincidence for peace-loving people in Australia and the region was the arrival of the first of the US marines at what will be a new base in Darwin. Tensions with our neighbours have increased and war plans against China have become clearer.

The arrival of the first batch of 200 marines was the occasion for a flood of official doublespeak. Prime Minister Gillard went on record, saying the marines' new home was not a US military base. There are no US bases on Australian soil and there never will be, according to the embattled PM. The custom in Australian military circles for some time has been to call such bases "joint facilities" even if there is not a single Australian accent to be heard on their grounds. By 2017, it is projected that a 2,500-strong Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) will rotate through

the NT base in the dry season. It will accommodate major equipment including wheeled vehicles, artillery pieces, light armoured vehicles and aircraft.

US ambassador to Australia, Jeffrey Bleich was on hand to suggest the role of the troops was to secure trade routes from an unidentified and non-existent threat. "You have access to the Pacific Ocean, to the Indian Ocean, to the East Timor Sea and the trade routes all around," he said. A marine corporal was upbeat about the posting. "Everybody is excited to be here," he said. "We are really pumped."

The arrival of the marines cements a joint undertaking by Julia Gillard and Barack Obama during the US President's visit to Australia last November. The announcement foreshadowed the release earlier this year of the Australian military's latest *Defence Force Posture Review*. It proposes the creation of new bases, the expansion of some current ones and even an upgrade to Fleet Base West at HMAS Stirling near Perth to accommodate US nuclear submarines.

The final report has been handed to defence minister Stephen Smith who noted it would become part of the process that will deliver a new *Defence White Paper* in 2014. The last *White Paper* in 2009 presented the Australian people with a huge bill for multi-billion dollar weapons

acquisitions as part of a further shift in Australia's role in the Asia-Pacific region towards containing the growing prestige and influence of China and, ultimately, to wage war against it alongside US forces.

A lot of cover stories have been devised to take attention away from the essence of the strategy. The ambassador mentioned the supposedly threatened security of sea-lanes. The *Defence Force Posture Review* also mentions the capacity to respond to natural disasters and the defence of the mineral wealth of north-western Australia – as if overseas interests aren't already plundering these resources without a single shot being fired!

The arrival of the marines was a reminder of the cost of the US alliance and the Australian military's role in disrupting the possibility of peaceful relations in our region and beyond. The Global Day of Action will go ahead and the voices of people demanding jobs and proper services will not be silenced. People know that even a relatively small shift away from the current policy direction would reap enormous benefit at home and across the world. If just 10 percent of the estimated global military budget of US\$1.5 trillion were put to social needs, the UN's Millennium Development Goals for the third world could be met with ease. ☺



Photo: Avante Media Australia

# Bad management to blame for company collapse

The former director of a Victorian automotive component manufacturer should look in the mirror instead of blaming workers for the company's collapse.

More than 100 Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) members were stood down without pay when APV Automotive Components, from Coburg in Melbourne's north, entered administration.

AMWU Victorian Vehicle Division secretary, Paul Difelice, said that workers who recently

negotiated to keep their redundancy provisions were not the cause of APV's collapse, as claimed by former managing director, Harry Hinckling.

"I find it very offensive my members are being blamed for the collapse of APV. When the company was taken over he (director Harry Hinckling) knew what the liabilities were."

Hinckling has publicly argued a company plan to seek voluntary redundancies was rejected by the workers. However Mr Difelice

accused the company's directors of poor management and being unwilling to cooperate.

"We haven't had access to their financials and for many years we've tried to sit down with the company and they've continually refused to work with us.

"The company could have put any terms for voluntary redundancies to their workers but instead they've tried to get an across-the-board reduction in entitlements.

"In the end it came back to a position of trust between the

employees and Harry Hinckling and the manager out there."

Receivers of the company, who supply parts for Ford, Toyota and Holden and are a key player in the Australian automotive chain, will now look to revive jobs and production.

The administrator, Stephen Longley, said he would hold urgent discussions with customers, employees, the AMWU and suppliers to try and restructure the business with the objective of resuming operations as soon as possible.

Meanwhile AMWU delegate, Marco Randone, who has worked at APV for 18 years, said many of his workmates had phoned him in tears.

"I've worked there since I left school. This is the only job I have ever had.

"I'm shattered. I was on parental leave," he said.

"My wife just had our third daughter two weeks ago, and I have a \$400,000 mortgage to pay. How am I going to do that?" ☺

Pete's Corner



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Want to get involved?  
Contact UnionsWA on 08 9328 7877 or unionsyes@unionswa.com.au

# Terminal impacts

## Summary of 4th Coal Terminal Impacts

Port Waratah Coal Service's 4th Coal Terminal (T4) is a proposal for a massive new coal terminal in Newcastle, NSW. If approved, T4 would allow an additional 120 million tonnes per annum of coal to be shipped out of Newcastle. This would boost existing coal export capacity by 84 percent, in what is already the world's biggest coal port.

### Impacts on habitat, endangered and threatened species, and migratory birds

An area within the 4th terminal site is currently National Park. The National Park lands provide critical habitat for migratory shore birds. National Park lands must not be included in the proposed development.

- The 312 hectare project site includes 91 hectares of valuable native vegetation and 24 hectares of open water habitat. The project site is home to 18.8 hectares of saltmarsh (an endangered ecological community under the Threatened Species Conservation Act (TSC)), 28.9 hectares of mangrove and 27.3 hectares of freshwater wetland, 4 hectares of which are listed as an endangered community under the TSC Act.
- Loss of habitat for 23 threatened fauna species including the Australasian bittern (listed as endangered under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act), and the Green and Golden Bell frog (also listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act).
- Loss of habitat and disruption to an ecologically significant proportion of a population of four migratory shorebird species listed under international conservation conventions. At least 11 species of migratory birds recognised by international treaties rely on

the habitat of Deep Pond and its proximity to the RAMSAR listed wetland.

- Offsets cannot hope to compensate for loss of habitat at the site. The proposed offset site at Ellalong has already been identified as critical for conservation in its own right. Furthermore, the offset site fails to compensate for the loss of Deep Pond because it is over 50 kilometres away from Kooragang Island. Deep Pond is critical because it provides key foraging and roosting habitat due to its proximity to RAMSAR listed wetlands in the Hunter estuary.
- Deep Pond is the only freshwater drought refuge in the Lower Hunter Estuary system. It is relied upon by at least 15 species of waterfowl, three of which are listed as threatened under the TSC Act.
- Because of the valuable habitat that Deep Pond provides to numerous threatened and protected species and its critical function to the nearby RAMSAR listed wetlands, Deep Pond should be protected and its management should be coordinated with the ongoing conservation efforts in the Hunter Estuary.

### Air quality

- The Environmental Assessment of T4 downplays impacts on air quality stating: "The T4 project is not expected to result in any criterion exceedences on any additional days of the year". It defies belief that extra, uncovered coal stockpiles will not increase the amount of coal dust effecting Newcastle suburbs.
- The EA only considers the impact of increased coal train movements on residences within 20 metres of the rail line. However, the impacts of coal dust are likely to extend far beyond this area.

- The current guidelines are outdated and fail to account for the findings of recent health studies which demonstrate that total suspended particles (coal dust) are of greater detriment to human health than when the T4 guidelines were put in place.
- The precautionary principle should be applied to potential health impacts of the T4 proposal. Approval should not be allowed until a more conclusive health and air quality study is undertaken for the Newcastle LGA.

### Dredging and Water Pollution

- There is no plan to fully remediate the heavily contaminated T4 site. The T4 proposal will therefore cause the leaching of existing toxic material into groundwater and surrounding surface waters via a 'squeezing effect'. The result will be pollution of both the neighbouring (National Park and RAMSAR listed) wetlands and the Hunter River.
- An increase in shipping will negatively impact harbour water quality with sediment disturbance (some of it contaminated), release of bilge water, more antifouling agents, chemicals and oil spills, and dumping of debris. It will also reduce access for other harbour users and increase the risk of introduced species.
- The T4 proposal requires the realignment of the banks of the South Arm of the Hunter River and construction of a "turning circle" or "swing basin" to accommodate the world's largest ships. The proposal also requires dredging of the South Arm of the river from its natural depth of 2-4 metres to 16.2 metres with 17.8 metres deep shipping berths along each bank.
- The dredging will have massive impacts including the removal of aquatic habitats and impacts on estuarine habitats via changes to tidal hydrodynamics and salinity. Also, it has the potential of creating stagnant deep holes, altering currents, causing riverbed erosion and releasing pollutants that are currently trapped within the bottom sediments.
- The area that will be dredged has changed significantly after the state government gave the dredging approval. PWCS should



apply for a new license for dredging, given that the proposal for dredging has changed significantly.

### Social and economic impacts on Newcastle and Lower Hunter

- After construction, T4 will provide no additional long-term employment. Rather, T4 is likely to result in the loss of other economic activities in the port, such as tourism, fishing and other shipping.
- T4 would facilitate an increase of at least 41 additional coal trains per day through the suburbs of Maitland and into Newcastle. This would increase congestion on the rail lines as well as increasing noise and dust.
- T4 will increase noise and light pollution. Noise, vibrations and light pollution from onsite operations will occur 24 hours a day, 7 days per week.
- T4 will cause increased traffic congestion during the construction period.
- T4 is likely to have impacts on commercial fishing due to the loss of habitat and the increased contamination caused by the dredging.

### Impacts of increased coal mining in NSW

- When completed, T4 would facilitate the development of at least 15 more large coalmines in the Hunter Valley and Liverpool Plains.
- The costs of more mining to the state include: greenhouse

gas generation at mines, loss of agricultural lands, blasting, noise, air quality, loss of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage, visual impacts, loss and pollution of surface water and groundwater, damage to aquatic ecology, flora and fauna loss.

- Research shows the health impacts of the coal industry are estimated to be around \$2.6 billion across Australia. Pollution from coal affects all major body organ systems and contributes to the leading causes of morbidity and mortality. In the Hunter Valley this impact is all the more prevalent due to the proximity to communities of coal mining, transport and infrastructure. The 4th terminal project would increase negative health impacts in the region. For this reason alone, the negative contribution of the project far outweighs any merits.
- T4 will mean 22 more coal ships would visit Newcastle every week, pushing out other port users.
- T4 would provide coal for the equivalent of 15 more large power stations around the world, generating an extra 288 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year and fuelling the global climate crisis.

To make a submission to the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure go to [majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au](http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au) and in the "Search Projects" field enter "Port Waratah". Fill out the submissions form and don't forget to select the option "I object to it" in the drop-down box. ☒

## Defusing the aged care time bomb

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Moreover, there is no reason why nursing homes – or aged care complexes that provide a variety of accommodation services, as the Productivity Commission has recommended – could not be government-run. After all, governments manage public transport, hospital and other services – not to mention superannuation schemes that have outperformed private schemes, many of which suffered massive losses during the recent financial crisis.

The fundamental reason for the current crisis is that aged care

is dominated by the private sector, whose values and practices have been adopted by many of the church-run organisations.

Moreover, governments have not tackled the failings of the aged care system, which include lengthy prior notification by the government to the institution concerned of accreditation inspections.

As Adelle Horin commented: "Providers might argue that the current system is failing because of lack of funds. But enriching the providers in a freed-up market is no panacea – not without more transparency, a

better accreditation system, including public reporting on unannounced (inspection) visits, and better staffing"

Achieving the Productivity Commission's objectives would certainly require extremely tight control by government over the profit-motivated firms that currently dominate the aged care industry. But it would be better still to begin to replace the current arrangements with a new Medicare-style aged care regime dedicated to providing a first class service for our older fellow-citizens. They deserve it, and so do we. ☒

Sydney

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## Humor from my Pen

Political cartoons by Gerardo Hernández

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Gerardo Hernández



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# Elders say they'll fight mining plan

Kirstie Parker

**Aboriginal Elders in northern New South Wales say they'll mobilise community support for their anti-mining message, after meeting with the statewide land body over its hopes to explore the region for gas and petroleum.**

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) sparked a flurry of protests when it announced last month it had applied to the state government for three exploration licences; one covering a 368,340 square kilometre area near White Cliffs, one covering a 47,040 square kilometre area south south-west of Grafton, and a third covering a 1,330 square kilometre area outside Murwillumbah.

The umbrella body for more than 100 local Aboriginal land councils throughout the state, NSWALC conceded the applications represented "a paradigm shift" in its activities but said they had the potential, if granted, to greatly enhance the economic fortunes of Aboriginal people in those areas.

It is negotiating with a major developer who it has so far declined to name.

A fortnight ago, NSWALC chief executive Geoff Scott fronted a meeting in Lismore to hear Elders and other community representatives vent their frustration at not having been consulted before the applications were lodged, and the potential for any eventual related mining activity to involve extraction of coal seam gas (CSG) via fracking. A major community-driven campaign has continued to draw attention to the negative impacts of the controversial practice, including potential contamination of water bodies if accidentally permeated by toxic gas.

Senior Bundjalung woman and grandmother of 11 Patsy Nagas said after last week's meeting that about 60 of the 70 people who attended were opposed to the direction being taken by NSWALC.

"Everyone had a say and they were all virtually of the same mind; they were all against it," Ms Nagas told the *Koori Mail* newspaper.

"We've been protesting now for

at least a year against coal seam gas. It's just a 'no' decision from us.

"Geoff Scott said something at the meeting about petroleum... I don't know anything about the petroleum so can't really comment there, but it's still mining to me, which I don't want to happen.

"This is both an environmental and cultural issue; they want to come through land that is the spiritual country of people around the north coast."

Ms Nagas said she knew the exploration licence applications did not necessarily equate to mining – there are no guarantees they'll be granted. And she said it was good that Mr Scott had spoken to community members soon after the announcement.

"But my issue is that Geoff Scott hadn't talked to anyone up in this area first," she said.

"Let me reiterate that the man himself personally doesn't want coal seam gas mining; he has a job to do.

"His idea is that it might as well be blackfellas who get the licences, because they'll care more about what happens to the land, but I'm still against.

"I don't see Aboriginal beliefs co-existing with mining anywhere. Mining not only destroys country, it also destroys the spirit of the land.

"We're going to fight to the end. It's not just the Aboriginal people who are fighting it. I can honestly say that 75 percent of this community of Kyogle and this whole district are against coal seam gas and mining."

Another Bundjalung Elder opposed to the NSWALC's attempts to use mining to potentially "get a seat at the table" in terms of economic development was Lismore-based Reg King.

He attended the meeting too, to ensure his voice was heard.

Earlier, he told the *Koori Mail* that he didn't want CSG mined on his country because of the damage it had caused in other countries like America.

"All the sickness it will cause, our land will be worth nothing," he said.

"All of our bush food will be gone.

"I tell you, I'll move out of the area if it's signed and sealed, and this



Bundjalung man Reg King.

Photo: *Koori Mail*

is my own country! I'm a Cubawee boy. I was born and bred here.

"They never told us what was going on. This is not the Aboriginal way.

"I'm calling on all of my people to stand up and be counted. The dollar is the root of all evil. I'm very upset about this."

Mr Scott told the *Koori Mail* there was little opportunity to consult communities before lodging the applications, literally a window of just a few hours.

However, he said NSWALC wanted to hear what local communities had to say on the subject and they would be listened to.

Ms Nagas said she had invited organisers of a local anti-CSG group to her local Gugin Gudduba land council at Kyogle, "so they can further educate my people as to why we have to stand against this".

"I'm doing this for our young people. They need to learn now about environmental destruction before it's too late," she said.

*Koori Mail* ✪



Boral, Australia's biggest construction material supplier, has been warned by the Fair Work Australia commissioner that its practice of supervisors accompanying injured staff members into doctor's consulting rooms is poor practice. It was the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union which was the first to question the practice saying it raised privacy concerns and could interfere with the doctor-patient relationship. Boral insisted that it was its "duty of care" to accompany employees to medical visits to ensure they got proper treatment. Fair Work Australia commissioner John Ryan recommended that the practice should be changed. "The real vice in Boral's actions is that an injured worker who needs to get to a doctor for medical treatment may not have the capacity to say 'no' to such a request. Boral puts the request to an employee when the employee is vulnerable. This could create a situation of undue influence or pressure being placed on the employee". The union's industrial officer said it was outrageous to see such an intrusive policy. "The supervisors at Boral should concentrate on their own jobs and leave healthcare in the hands of medical professionals. What's next – will supervisors follow workers into the confessional?"

ACTU President Ged Kearney has welcomed the passage by Parliament of two bills to improve the pay and conditions of truck drivers and clothing outworkers. "The two pieces of legislation which have been passed in Canberra... highlight the plight of insecure work, which now affects 40 percent of the entire Australian workforce", Ms Kearney said. "Truck drivers and clothing outworkers endure some of the worst effects of insecure work, with the fear they will not have a job in the morning prompting them to work long hours, risk their safety and sacrifice valuable time outside work just to make a living ... Many home-based outworkers work 12-hour days or longer, for just \$5 an hour – less than one third the minimum wage – sewing items of clothes that earn distributors and retailers huge profits", Ms Kearney said.

The NSW electricity agency TransGrid has admitted its contractors sprayed herbicide across the Kosciuszko National Park killing thousands of alpine plants. The agency did not report the herbicide use to government agencies. National Parks and Wildlife Service staff spotted dead vegetation in December and there is an ongoing investigation into the incident and the possible remediation proposals.

**Don't forget to get those Guardian tins sent in. They should be cut open and the money collected sent into the party for The Guardian. If you live near the party office, drop the tin off with your name on it and we will count it and acknowledge it in the Press Fund. If you cannot visit the party office convert the contents of the tin into a cheque made out to The Guardian but mention it is from a Guardian tin.**



# Robespierre – Bourgeois Revolution

## Part 1

Bob Treasure

**Maximilien Robespierre is a name still reviled in polite French society today. It is difficult to find a memorial to him, or indeed the revolution in which he was so famously identified, in contemporary France. Many on the Left regard him as a significant figure of French revolutionary struggle, but few Marxists embrace him. Even now, as Sarkozy faces expulsion at the hands of a “socialist” candidate, many rightists and “moderates” live in dread of a revival of revolution, as well as the anti-rich “Terror” which Robespierre was supposed to have inspired.**

*Fatal Purity* is Ruth Scurr’s biography of Robespierre, revealing much of his character and motives. Marxist it is not, having little or no class analysis, but there are insights into Robespierre’s actions which have till now remained obscure, especially his role in the infamous Reign of Terror, and now these can be more soberly assessed.

### Early life

Maximilien Robespierre was born in 1758 in the northern border city of Arras. His family was associated with legal practice and his grandparents were reasonably well off, but his father was a dissolute who soiled the family name and lost its assets. After his mother had given birth to two girls, Charlotte and Henrietta, and another brother, Augustin, she died when Robespierre was six. The father promptly disappeared, and the Robespierre children were farmed out to other relatives.

Maximilien came to appreciate the critical place of privilege in society since, with his declining status, he could see his own advantages being frittered away.

So he studied hard at the local school and won a scholarship to the elite College Louis-le-Grand in Paris, once recently run by the Jesuit order. In 1762, Louis XV expelled the “subversive” Jesuits, allowing the University of Paris (the Sorbonne) to take over the running of the college and reinvent it for scholarship students “whose means do not allow them to enjoy the same advantages as others”. Some earlier alumni of the college were Moliere, Voltaire, and the Marquis de Sade, while some of Robespierre’s classmates were also high profile revolutionaries: Freron, Desmoulins, Petion. A unique curriculum, indeed!

### JJ Rousseau

Despite scrimping to get by Robespierre grabbed the chance to regain his family’s prestige. He grew determined, withdrawn, stubborn, humourless, but diligent. He studied rhetoric in order to develop his speaking skills, and at some stage while at Louis-le-Grand, he read Jean Jacques Rousseau’s sensational yet proscribed novel *Emile*: a book about a young man seeking liberation by living a “natural” life, unconstrained by socially imposed “habit”.

Rousseau’s famous saying: “Man is born free, but everywhere is in chains”, framed the ideological background to wholesale revolution, and Robespierre became one of his instruments, taking Rousseau’s abstract thoughts and forging them into revolutionary policy.

At the age of 23, after graduating from Louis-le-Grand with a law degree, Robespierre returned to Arras to build a legal practice: over the next decade much of his father’s debt had to be repaid. Developing a reputation as a “modern thinker” and champion of the underdog, he was appointed as one of five judges to the Bishop’s Court.

In one case, he was obliged to sentence a murderer to death. At this time, “death” meant being publicly battered on a wheel, then hanged. According to his sister Charlotte, Robespierre agonised over the decision. He could not eat or sleep, and became ill as judgement was to be passed. Nevertheless, his name was on the death certificate.

### The Monarchy cracks

In 1789 Louis XVI summoned the Estates General because the creaking feudal economy was broke and could no longer cope on loans.

This was a drastic move, because it involved the coming together, for the first time since 1614, of France’s three feudal Estates: Clergy (1st Estate, with 302 delegates); Nobility (2nd Estate, 289 delegates) and the Rest – bourgeois, “professionals”, artisans, shopkeepers, peasants, 95 percent of the population (3rd Estate, 576 delegates).

Robespierre campaigned hard to get elected, which wasn’t easy because it was a collegiate system, where assemblies for a town would elect delegates, who would then join other town delegates to elect regional delegates and so on.

He made it, and along with 1,167 other delegates from across France, came to represent the city of Arras at Versailles, the sumptuous “palace city” of the King, some 15 kilometres south west of the walls of Paris.

Robespierre went largely unnoticed during the early convulsions of revolt. More illustrious figures such as Necker, Mirabeau, Lafayette, Abbe Sieyes and Bailly stood out as first the 3<sup>rd</sup> Estate took the Tennis Court Oath to remain together, then demanded to be the National Assembly of France, and finally challenged the authority of the King to become the constitution-makers of a new state.

When Royal troops began to be assembled outside Paris, the people of the city stormed the Bastille prison-fortress and formed their own National Guard. The King was thus warned to keep his military out of the capital.

Later, a crowd of irate and radical women marched to Versailles with a cannon and insisted the royal family and the National Assembly come to Paris, where they could be observed and the founding democracy could remain under the watchful eye of the people.

### Robespierre — Friend of the Sans Culottes

As the power of the common people of Paris grew, so too did Robespierre’s profile. At first, the deputies of the National Assembly appeared united in their desire for a constitutional monarchy, the abolition of feudal privileges, the administrative reorganisation of France from regions into Departments, the declaration of the Rights of Man and the organisation of the forthcoming national elections.

Yet when it came to detail, divisions began to appear. Robespierre was appalled when the Assembly sought to categorise French citizens as “active” and “passive”. “Active” citizens would pay the equal of two days labour in tax; those who could not afford this were “passive” and thus could not vote. This amounted to 39 percent of the male population.

He was again outraged when he found that only active citizens were eligible to join the National Guard, and that a wealth qualification would apply to candidates for the new government.

The Assembly further sought to reorganise the radical districts of Paris into “sections” to elect the municipal Commune of the city. Georges Danton, spokesman of the radical Cordeliers district, saw this as an attack on the vanguard of the revolution and found an ally in the deputy from Arras: Robespierre. Their passionate opposition failed, but Danton formed the Cordeliers Club in response.

The real crunch came with the proposal to separate the functions of church and state, as in America, and to confiscate church lands (between one quarter and one third of all the landed property in France, to the value of 60 million livres, according to a mid 18th century account – a huge amount.) This was to pay for the reforms of the new government.

Robespierre was repelled by the Catholic Church’s opulent wealth, and his position was clear: “Church property belongs to the people; and to demand that the clergy shall use it to help the people is merely to put it to its original purpose.”

What this implied was simply that the new democratic state would soon assume responsibility over the education, health, and welfare of the nation. This might not have been good news to pious peasants in the far-flung provinces, still loyal to the local priest and Holy Father, but to the advanced Sans Culottes of the Paris

sections this was music to their ears: no longer the entrenched poverty and privileges of the old regime! Now the state promised redistribution of wealth and a future of opportunity for the benefit of all, and Robespierre, along with Danton, Marat, Desmoulins, Saint-Just and a host of others, was their primary spokesperson.

From this point on, Robespierre’s die was cast: his fate was inextricably linked with the Sans Culottes. He was their hero, they were his acolytes, but he was the prisoner of their collective imaginations. In the surge and frenetic push-and-pull of revolution, all were jointly seized by the power of popular joy, fraternity, fear and excitement which, like a careering carriage, hurtled toward the unknown...

### Who were the Sans Culottes?

Initially the Sans Culottes were portrayed as the half-mad, blood-crazed mob of street vagabonds who patrolled the streets of Paris hunting out aristocratic victims: a professional revolutionary crowd, so it seemed. Closer research by historians such as Rude has revealed a much more sophisticated mix. For Scurr, they are the ever-demanding backdrop of Robespierre’s anxiety.

Literally, the term “Sans Culottes” means “without pants”, more strictly “without the stockinged breeches” of the aristocracy and well-to-do. They are traditionally shown in working clothes, wooden clogs, and a red Phrygian cap with the revolutionary cockade attached. At one stage of the revolution, during the heady, topsy-turvy world of 1793-94 and the Terror, “Sans Culotte” clothing became the fashion and parading aristocratic attire became a risky business.

In reality, the Sans Culottes were the working people of Paris. Not the “working class” in a modern, industrial sense, since France at this stage had still not undergone an industrial revolution – yet still these were masons, plasterers, coach-drivers, smithies, washer-women, labourers, seamstresses, cabinetmakers, hairdressers. They comprised “respectable” trades such as tailoring, as well as unseemly ones such as prostitution.

Politically the Sans Culottes were the vanguard of the revolution. Being the poorer sections of society they had little to lose by launching into daring new policy that provided ever greater liberty and equality for themselves. They could read, as is evidenced by the wild popularity of the pro-Sans Culotte papers such as *Marat’s L’ami du Peuple* and Hebert’s *Le Pere Duchesne* as well as Robespierre’s more high-brow publication: *La Defenseur de la Constitution*.

Despite being short on rhetoric, they attended debates in the Cordeliers, Jacobin and Feulliant clubs and when they could, they sat in the galleries of the National Assembly/Convention. They were no fools. They made their views loudly known. They were alert, conscious of their interests, and were stubbornly loyal patriots: defenders of the revolution.

Living in the second largest city in Europe (London was by far the biggest) the Sans Culottes were also dependent on supplies to the city for their survival. The staple of their diet was bread. The old regime had failed to guarantee a reliable supply of bread to the capital, and its price continued to fluctuate wildly.

This issue was a major stimulant to the militancy of the Sans Culottes. The revolution – and by implication, Robespierre – needed to address this simple economic dilemma, or face political annihilation.

### The Jacobins

“The Jacobins” have often been referred to in the sense of a modern political party. They were not. The Jacobins were mainly a debating club formed when the National Assembly moved to Paris. The “radical” deputies who wanted to preserve the gains of the revolution rented some large rooms in a Dominican monastery near the Assembly meeting hall – the monks were called the Jacobins because their building was originally situated on the Rue St Jacques.

Robespierre played a major part in the formation and popularity of the Jacobins. Each day, after the debates and resolutions of the



Assembly, the deputies would report and make speeches to explain their position. Observers, including many Sans Culottes, came to the club after work to boo the heretics and cheer their heroes.

Robespierre encouraged the spread of Jacobin Clubs across France, and tried to ensure that his speeches were printed and distributed throughout the country. In this way, Robespierre sought to spread the radicalism of Paris to the Nation and stave off counter revolution – his greatest fear.

Yet the class nature of the Jacobin Club was revealed in its very structure: it cost 12 livres to join and 24 livres annual subscription, a lot of money in those days (by contrast, Danton’s Cordeliers Club cost a penny a month to join), and it was restricted to males. Women and Sans Culottes could sit in the galleries surrounding the seated members and the speaking tribune and express their position – but they could not speak in any formal sense.

### The Bourgeoisie fractures – 1791-1794

In the years following 1791 representatives of the bourgeoisie found themselves leading a revolutionary government. As the nation, and especially Paris, became radicalised the bourgeois leadership groped for its most powerful comfort zone in the new emergent society. Scurr details well the atmosphere as successive factions: moderates, “Girondins”, “Dantonists”, “Jacobins” and “Enrages” struggled for supremacy.

The French masses, confronted with issues such as the flight and execution of the King, the formation of a new Republic, the conflict between Church and State, the declaration of war on the tyrants of Europe and its dreadful rebound, as well as counter-revolution, drove the momentum of new policy, new extremes, and new measures.

Throughout, Robespierre, the “Incorruptible”, remained loyal to the principles of Rousseau and natural justice, and grew in stature as a prominent ally of the Sans Culottes.

# onary



When it came to the execution of the King, the man who a year before had argued for the abolition of the death penalty now sought justice swift and clear for Louis' treachery: execution by guillotine. He judged it to be the popular will. When it came to war, Robespierre (in the minority) fought the Girondin faction to stop it, but when the conflict was declared and turned into debacle, he urged complete and utter commitment to victory: the arming of the common people, with pikes if necessary: "total war", in fact.

Throughout the foreign invasion and counter-revolution, Robespierre argued an iron-clad logic: one cannot expect the common foot soldier at the front to risk their lives for a cause that was not pure, that did not guarantee rights, justice, equality, and total support. Any profiteering, any speculation, any soft dealing with the enemy, in short, any corruption would corrode the army's morale and undermine the revolution.

During even the most desperate and dangerous times of 1793-94, however, Robespierre maintained his bourgeois appearance: his powdered wig, his natty blue satin vest and blue coat, his stockinged legwear, though he only maintained a dual change of the outfit. He remained rudely steadfast in not accepting money or gifts for anything whatsoever – even if offered in the most trivial or innocent situation. He continued to rent his room in a loyal cabinetmaker's house near the Convention hall and ate simply. After an early affair, he denied the company of women.

Meanwhile, many of his compatriots in the government lived high on the hog, in extravagant mansions and fine livery. Danton was a passionate womaniser and people like Petion, the mayor of Paris, entertained luxuriously, despite the hardships being suffered across the country.

In the bitter struggle between the federalist Girondins and Paris-central Jacobins, the former attempted to prise Sans Culotte support away from Robespierre by accusing him of "tyranny". Their gambit failed, and several thus came to face their fate on the scaffold.

Next week: The Guillotine ✪

# WFTU International Campaign for Palestine

## For the immediate release of all political prisoners held in Israeli jails



Palestinian girls show photos of relatives held in Israeli jails.

Dear Colleagues,

Today in Israeli prisons there are 4,600 Palestinians imprisoned militants. Of these:

- 560 have been convicted to life imprisonment by Israeli courts.
- 220 are children.
- 24 are Members of the Parliament.
- 204 prisoners have died in Israeli prisons.

Among the prisoners there are great Palestinians and Arab militants who have dedicated their lives to the struggle of the Palestinian People to get their own independent homeland.

The World Federation of Trade Unions since the first day of its establishment is firmly on the side of the Palestinian People. April 17 is the International Day of Action for Palestinian people for the release of all prisoners in Israeli jails. All of those militants kept illegally and undemocratically by the imperialists and their organs.

For years now the international community has been limited to words. It shows indifference. It allows the government of Israel to kill, to imprison, and to terrorise the people of the region.

The WFTU in a joint meeting with the General Union of Palestinian Women held recently in Ramallah decided to call upon all our affiliates and friends to act on April 17. To submit statements to the Israeli embassies in their countries, as well as international organisations and to demand the immediate release of all the militants from Israeli prisons.

We ask you all to act. To express active solidarity calling for:

- The immediate release of all political prisoners in Israeli prisons.
- To stop the settlement activity and for the dismantling of the settlements.

- The immediate lifting of the unfair and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip, the withdrawal of the Israeli army from all territories occupied there since 1967, including the Golan Heights and the Shebaa area of southern Lebanon.
- The demolition of the racist wall.
- The creation of an independent, democratic and truly free Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital and the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland.
- The international community to undertake its responsibilities and to implement all decisions of the United Nations and the Security Council!

Send your protest letters, photos and statements to the following email addresses:

- mohammad\_yahya2007@yahoo.com
- mohiqn62@gmail.com,
- international@wftucentral.org
- UN Human Rights Council: civilsociety@ohchr.org
- Israeli Foreign Minister: sar@mfa.gov.il
- High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: COMM-SPP-HRVP-ASHTON@ec.europa.eu ✪

# Big push for freedom for the Cuban 5

Emile Schepers

**A broader-than-ever coalition of organisations, activists and well-known artists will be going to Washington DC the week of April 17-21 to break through the wall of silence that is squashing information about five Cuban anti-terrorism fighters who have been languishing for years in American jails.**

The five were monitoring ultra-right Cuban exiles in the US who, with the support of successive US administrations, committed acts of terrorism against Cuba and its citizens that Cuba says have resulted in 3,400 deaths in that country.

In the late 1990s, the Cuban government had presented evidence gathered by the five to the US government. Instead of following up on the evidence US officials arrested the five. They were indicted for conspiracy to commit espionage, and one of them, Gerardo Hernandez, was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder.

Since then, Rene Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez, Ramon Labañino and Gerardo Hernandez have been condemned in what international observers have described as a biased trial.

They have been incarcerated in various prisons while their appeal process drags along. Authorities have denied two of the five, Rene Gonzalez and Gerardo Hernandez, the right

to receive visits from their wives, Olga Salanueva and Adriana Perez, respectively.

Rene Gonzalez has now been released with the requirement that he stay in the United States for an additional three years, and that he not frequent areas where terrorists might be found. Recently, the original judge in the trial granted him permission, over the objections of the federal government, to go to Cuba temporarily to visit his critically ill brother.

The April 17-21 activities have been organised at the initiative of the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban 5, and are endorsed by hundreds of prominent organisations and individuals from around the world.

US organisations endorsing the activity include Global Exchange, IFCO/Pastors for Peace, the National Network on Cuba, the Communist Party USA, the National Lawyers' Guild, School of the Americas Watch, the Centre for Constitutional Rights, the Venceremos Brigade, the William Velazquez Institute, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and many others.

Artists and public figures endorsing the activity include Nobel Peace Prize winners Adolfo Perez Esquivel and Mairead Corrigan Maguire. Social scientists, activists and artists include Danny Glover, Oliver Stone, Michael Moore, Ed Asner, Elliott



Gould, Esai Morales, Pete Seeger, Martin Sheen, Michael Parenti and scores of others.

The week will kick off with a day of lobbying on Capitol Hill on April 17. The following afternoon there will be a get-together hosted by Wayne Smith, who was former President James Carter's chief diplomatic representative in Cuba, and is now a Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Policy. The guest speaker will be Canadian author Stephen Kimber whose new book

"What Lies Across the Water" goes into detail on the flaws in the original trial of the Five. That evening, Saul Landau's documentary "Will the Real Terrorist Please Stand Up" will be screened.

Activists will spread out across Washington on April 19 to staff information tables on the Cuban 5. In the afternoon there will be an event for the Five in Takoma Park, Maryland, a Washington suburb.

On April 20, farmworker and social justice activist Dolores Huerta

will be the keynote speaker at a downtown Washington event which will also feature actor Danny Glover as a special guest.

On April 21 there will be a march and rally in front of the White House demanding freedom for the Cuban 5.

A complete list of events, venues, endorsers and speakers, as well as detailed information on the Cuban 5 and their trial, are available from the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban 5.

*People's World* ✪

## Thousands of BMI jobs to go

Tony Patey

**Unions are reeling over the news that up to 1,200 jobs could be lost after British Airways formally takes control of airline British Midland International later this month.**

Engineers union Prospect said it was "dismayed" by the announcement and negotiator Richard Hardy revealed that unions were told at a briefing with BA that only the BMI operation at Heathrow was seen as having a future.

All other BMI staff are at risk of redundancy including those at BMI's head office at Castle Donnington in Derbyshire and regional airports.

Prospect represents more than 200 airworthiness engineers based at regional airports including East Midlands, Birmingham,

Belfast, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Heathrow.

Mr Hardy said: "Over 400 jobs will be lost in the East Midlands alone, over 100 of them high-quality engineering jobs."

"This is yet another body blow to local economies. Not only will it cause personal hardship and uncertainty for the individuals affected, it will also have a devastating knock-on impact on local businesses, shops and communities."

"There will be similar, though smaller, impacts in Birmingham, Glasgow, Belfast and Edinburgh."

Consultations on redundancies have begun and Prospect along with GMB will be pressing BA to protect as many jobs as possible.

The British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA) said it will be allocating all resources at its disposal to support pilots affected.

BALPA general secretary Jim McAuslan said: "Our hearts go out to the large number of BMI HQ-based staff who appear to have borne the brunt of today's announcement."

"Each job loss is a personal tragedy and BALPA will be pressing for maximum redeployment opportunities for all BMI pilots, including BMI Mainline, BMIBaby and BMI Regional, inside BA."

"These are uncertain times in the aviation industry and it is not helped by government aviation policy on air passenger duty which is pricing many passengers out of the market."

Discussions with potential buyers for company subsidiaries BMIBaby and BMI Regional are continuing.

*Morning Star* ✪

## ILO condemns detention of Ivory Coast unionist

**The International Labour Organisation has called on the government of Ivory Coast to release jailed union leader Basile Mahan Gahé in the latest report of the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations. The Committee referred to Basile Mahan Gahé's April 2011 abduction, torture and detention as "a grave violation of the principle of freedom of association", adding that "a genuinely free and independent trade union movement can develop only if fundamental human rights are respected."**

Furthermore, the report notes, "The guarantees set out in international labour Conventions, particularly those relating to freedom of association, can be effective only if the civil and political rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, are genuinely recognised."

The Committee called on the government of Ivory Coast "to state the charges brought against Mr Gahé and to indicate whether he has been released pending trial." Basile Mahan Gahé remains imprisoned in the remote town of Boundiali – some 700 kilometres from the capital Abidjan – together with common criminals. Following

an ILO mission in June 2011, absurd charges were announced – sedition, insurrectionary activity etc – and he was transferred from Abidjan to his cell in Boundiali. He has not been brought to trial, he is isolated from his family, colleagues, lawyers and international visitors and the government has failed to respond to international calls for his freedom. The ILO has now formally added its voice to these international protests.

The ILO's references to fundamental human rights instruments – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – should remind the transnational companies who rely on cocoa sourced from the Ivory Coast that the massive presence of child labour in cocoa production is not the only ongoing human rights scandal in that country.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights require companies to take stock of the human rights risks in their supply chains and to engage in corrective action. No cocoa trader or confectionery maker can say they didn't know that the government they deal with is arbitrarily and harshly imprisoning a national trade union leader. What are they doing about it? Amnesty International considers Basile Mahan Gahé a prisoner at risk of torture. ✪

## Roman workers defy pension assault

Tom Gill

**Workers took to Rome's streets last week to tell the government exactly what they think of plans to strip hundreds of thousands of Italians of their pay and pensions.**

Politicians have raised the retirement age, leaving "younger" retirees without pensions.

Mauro Nori, director-general of state-backed pension fund INPS, told MPs that he reckoned 130,000 people were in this dire position.

Labour Minister Elsa Fornero

now claims only 65,000 people are without pay or pension, even though she said a month ago the figure was as high as 350,000.

The CGIL, CISL and UIL trade union confederations accused the government of fiddling the figures to play down the problem.

CGIL general secretary Susanna Camusso told marchers in the capital: "The government must have the courage to take a step back and not use fake numbers."

"People who have generously chosen to leave the workplace to

make room for the young – today the government says we do not know what to do with you.

"We are fed up of hearing people who have worked many years and then were forced to leave their jobs because of the crisis described as 'privileged'."

"If the government does not immediately open discussions with us, it knows that we will be in the streets again. We will not let the workers down."

*Morning Star* ✪

# Syrian insurgents violate ceasefire

Stephen Lendman

**On day one, insurgents violated the ceasefire calm. Blame Washington's dirty hands. It manipulates everything going on.**

It won't tolerate peace and stability. Regime change plans need violence blamed on Assad. That's imperialism's ugly face. Behind it lurks a menace too threatening to ignore.

International, constitutional, and US statute laws are spurned. Independent regimes are toppled. War is policy. America is no democracy. It's a killing machine, a police state.

Syria and Iran now face its wrath. On April 12, Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy discussed Iran and Syria. Both accused Assad of violating ceasefire terms. Sarkozy and UK Prime Minister David Cameron called for "transition at the top" change. British Foreign Secretary William Hague said if violence erupts, "we want to return to the Security Council in a new attempt to obtain a resolution on Syria. We will intensify our support for the opposition."

Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel urge "more resolute" action.

On April 13, *The New York Times* headlined, "Cease-Fire Tested by Reports of Syria Clashes," saying:

"... some deadly clashes were reported." Pro-Western "activists" claim violence wracked areas are "under virtual martial law, with tank deployments, armed checkpoints and rooftop snipers."

*Times* writers never spare hyperbole. On issues mattering most, managed news substitutes for truth and full disclosure. Protection Syrians need is denounced. Imagine how out-of-control things would be without it. Current and former UN Secretaries-General replicate Timespeak.

Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon



point fingers the wrong way. Assad is blamed for insurgent violence. From Geneva, Ban said "The onus is on the government of Syria to prove that their words will be matched by their deeds at this time."

Their forces and armour "must return to their barracks immediately," he added. In other words, leave civilians unprotected. Like Annan, Ban makes no pretence which side he's on. Both men have impeccable imperial credentials. That's how they got their job.

On April 13, AP headlined, "Syria truce holding for second day, protesters call for mass marches to test regime," saying:

"Syrian troops fought with rebels near the border with Turkey on Friday, but opposition activists said the brief clash appeared to be an isolated violation as a fragile UN-brokered truce entered a second day."

In fact, Washington plans more violence. Eruptions will follow imperial plans. Reality will replace optimism. Assad, of course, will be blamed.

Opposition forces call for mass anti-government marches. Peaceful demonstrations are permitted. Violent ones will be confronted responsibly. No country tolerates them.

Imperial powers plan their next move. Concluding their two-day summit, G8 leaders called ceasefire a first step. Hillary Clinton assaults Assad mercilessly. She accused him of violating peace plan terms, saying:

"The Annan plan is not a menu of options; it is a set of obligations. The burden of fully and visibly meeting all of these obligations continues to rest with the regime. They cannot pick and choose."

"For it to be meaningful, this apparent halt in violence must lead to a credible political process and a peaceful, inclusive democratic transition."

"We remain firmly resolved that the regime's war against its own people must end for good and political transition must begin. Assad will have to go and the Syrian people must be given the chance to chart their own future."

In other words, Washington accepts one option only – regime change. All means are employed to achieve it, including war. It's coming if current plans fail. Six G8 nations support it. Russia and China oppose intervention, insurgent violence, and war. So far, they have prevented it. At issue is for how long?

Ahead, things get tougher. Imperial Washington won't quit. Events on the ground are manipulated. Orchestrated incidents begin. Expect greater eruptions ahead. Direct NATO intervention will follow. Turkey may initiate it.

Prime Minister Erdogan's hawkishness suggests it. He openly called for intervention. Citing Article 5 of NATO's Charter, he said the alliance "has the responsibility to protect Turkish borders."

On April 12, *Today's Zaman* headlined, "Turkey says Annan plan not implemented," saying:

"Erdogan said Assad has not met ceasefire terms. 'There is a six-point plan in the open presented by Annan. I do not think this six-point plan has been implemented. There is nothing like this out there'."

A same day *Today's Zaman* article headlined, "Turkish opposition slams government over Syria 'warmongering,'" saying:

"Opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, said 'The Turkish Republic has never done as much warmongering as it has today'." He rejects Syrian intervention. He's against interfering in the internal affairs of other nations.

He accused Erdogan of "beating the war drum". He added that regional meddling worsened relations with Iraq, Iran and Syria. He wants Turkey supporting peaceful conflict resolution.

Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) parliamentary group Deputy Chairman, Hasip Kaplan, explained the dangers of Turkey being pro-war: that its support makes it more likely.

On April 12, Press TV cited Syrian state television, saying "armed men assassinated an al-Mazareeb

town official." Witnesses said insurgents shot Naser Bhkeit Naser from a passing car without license plates.

Other insurgents "killed an army officer and injured 24 others after they targeted a military bus with an explosive device in Syria's second largest city of Aleppo."

In addition, "terrorists targeted a law-enforcement vehicle with an explosive device at Wadi Haj Khaled region in Idleb, injuring a number of officers."

Brigadier General Walid Jouni was killed in Jaramana near Damascus. Syria's Interior Ministry said terrorists attacked him at home.

Syrian television said armed groups "intensif(ied) criminal operations in an attempt to destabilise Syria and torpedo" peace. Expect larger-scale eruptions ahead. Assad, of course, will be blamed. Calls for intervention will increase.

Syria's UN envoy Bashar al-Jaafari said his government is testing the credibility of nations supporting ceasefire terms.

"Because they are disappointed, they are still betting on every possibility to sabotage the plan.

"I would like to refer to some Arab and regional countries and some international powers, because the Syrian crisis has local, Arab and regional dimensions, and an international one.

"Consequently, it is not enough that the Syrian government shows full commitment to Annan's plan, but all sides have to stand by us clearly and unequivocally."

He also said nations sceptical about Syria's resolve want conflict, not peace. They're responsible for violent incidents. He accused so-called Friends of Syria of plotting "to overthrow" the government.

Arming and funding insurgents reveals their real agenda. Syria is "a victim of diplomatic, political, media," and terrorist aggression. "We have a lot of evidence and proofs that will embarrass the countries which sponsored terror in Syria, but we will uncover this at a suitable time."

Information Clearing House ☛

## Kosovo administration bogged down in crime

Anton Kulikov

**In Kosovo, the chief prosecutor of the anti-corruption agency of the area Nazmi Mustafi was arrested on suspicion of corruption. The arrest warrant was ordered by a prosecutor of the EU Mission in the rule of law.**

Mustafi is suspected of extorting a bribe from a suspect in a case investigated by his agency. Investigators believe that the main Kosovo anti-corruption leader took other bribes for shutting down cases.

According to local press reports, the majority of the cases under investigation either fell apart or the defendants got off with probation.

The Kosovo Anti-Corruption Agency was established in 2010. Nazmi Mustafi was appointed as head of the department by Prime Minister of Kosovo Hashim Thaci, the former head of the so-called "Kosovo Liberation Army".

The absurdity of the situation is not only the fact that he took bribes, and did it so blatantly that

it caught the attention of the EU Mission. Here is another proof for the Europeans that a real criminal enclave emerged in the Balkans with the direct support of the European Union.

The name of Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci popped up again (the book of the former prosecutor of the Hague Tribunal Carla del Ponte "The Hunt" talked about Thaci's involvement in the trade in human organs).

In 1999, members of the Kosovo Liberation Army kidnapped some 300 Serbs and other non-Albanians and took them to Albania. The sick ones were immediately killed, while healthier ones were fed for slaughter, and then sent to the operating table where their hearts, kidneys and other donor organs were extracted for sale. According to Del Ponte, Tachi received 80 percent of profits from this business. Nearly 400 pieces of evidence were collected against him, but the Hague judges decided to destroy them.

In 2010, a report of Swiss member of Parliamentary Assembly

Council of Europe Dick Marty was published. In particular, it said that in 1990s, the leaders of the United States and European Union countries were told about the involvement of Thaci in contract killing, but they did not listen. "We found that the head of Drenitsky group was Hashim Thaci. He and other members of the group are constantly referred to as 'major players' in the intelligence reports on organised crime structures of Kosovo," stressed the report.

After Marty's report, an investigation was initiated. It was found that the organ trade in Kosovo had continued to flourish until recently. Former Health Minister of Kosovo Ilir Retsay is suspected of involvement in the "black transplant" business.

However, the information contained in Del Ponte's book and Marty's report did not shake the position of Hashim Thaci. In this light, the appointment of the anti-corruption leader of Kosovo engaged in corruption is not surprising. *Pravda.Ru* ☛

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## Internal divisions

**Israel is a settler state built on the dispossession, dispersal and occupation of the native population and their land. It is an abnormal state, full of numerous cultural, ethnic, religious and other divisions. What unites most of Israel's people is the fear of armed Palestinian revolt and the necessity to continually repress the Palestinian desires and struggles for their just rights. This has created anxiety and a fortress mentality among Israelis that rationalises and justifies their continued brutal occupation.**

While the Palestinian people have every legal and moral right to resist the Israeli occupation by any means necessary, including armed struggle, I consider the present non-violent campaigns of civil, political and diplomatic struggle to be incredibly constructive. These peaceful forms of resistance, the civil and human rights and the lull in armed opposition to Israeli policies have opened up a new dynamic.

In this period of calmer conditions

between the oppressor and oppressed, the acute contradictions within Israeli society have come to the fore with confrontations breaking out between Israeli moderates and militants, secular and religious extremists, the Israeli army and fanatical settlers, Israeli minorities and the main Zionist power structure, the wealthy and the deprived and women's liberties against sexist subjugation.

Israel is a militaristic, dysfunctional society that is rotten to the core. The diverse and intense divisions inherent in this artificial state will see Israel wither and fall apart due to its own internal contradictions. This decaying process offers the real hope of a new beginning, an end to the occupation and the prospect of genuine peace with justice for the peoples of the region.

Steven Katsineris  
Vic

## Being led up the path?

**I wish to raise my objection to Steven Katsineris' piece against the Syrian government's heroic anti-imperialist struggle (Guardian April 4). The article is divided into repeating the claims of imperialist "humanitarians" that President Assad's government is cruel and tyrannical, whilst the rest is intended to distract attention from Syria's CURRENT struggle against imperialism by irrelevant rehashing of Syria's past, complex history with the Palestinian struggle.**

What does that have to do with events in 2012 which sees Syria at the

forefront of defeating imperialism? He claims Syria, and Iran, are repressive. So says who? The imperialist marauding mafia, or the 5th-column Quislings who go under the name of "Free Syria Army" and are treated like royalty by imperialists like the US, UK, and Turkey? Or is it the mercenary stooges of the Arab League? A year ago we had the exact same situation in Libya. Imperialism bombed Libya, murdered at least 50,000 people, but the social chauvinists told us, "don't support evil Gaddafi, but oppose imperialist meddling, don't support the Libyan government's anti-imperialist struggle, let's just hope and pray a magical 'leftist' force can appear and fix tyrant Gaddafi and imperialist interference!"

Twelve months later, we hear the same nonsense towards Syria! Now [Libya] is in the hands of a pack of bloodthirsty, racist, medieval thugs. Are we still waiting for the emergence of "leftist, progressive forces" to be the third road? If we fail to support Assad's anti-imperialist regime, soon Syria will be in the hands of CIA-Quisling gangsters like the "Free Syrian Army".

The CPA is a Marxist-Leninist party, thus it is our fundamental duty to give total support to Syria's anti-imperialist government led by President Assad. Mr Katsineris states "that they [Syria and Iran] have opposed the USA and other western i.e., imperialist, powers and supported the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance doesn't change [their supposed tyranny]". On the contrary! Their battle against imperialism (like Libya's) DOES make a fundamental

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difference! Because Assad doesn't talk about socialism or ending capitalism, we mustn't support him? Let comrade Lenin answer that. "Whoever expects a 'pure' revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip service to revolution without understanding what revolution is". And Syria's stance IS a revolutionary fight against imperialism!

The CPA must climb down off the fence of "third-pathism".

Mark Window  
SA

## Plane hypocrites

**With the overthrow of Libya, one BBC propagandist in an attempt to demonise Gaddafi did a segment on his decadent wealth. The news item filmed the plane that Gaddafi**

**used to travel in as his own in an attempt to prove that he had stolen it from the hard work of the common people and so this was justification for overthrowing him. (The plane was probably the ownership of the State but why let the truth get in the road of good imperialist propaganda).**

However, there is nothing worse than hypercritics who like to use an argument against their enemies but do not apply it to themselves. So if the BBC propagandist was consistent he would also be arguing that the Queen of "Great" Britain should also be overthrown for her decadent wealth or Clive Palmer who at the same time was bragging that he owns two airplanes should equally be toppled. Manipulative bastards.

Helen Brown  
SA

# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

## Lock up your poor

**The United States, the world's richest country – and according to its own propaganda the world leader in democratic freedoms – has the largest prison population in the world today. Seventy five percent of that prison population are black or Latino.**

The USA may be the centre of world capitalism, but it cannot provide jobs for its own population (or housing or health care, either). To the ruling class in the US, poor Blacks and Latinos are not only economically superfluous, they are considered potentially dangerous. J Edgar Hoover, the notorious former head of the FBI, was constantly stewing about "the coming black uprising" in America.

Beliefs such as these have converted the US prison system into an instrument of social control. Half a century ago, in 1960, Black activist George Jackson wrote, from prison: "Black men born in the United States who are lucky enough to live longer than 18 years are conditioned to accept the inevitability of being sent to prison. For most, that reality is looming as the next phase in a long series of humiliations."

The American Coalition for Human Rights has pointed out that not only are most people in US prisons poor people of colour, they were also unemployed or under-employed before being caught up in the prison system, and are there for non-violent crimes. Sensibly, the Coalition points out that this reflects the inequalities in US society.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has previously called on the US government to take action over the glaring racial inequalities exemplified in the country's prison system, but instead of improving, there has been an increase in the prison population of the poor and people of colour.

Capitalism in the US cannot cure a problem of which it is not only the cause but which it constantly renews.

## The energy wars

Meanwhile imperialism, especially US imperialism, continues its efforts to gain control over the world's energy resources. From Iraq to the Horn of Africa, Libya to Nigeria, oil-rich countries are being helped to undertake "regime change" and to realign their oil exports to comply with US and EU preferences.

Apart from jockeying among themselves for the chance to dominate global energy, the imperialist powers are united in their endeavours to prevent China from having access to essential energy. Blocking China, as much as profits for themselves, is a principal driving force behind recent Anglo, US and French interference in North Africa and Nigeria.

Another country on the receiving end of imperialist intrigue and subversion is Venezuela. Venezuela's state-owned oil reserves are vast and – what is most distressing to the US – they are being developed with Chinese help. Venezuela currently sends 460,000 barrels of oil daily to China, and in return receives technology, funding and resources.

Trade between the two countries has risen 52 fold since 1999, and currently stands at over US\$10 billion per annum. Oil exports to China from Venezuela are expected to reach one million barrels by 2015.

## Mercenaries or undercover warfare?

The hypocrisy of imperialist governments was once again on public show following the defeat of the NATO-backed (and NATO-armed) insurgents in the Syrian city of Homs. More than 1,500 prisoners were taken by the Syrian Army. Most were Muslim mercenaries from the "Wahabi Legion", but according to French and Russian media reports, among them were 18 French nationals who claimed prisoner-of-war status but refused to give their identity, rank or unit of assignment. One of them is said to be a Colonel in French Intelligence.



The same media report that France has asked Russia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates to mediate to obtain their agents' release. The capture puts France on the back foot: to acknowledge that the agents are in fact combatants with POW status is to acknowledge what everyone already knows but politely does not mention: that France (and its NATO allies) are waging an undeclared war against Syria, a UN member state.

If France washes its hands of them, there is no telling what they might do – or say – in return for being abandoned by their government.

Australians might remember when French agents left a bomb that sank the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland harbour in July 1985, killing Fernando Pereira, a photographer, who drowned on the sinking ship. The ship was going to take part in protests against French nuclear tests in the Pacific.

Two of the perpetrators were caught and sentenced to prison. The French government, not long afterwards, sent another agent to negotiate for their release (nominally they were sent back to France to serve out their sentences there, but of course as soon as they arrived in France they were received as heroes by the Right and they certainly never saw the inside of a French prison).

In company with several Sydney comrades,

I subsequently met the French agent who negotiated their release. A nice chap, married to a member of the French CP, he revealed that the French government thought sufficiently well of his efforts on their murderous agents' behalf that they gave him the Legion of Honour for it. Gives a whole new meaning to the word "honour", don't you think?

NATO, meanwhile, has imposed economic sanctions on Syria while weeping crocodile tears for the plight of the Syrian people, supposedly crushed underfoot by the Syrian army. At the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Syria's Ambassador Faysal Al-Hamwi denounced the NATO bloc for "inciting sectarianism" and fomenting civil war by arming the opposition in his country.

He pointed out that the economic sanctions imposed by some NATO countries against Syria hindered the procurement of medicine, vaccine, food and fuel. "Unilateral economic sanctions are the ugliest violations of human rights because they target first of all civilian populations, including women, children and the elderly."

Syria has been a steadfast ally of Russia and China in the Middle East, and a thorn in the side of the oil princes, opposing US scheming and Israeli expansionism. "Regime change" was clearly overdue. ✪



Sun Apr 22 –  
Sat Apr 28

John Doyle and Tim Flannery made a success with their previous travel series, *Two Men In A Tinnie* and *Two In The Top End*, so now they have a third series, *Two On The Great Divide* (ABC1 Sundays from April 22 at 7.30pm).

The semi-amateurish style of the previous series, with the mixture of scientific information (from Flannery) and light-hearted banter (from Doyle), is repeated in this series, but seems to be wearing thin. The way they relentlessly call each other John and Tim, where normal friends on a trip like this would say "mate" or some such expression simply emphasises the artificiality of the seemingly casual series.

John Doyle, who once famously declared on television that he would be voting Communist in the federal election that was coming up at the time, is the voice of the Common

Man, while Tim Flannery supplies education and culture.

However, although they intend to visit "all the major peaks" of the Great Dividing Range in the course of their journey, one is acutely conscious that these are not very high, and although the journey should prove interesting, it is unlikely to be as spectacular as they make out.

When a program that is advertised as a "comedy-drama" turns out to be simply stupefyingly dull, one thinks first that it must be the fault of the cast, then the fault of the director and then the fault of the writer or writers.

In the case of *Dirk Gently* (ABC2 Mondays from April 23 at 9.30pm) the cast (Stephen Mangan, Darren Boyd, Helen Baxendale) is probably not to blame: they have track records in other shows that prove they are perfectly capable of sustaining lively comedy at least.

The dead hand that lies heavily on this series seems to belong to a director who is incapable of striking sparks from Howard Overman's leaden script. Overman won a BAFTA award for his scripts for the series *Misfits*, but seems to have met his match in attempting to adapt Douglas Adams' novels about Dirk Gently's holistic detective agency.

The novels are the type usually described as "cult novels", to explain why they are so popular with a limited range of readers. Adams made his name with *The Hitchhiker's Guide*



Young Dracula – (ABC3 Mondays through Thursdays from April 25 at 6.30pm).

*To The Galaxy*, which my eldest son found hilariously funny while I thought its whimsy was so heavy handed it could have been a German TV comedy!

English whimsy, like French farce, requires a light touch to be really amusing, so that you laugh at a situation because it is comic, not just because you recognise that it is meant to be comic.

Adams wrote *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* in 1987. He died in 2001. He had become known not just as a successful author but also as an advocate for environmental and conservation causes. He was a staunch atheist, famously imagining a sentient puddle who wakes up one morning and thinks, "This is an interesting world I find myself in—an interesting hole I find myself in—fits me rather neatly, doesn't it? In fact it fits me staggeringly well, must have been made to have me in it!"

Biologist Richard Dawkins dedicated his 2006 book, *The God Delusion*, to Adams, writing on his death that, "Science has lost a friend, literature has lost a luminary, the mountain gorilla and the black rhino have lost a gallant defender."

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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,  
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# Up, up and away: How money power works down under

John Pilger

One of my first jobs as a junior reporter was to meet flights bringing famous people to Australia. Growing up in a country far from everywhere (except, as my father would say, "where you come from"), I was led to believe that Australia's honour was at risk unless a well-known person from Over There said something flattering about us, preferably the moment they arrived at Sydney airport.

There was a designated list of attributes they could comment on. These were: the weather, the beaches, the harbour, the harbour bridge, the happy people, the beer. When an exhausted Elizabeth Taylor stepped off her piston-engined flight from California and faced the mandatory barrage of questions, she replied: "Where am I, for Christ's sake?"

This was understandable but ill-advised. Readers of the Australian press were warned that Taylor and her accompanying husband Mike Todd, the Hollywood producer, were problem people who did not appreciate their good fortune in being among us. Todd's "dwarf-like and grizzled" appearance and the size of the bags under his wife's eyes became the subjects of particular tabloid scorn. Their stay was brief.



It was the first scheduled jet flight that drew us closer to the rest of humanity. This momentous occasion gave me my first front page story in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, which declared solemnly, "A new era in civil aviation has dawned...". The inaugural aircraft was a Boeing 707 of the national airline Qantas, an acronym for Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services. Founded in the outback town of Winton, Queensland in 1920, Qantas is today the world's oldest continuously operating airline and, along with the great cricketer Don Bradman and

the Sydney Harbour Bridge, occupies a place in the nation's affections. Most important, it is the only major international airline in the jet age never to have lost an aircraft in a fatal accident. Perhaps wary of holding such a distinction to fortune, Qantas advertising never mentions it.

In recent years, however, the safest airline has had close calls, including an Airbus A330 that went into a sudden dive in 2008 and injured up to 74 people, a Boeing 747 engine that blew up after leaving San Francisco in 2010 and a new A380 whose engine shattered over Singapore

later that year. These, and a series of less serious incidents, have all happened since the airline was taken out of public ownership and handed to global banks. The largest shareholders include JP Morgan, HSBC and Citicorp, which are also among the top shareholders of Australia's major banks and largest mining companies. The national airline, like the Australian economy, is mortgaged: the product of a bi-partisan political system dominated by rapacious business.

It was an article of faith that the world's only island-continent, flanked by the two greatest oceans, needed a long-haul airline – until the asset-strippers took control. What followed is a cautionary, universal tale. Last October, without warning, the Qantas Chief executive, Alan Joyce, ordered the grounding of the airline's global fleet.

More than 68,000 passengers were stranded in 22 countries, and the entire Qantas workforce was locked out without pay. Joyce later admitted that tickets had been "mistakenly" sold for flights that Qantas management would never take off; the grounding had been planned well in advance.

This unprecedented action was the climax of a plan to crush the unions, Murdoch-style, and to take much of the company "off-shore" into Asia. A subsidiary airline based in Asia would employ fewer staff and pay them less, including pilots and engineers, in conditions once unknown to the world's safest airline. For a decade, the company has been building wholly or partly owned domestic and regional airlines on this cut-price basis while closing Qantas routes.

The fleet grounding was presented in Australia's mostly Murdoch-owned capital city press as the inevitable result of an intractable industrial dispute. In fact, the unions were negotiating with Qantas, and the domestic network was not in dispute

at all – yet its workforce was also locked out without pay. As if on cue, Prime Minister Julia Gillard stepped in, using powers under the Labor government's Thatcher-like industrial laws known as Fair Work Australia (FWA), which allow employers to lock out their employees without notice and requires none of the ballots and processes forced on unions.

Gillard ordered an emergency sitting of the FWA arbitration court which effectively ruled in favour of the company, cancelling the lock-out yet stopping the workforce from taking action against the coming destruction of their jobs. The Transport Workers' Union offered only vocal resistance. Gillard's workplace relations minister is Bill Shorten, a former union leader whose political ambitions and boasts of close ties to business elites are highlighted in US diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks.

The day before he announced the grounding and lock-out without pay, Joyce received a pay rise of 71 percent pay. He now takes home \$5 million a year. Last year, Qantas recorded a before-tax profit of \$552 million, having doubled its net profit and increased its revenue.

In February, the company announced that, as a result of a sharp fall in this year's profits – caused, not surprisingly, by the grounding of the fleet and the consequential loss of business – it planned to cut 2,500 jobs, including maintenance engineers and pilots.

The catch-22 caused barely a political ripple and Qantas management was congratulated in the media for its "courageous stand". According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the loss of revenue is "a case study in Australia's ability to cope with globalisation". In a choice of words Qantas passengers might find unsettling, the paper said the airline had to "compete or die".

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## Unemployed short-changed by 20 cents per day increase

**"1.1 million Australians, including 566,000 unemployed people on the Newstart Allowance of just \$35 a day have every right to feel short-changed with last month's \$1.45 per week indexation increase to Newstart Allowance," said Maree O'Halloran of the National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN).**

"The increase for Australia's 3.4 million pensioners is not much better, at \$3.35 per week. (People on Youth Allowance and Abstudy did not receive an increase. They only receive one indexation increase per year in January and fare the worst of all.)

The "payment gap" between Newstart Allowance and pensions is now \$132.90 a week. On a yearly basis, job seekers are expected to get by on \$6,910 less than that available to age, disability and carer pensioners.

Pensioners fought long and hard

for the historic and much needed increase of \$32.50 to the single pension in 2009. The single pension (including the Pension Supplement) is \$377.75 a week. The Newstart Allowance is just \$244.85 per week.

Unemployed people, students and single parents missed out on the 2009 pension increase. This omission, combined with less generous indexation arrangements, has meant that income support payments for the so-called "undeserving poor" have barely increased since 2009. While the single pension rate increased by \$77 a week since 2009, the rate of Newstart Allowance increased by just \$16.55 over the same period.

The widening gap between pensions and allowances is of growing concern to welfare and community organisations, charities and emergency relief providers. An additional concern is that policies

pursued by successive governments have resulted in increasing numbers of single parents and people with disabilities being moved onto lower-paying allowances.

Furthermore, a Senate inquiry supported moving an additional 28,000 single parents onto Newstart Allowance over the next four years. These changes, commencing from 1 January 2013, will mean a single parent in this group on the maximum payment will be \$59 a week worse off.

Across the political spectrum and on the street, there is a growing consensus that \$244 per week is not enough for unemployed workers. The catalyst for agreement for an increase to Newstart Allowance was the 2009 Henry Tax and Transfer Review which recommended in May 2010 that the rate be increased by \$50 per week in today's terms. ✪



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**Central Committee:**  
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Hamilton NSW 2303  
Ph: 02 4023 8540 / 0401 824 386  
[newcastle@cpa.org.au](mailto:newcastle@cpa.org.au)  
**Riverina Branch:**  
Allan Hamilton  
2/57 Cooper St Cootamundra 2590  
[riverinacpa@live.com.au](mailto:riverinacpa@live.com.au)

**Melbourne Branch:**  
Andrew Irving [viccpa@netspace.net.au](mailto:viccpa@netspace.net.au)  
PO Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall  
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053  
Ph: 03 9639 1550 Fax: 03 9639 4199  
**West Australian Branch:**  
Vinnie Molina [perth@cpa.org.au](mailto:perth@cpa.org.au)  
PO Box 98 North Perth WA 6906  
Ph: 0419 812 872

**Brisbane Branch:**  
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152  
Ph: 0449 202 189  
[cpabris@live.com.au](mailto:cpabris@live.com.au)  
**South Australian State Committee:**  
Bob Briton, PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,  
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366  
[www.cpasas.blogspot.com](http://www.cpasas.blogspot.com)  
Email: [sa@cpa.org.au](mailto:sa@cpa.org.au)

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